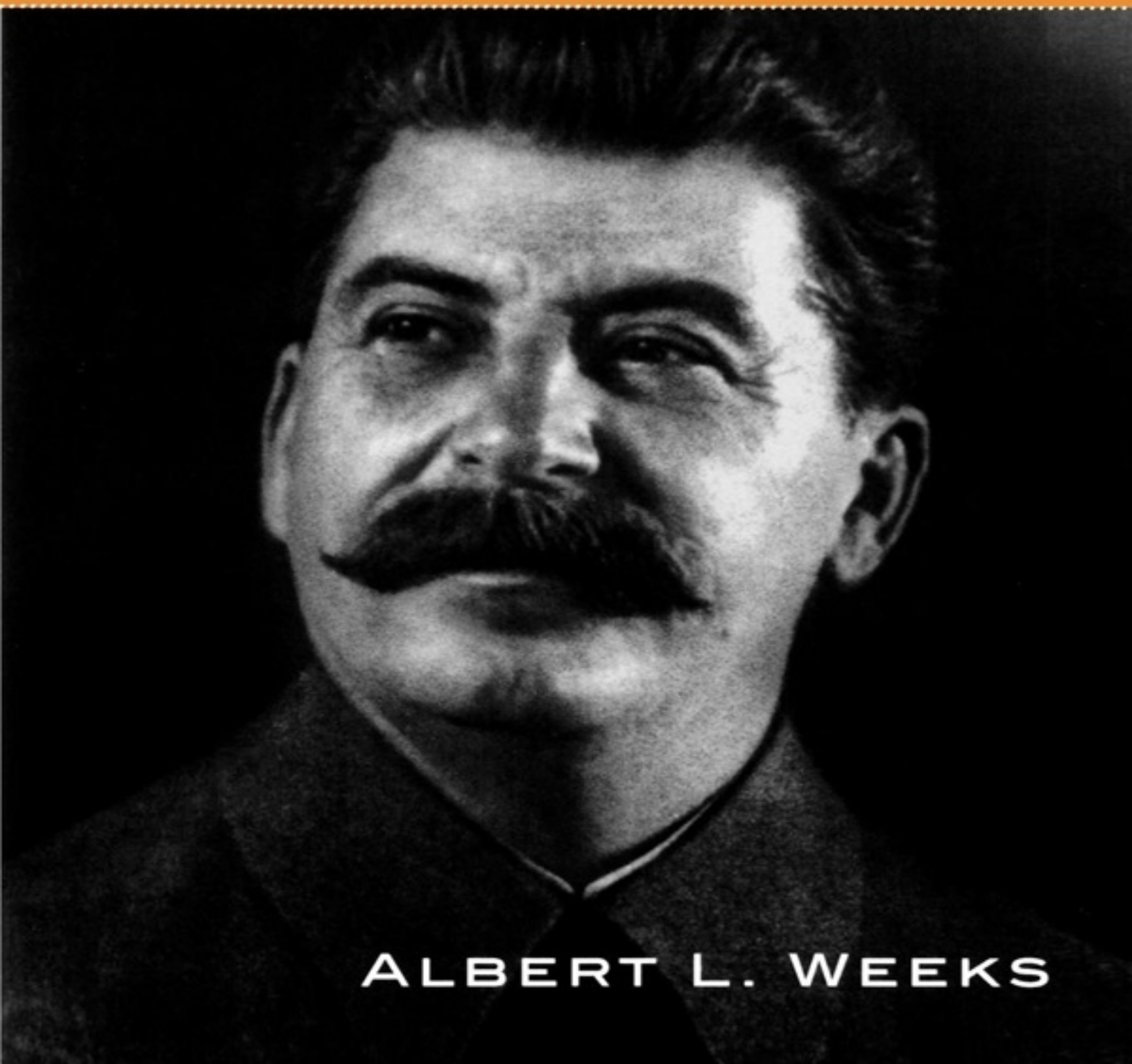


# STALIN'S OTHER WAR

SOVIET GRAND  
STRATEGY, 1939-1941



ALBERT L. WEEKS

# Stalin's Other War

Soviet Grand Strategy,  
1939–1941

Albert L. Weeks

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# Preface

*The war is going on between two groups of capitalist states (the poor vs. the rich ones in terms of colonies, sources of raw materials, and so on) for a redivision of the world and for world domination! We're not opposed to the idea of their fighting among themselves very well. Nor would it be bad if by the hands of Germany the position of the richest capitalist countries were shattered (in particular that of England). Hitler himself does not appreciate this fact nor does he wish to, but he is demolishing and undermining the capitalist system.... On our part we will maneuver while pitting one country against the other so that they can fight each other all the better. The nonaggression pact to a degree helps Germany. But in the next moment, it batters the other side.*

—J. V. Stalin

The animus to write a book about such a controversial issue as Stalin's war plans 1939–41 arose as Russian archive information on the problem has become increasingly available since the middle and late 1990s. Historians, like me, are learning more than earlier about Stalin's and the Red Army's actions on the eve of the German attack against the USSR on June 22, 1941. The disclosures in some cases throw into question the conclusions drawn in the past by former-Soviet as well as foreign historians. These interpretations formed a historiographic consensus that now must be reexamined in the light of new evidence.

Above all, the most sensitive and misunderstood events and plans on the eve of the war need to be clarified. This research involves in particular the strategy Stalin and his generals had designed toward Germany before Hitler ordered his Wehrmacht to launch its large-scale “preventive war” attack in mid-1941. As Russian military historian Pavel N. Bobylev, of the RF Ministry of Defense Institute for Military History, has written: “While earlier discussion of this issue from 1991–1993 permitted a more concrete appraisal than before of Soviet planning for war against Germany, [documents since then] have now led to a deeper understanding of the problem that for so long has been obscured by ideological barriers.”<sup>1</sup> Historian Mikhail I. Mel’tukhov adds:

The historians’ research conducted in the early 1990s constituted a first step in reviewing the official views of the events on the eve of the war. [Since the mid-1990s] researchers now have access to documents that were once kept secret [that] now demand new conceptions about the participation of the Soviet Union in the events of 1939–1941, a more objective depiction of our country’s history during the period of World War II. [Using the new documents] it is necessary to analyze the diplomatic activity of the Soviet leadership in the 1920s and from 1939 to 1941, to canvas its views toward the advent of the European war [in September 1939], the military preparations undertaken by the USSR as well as the contents of Soviet propaganda.”<sup>2</sup>

Previous pre-1995 military histories, whether published in Russia or in the West, were thus hobbled, Russian historians note, by a lack of primary-source documentation. Today information has become available, among other places, in the 1998 two-volume compilation of

documents titled *The Year 1941: Documents*.<sup>3</sup> Among the Russian resources used in this book are the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF); the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGACPI); the Russian State Military Archive (RGVA); the Russian State Archive on the Economy (RGAE); the Center for the Collection of Contemporary Documents (TsKhSD); and the All-Russian Scientific-Research Institute for Documents and Archive Affairs (VNIIDAD).

Included among such “ideological barriers,” according to Bobylev and other “new-generation” Russian historians, are the “slanted” memoirs of and interviews with such senior officers of the Soviet Army as Marshals Georgi K. Zhukov and Aleksandr M. Vasilievsky. Both were major staff officer figures in the Soviet war, known as the Great Fatherland War, against Germany, 1941–45. It is also true that a conventional interpretation of Stalin’s war plans 1939–41 has congealed among Western historians in ways that have discouraged fresh interpretations of the dictator’s strategy. Complaints about this, in fact, are leveled at Western and former-Soviet historians by some of today’s Russian historians.

When discussing the mistakes made on the eve of the German attack, these officers inevitably indicted Stalin. Yet Bobylev and others observe that Red Army staff officers were not about to shoulder the blame themselves for such a tragedy. Instead, they put the onus on the deceased, de-glorified tyrant, Stalin. As a consequence, many Western historians—writing on the war and relying on the same sources in drawing their conclusions—likewise blame Stalin alone for the many tragic miscalculations. As noted by Bobylev and other Russian researchers, at the same time, it was Stalin who, after all, endorsed the plans—many of which were seriously flawed—when they were submitted to him by General Staff officers such as Generals Zhukov, Vasilievsky, and Kirill A. Meretskov and Marshals Semyon K.



Timoshenko and Boris M. Shaposhnikov (their ranks before June 1941). Ultimately, the Soviet dictator must bear the responsibility for approving the mistaken concepts and plans. Yet, as it turns out, it had been an overconfident, miscalculating, and in part sycophantic military that in the main had devised the errant plans and had exaggerated the readiness of the Red Army for combat. Doubtlessly, they were motivated by fear of the dictator, who did not hesitate to purge and spill the blood of his top commanders, often in an arbitrary, unprovoked way. Moreover, the plans submitted to Stalin by his most trusted professional soldiers appealed to the Soviet leader, as cautious as Stalin tended to be, because of their audacity and because of their Bolshevik-style “offensiveness” (*наступательность* or *nastupatel’nost’*).

Stalin himself and his military indoctrinators, after all, repeatedly touted “offensiveness” as the Red Army’s most distinctive feature. So wedded were they to this concept of waging offensives on enemy territory and reaping the advantages of surprise attack that they seriously neglected designing necessary defensive (*оборонительные*, or *oboronitel’niye*) strategies and defense-oriented preparations for the Red Army. This is all but admitted now by contemporary Russian historians and even by some latter-day defense officials (e.g., in a long article appearing in mid-2000 in a major Russian military publication written by the current chief of the General Staff of the Russian Army, General Anatoly Kvashnin).<sup>4</sup> In any case, retreat was out of the question for the mighty, well-motivated Red Army, whose mission was “revolutionary” and “world historical,” not simply traditional war fighting alone based on conventional principles of armed struggle.

Among the several, newly disclosed documents of the last few years up through the year 2000 that call for a reassessment of the conclusions previously drawn in earlier discussions of the prewar period are the texts of Stalin’s address and remarks made to the graduating Red Army military cadets, May 5, 1941; the texts of Red Army strategic plans, in

particular that of May 15, 1941, and their later “refinements”; and the telltale orders issued from the General Staff for secret, well-camouflaged deployments of Red Army troops to the Western Front in the run-up to the fatal day of June 22, in which defensive preparations are not even given as one of the Red Army’s main tasks but, instead, in which offensive troop concentrations and tactics are paramount.

The preparation of this book has been further sourced by a comprehensive, well-documented, 600-page study of the pre-June 1941 Red Army, Navy, and Air Force war preparations as canvassed in the new book by Russian military historian, Mikhail I. Mel’tyukhov of VNIIDAD. Together with Bobylev and other “new historians”—whether Russian, French, German, or American—all such historians are cited in the pages that follow.

## NOTES

Stalin’s documented remarks in the epigraph are quoted in F. I. Firsov, “Arkhiy Kominterna I Vneshnyaya Politika SSSR v 1939–1941” (“Archives of the Communist International and the Foreign Policy of the USSR 1939–1941”), *Novaya i Noveishaya Istoriya*, no. 6 (1992), pp. 18–19.

1 P. N. Bobylev, “Tochku v diskussii stavit’ rano. K voprosu o planirovaniy v general’nom shtabe RKKA vozmozhnoi voyny s Germaniyei v 1940–1941 godakh” (“Calling an Early Halt to the Discussion about the Problem in the General Staff of the RKKA on Planning a Possible War with Germany from the Years 1940–1941”), *Otechesvennaya istoriya*, no. 1 (2000), pp. 41–64. Bobylev also takes Viktor Suvorov (Vladimir Bogdanovich Rezun, a Russian émigré living in London) to task for the distortions in his writings of 1989–90, including his 1990 book, *The Ice-Breaker Who Started the Second World War?* and notes that Suvorov, in any case, was not the first to search for offensivism in Stalin’s and the Red Army’s war planning

against Germany.

2 M. I. Mel'tyukhov, *Upushchennyi Shans Stalina Sovetskyi Soyuz I Bor'ba za Yevropu 1939–1941 (Stalin's Lost Opportunity: The Soviet Union and the Battle for Europe 1939–1941)* (Moscow: Veche, 2000), pp. 7, 9. This book, running 600 pages, is the most comprehensive study to date on the period under examination. Its author is a post-Soviet historian on the staff of the All-Russian Scientific-Research Institute for Documents and Archive Affairs (VNIIDAD), founded in 1966. Mel'-tyukhov has contributed chapters and articles to a number of books and scholarly history periodicals in Russia.

3 A. N. Yakovlev, ed., *1941 God. Dokumenty (The Year 1941: Documents)* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi Fond Demokratiya, 1998), 2 vols. Russian historians describe these volumes as crucial in updating discussion of the pre-June 1941 preparations and other relevant events.

4 Anatoly Kvashnin and Makhmut Gareyev, "Sem' Urokov Velikoi Otechestvennoi" ("Seven Lessons from the Great Fatherland War"), *Nezavisimoye Voennoye Obozreniye* (April 28-May 11, 2000), pp. 1–3.

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# Introduction

As long as capitalism exists and socialism exists, we cannot live in peace. In the end, one or the other will triumph. A funeral dirge will be sung either over the Soviet Republic or over capitalism.

—V. I. Lenin

Bolshevism cannot evade responsibility for perpetrating falsehoods unheard of in history . . . for fostering criminal ideas of force and violence, class struggle, dictatorship of the proletariat, revolution, [and] for the militarization of the country.

—A. N. Yakovlev, former Communist Party Secretary for  
Propaganda

[Revolution in Russia] did not lead to national harmony but to catastrophe and genocide. Anyone who forgets the past is destined to repeat it over and over.

—V. P. Ostrovskyi, post-Soviet Russian high school  
textbook author

The demise of communist rule in Russia in 1991 triggered intense discussion about depictions of the past as boilerplated in Communist Party–guided Soviet historiography. With the partial opening of archives of Soviet civilian, military, and security police authorities, the contents of the Orwellian Memory Hole, to which so many historical truths were committed in the Stalin period, began to be exhumed. As a result, wholesale revisionism has been sweeping through Russian historical science for the past ten years. In this process almost no stone has been left unturned. One of the great “white spots,” as Russians call intentional omissions in the Soviet historical record, concerns Josef Stalin’s and the Red Army General Staff’s intentions and plans during and after the signing of the crucial Nazi–Soviet agreements of August–September 1939. Included are secret protocols drawn up and signed by the governments of Berlin and Moscow sixty-two years ago, whose very existence was disingenuously denied by former Soviet authorities, including Mikhail Gorbachev. Since roughly 1994–95, even more revealing documents have surfaced as various Russian archival holdings are made available to working historians. Western historians have still not caught up with the new disclosures that date from 1996 to 2001.

A prevalent school of thought among Russian and Western historians hews to the conventional line that has dominated history books in the USSR and abroad up until only recently. Based largely on Soviet-controlled documents, this interpretation insists, namely, that Stalin’s military policy from 1939 until the German invasion of the Soviet Union, on June 22, 1941, was largely *defensist*. That is, Stalin and the General Staff harbored no offensive or “preemptive,” military-oriented Grand Strategy vis-à-vis Germany or against any other prospective capitalist enemy. In the prewar years up to June 1941, Stalin intended merely to keep the USSR as long as possible out of a new world war—predicted by Marxism-Leninism as “inevitable.” In this way, it is argued, the Soviets would have time to build up their defenses in the

expectation of a coming global conflict that sooner or later would likely engulf them as hapless victims like Hitler's other dupes. Among such defensive moves, the "defensist" school maintains, were the Soviet territorial acquisitions of 1939–40. These annexations consisted of half of Poland, which included territory added to Soviet Ukraine and Byelorussia; all of the Baltics; part of Finland; and northern Bukovina and Bessarabia at Rumania's expense. Termed a "buffer zone" by the defensists and Soviet-period apologists, these territories were not the fruit of a deliberate Soviet expansionist policy, they claim. Rather, the annexations and sovietizations added up to merely protective measures wisely taken by Stalin as insurance against the day of a German invasion. That these territories remained parts of the USSR after World War II is deemed by some historians, strange to say, as all but irrelevant. Interestingly, the defensist argument about Soviet Russia was also given out by orientation officers to U.S. soldiers in World War II.<sup>1</sup> These officers used such reference manuals as *The USSR Institutions and People: A Brief Handbook for the Use of Officers of the Armed Forces of the United States*. "The Nazi–Soviet Pact," says the handbook,

was accepted by the Soviet people as an act of wisdom [gaining time] for them . . . in which to prepare for the Nazi attack which came in June 1941.... Soviet-advocated measures failed largely because the democratic powers mistrusted the Soviet Union. [The Soviet people felt] that the overtures made to the Soviet Union by Great Britain and France in the summer of 1939 lacked a basis for realistic and effective measures against Germany.

The same orientation pamphlet describes the USSR as a democracy and fatuously claims that Josef Stalin was the "elected" leader in the

Western sense.

The invasion, an unforgivable “double cross” (*вероломство*, or *verolomstvo*, in Russian), took Stalin by surprise precisely, it is alleged by this school, because he had been tricked into allowing Soviet Russia to become a “sitting duck,” a “dupe.” Foolishly, he had fully trusted his alliance with Hitler even as the latter so obviously deployed German invasion forces all along the Soviet western frontier by spring 1941. Stalin, moreover, blithely ignored the warnings of an attack proffered to him secretly by Roosevelt and Churchill (exploiting top-secret intelligence gleaned from Enigma Machine/Ultra decoding of German General Staff encrypted traffic) and by Stalin’s own best foreign agents. One of the latter even predicted the date of the invasion.

Stalin, in any case, distrusted the Western powers, those duplicitous “Munich appeasers.” The latter, it is alleged, had refused serious Soviet overtures to build collective-security guarantees against Axis expansionism. Yet, as we shall see, new documents indicate that Stalin preferred to strike a deal with Hitler than one with the scorned “Anglo-French bloc.” (For Stalin’s observations about this, which have been kept secret until recently, see appendix 3.)

The offensists, on the other hand, attempt to rebut the conventional image of Stalin’s alleged ignorance of Hitler’s plans. They claim that the Soviet dictator was well aware of Operation Barbarossa. But if he was aware and in what detail he was aware have yet to be fully supported by classified documents. (There are, after all, “white spots” within the released archival material itself. Many Russian researchers and historians complain that they have been given access only to a portion of the truth.) He erred in thinking Hitler would not get the jump on the Red Army, which had developed its own offensist plans.

Having earlier (mid-1930s) pursued a policy of joining the League of Nations and defining and touting the principles of nonaggression and



collective security with England and France against Nazi Germany, Stalin—who at this stage thrust forward Maxim Litvinov to instrument this “peace-minded” policy—sought seriously, it is alleged in conventional as well as Soviet party-line histories, to curtail Hitler. He attempted by 1938–39, it is claimed, to align the USSR with the Western capitalist democracies.

However, recent research, as we will see, raises questions as to the sincerity of Stalin’s putative intentions concerning serious collective-security arrangements with the West European capitalist states. Incidentally, the same Litvinov, as Stalin’s commissar of foreign affairs in the early 1930s, who early on had changed his name from Vallach to Litvinov, was, ironically, instrumental himself in paving the way toward Nazi–Soviet rapprochement (see chapter 2).

Accordingly, at this time Stalin ordered Western Communist parties to adopt the Popular Front tactic. But the line was promoted always with the caveat that it was a means of enhancing communist opportunities for seizure of power in the given countries. Stalin, claims the defensist school, on the other hand, was frustrated in this putatively sincere endeavor to form a bloc against “fascism” (as Soviet ideology called Nazism and Italian Fascism). England and France, they claim, refused to cooperate in establishing collective security with the Soviets. The Anglo-French bloc was motivated, defensists say, by the hope that Germany and Russia would embroil themselves in war. As one defensist-minded American academic has written, the Western powers were blindsided by their hatred and fear of communism, even more than the Soviets were misled by their anticapitalist ideology. As he puts it, “Ideologically-derived perceptions [on the part of England and France] shaped the behavior of the Western leaders to a greater extent than they did Soviet policy.”<sup>2</sup> Such perceptions, the historian alleges, frustrated Moscow’s proposals for collective security.

Because of Western suspicions, this writer continues, reflecting a

consensus among many historians, the Franco-British Munich appeasement policy evolved into abandonment of the Soviet's principal central European ally, Czechoslovakia. Out of frustration, Soviet pursuit of collective security, therefore, was given up by Stalin. Litvinov himself, a symbol of collective-security policy, was abandoned by Stalin in early 1939. He was demoted, significantly, well before Western envoys had given up coming to Moscow to try to work out a deal in the summer of that year.

The rigid, orthodox aide closest to Stalin, Vyacheslav Molotov, thereupon took over the reins of foreign affairs from the talented, trusted Jewish Old Bolshevik. The Soviets, it was then perceived by some, would now look out for themselves while pursuing bare-knuckled Realpolitik. Yet, it is claimed, for all that, Stalin's policy remained one of defense, not offense. This defensive policy, it is alleged, remained in force right up to the German invasion of the USSR on June 22, 1941.

In contrast to this line of argument, the second, or *offensist*, school presents fresh evidence that strongly indicates that Stalin all along was secretly plotting an offensive war of his own—above all against Germany but ultimately against all of “capitalist-imperialist” Europe. This second, secret—or “other”—war was to be waged after the capitalist countries had mutually destructed each other in a “big war,” as Stalin called it. This was Stalin's “great dream,” says the Russian historian and biographer Edvard Radzinsky.<sup>3</sup> As Molotov observes of “big wars” in his interviews with Felix Chuev in the 1980s, referring to Stalin's view of the two world wars and a future world war: “Stalin looked at it this way. World War I has wrested one country from capitalist slavery. World War II has created a socialist system. A third world war will finish off imperialism forever.”<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, Stalin told a high Yugoslav Communist Party official, Milovan Djilas, just after World War II: “We will have another go at

it,” meaning World War III. With this third “big war” would come further expansion of Sovietism worldwide. During the Korean War (1950–53), which was an attempt to hit at capitalism’s rear in the Far East, the Soviet representative to the UNO, Yakov Malik, was quoted on the front page of *The New York Times* on February 3, 1952, as stating with ideological sangfroid: “World War III has already begun.” War—in this case in Korea—and revolutionary expansion worldwide obviously were two sides of the same coin. Indeed, post-Soviet archival material shows that Stalin did in fact have global expansionist aims as far as the Korean War was concerned, as revealed in top-secret messages exchanged between Moscow and Beijing and Pyongyang in the winter of 1949–50. “The East Is Red” became more than a catchy title for a video documentary on the period.

Statements, secret or open, made by leading officials and the Soviets’ own military planning all point undeniably in the offensivist direction, it is claimed by these historians. Such evidence includes Stalin’s secret speech to the military graduates and his remarks at their reception, May 5, 1941, which rattled offensive sabers (see appendix 1 for the full text of one of the key Stalin speeches at the ceremony); two successive, pre-June 1941 Red Army field manuals containing exclusively offensivist principles of combat while all but totally ignoring defensive ones; and a significant military strategy paper, or memorandum, addressed to Stalin, May 15, 1941, by the Red Army’s topmost staff officers (Vasilievsky, Timoshenko, and Zhukov) that explicitly advocates preemptive war (see chapter 5 for discussion of the above as well as appendix 2, containing key sections of the memorandum). There are other clues as well.

The defensists counter that there is no proof Stalin ever saw the military document. But the new historians pointedly ask whether the three topmost Red Army generals would have dared to make such recommendations to Stalin if they did not think he agreed with them.

Not long before, the dictator had bloodily purged the General Staff; no one dared thereafter to propose anything that would alienate the capricious Stalin. If offensist principles did not harmonize with Stalin's own views, what professional staff senior officer would dare challenge Stalin on such a crucial matter? Obviously, the staff officers were certain that Stalin would accept their recommendations.

On their part, defensist authors, not having the latest documents in hand, have pointed out that even if Stalin did read the staff officers' memorandum and even if its proposal did dovetail with Stalin's offensist-oriented remarks of May 5, subsequent military orders and actual deployments along the western frontier facing German-held territory do not suggest a full-fledged offensist posture. This dubious claim is reiterated in a sweeping analysis that appeared recently in the pro-government Russian military press, *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozrenie (Independent Military Review)*, issue of April 28–May 11, 2000, on the fifty-fifth anniversary of the end of World War II. The analysis is written by the present Russian Federation chief of the General Staff and deputy minister of defense, General Anatoly V. Kvashnin, and the former Soviet deputy minister of defense and prominent military strategist, General Makhmut A. Gareyev. Their conventional observations, though reserved, are quite predictable. (Evidence that questions these writers' line on pre-Barbarossa Red Army deployments is examined in chapter 5.)

On the ideological front, the revisionist offensists refer back to Lenin's "Report on Peace," November 8, 1917. The Soviet leader had then called on the Western "laboring and exploited masses" to end their nations' participation in war (World War I). They were to follow the Soviet example, "emancipate" themselves "from all forms of slavery and exploitation." The socialist "new order," Lenin continues, "will not be bound by treaties." We have "lit the torch of world revolution," he writes in the draft of the first post-1917 program of the Russian

Communist Party (Bolsheviks). The Soviets will “carry the revolution into the most advanced countries and in general into all countries.” In a speech on March 7, 1918, Lenin declared: “History marches forward on the basis of liberation wars.”

Such was the impetus for the Red Army’s invasion of Poland in 1920 and earlier and later attempts in those years to sovietize Germany, Hungary, and other East European as well as Baltic states. Lenin said that the war against Poland in 1920 was intended to carry Bolshevik-style revolution and sovietization all the way to Berlin. With reference to that war, Russian historians of the offensivist persuasion cite the recently published (in Russia) Lenin stenogram, under the title “Ya proshu zapisyvat’ men’she: eto ne dolzhno popadat’ v pechat’” (“I Intend to Write Less Lest It Fall into the Hands of the Press”). In it Lenin predicts in 1920 that with Poland sovietized, the Red Army would be deployed at Germany’s very borders. Thus positioned, it could then wage an “offensive war,” Lenin says, against the West, eventually carrying “liberation war” into the whole of Europe. “We will impress on the workers,” he declares, “that a new level of revolutionary activity has arrived.... We will exploit every opportunity [from our base in Poland] to go from defense to offense.... We will learn how to wage offensive war.”<sup>5</sup>

Such statements were often made by top Soviet officials right up to June 22, 1941. The question that is sometimes raised is whether such declarations constituted the actual underpinnings for concrete Red Army military strategy. It would appear that they *were* fundamental to military policy to judge by the writings in the 1920s of such Soviet military thinkers and commanders as Generals Triandafillov, Isserson, and Tukhachevsky. These officers not infrequently extolled export of revolution with the help of the Red Army.

Basic Leninist principles were never abandoned, claim the revisionist offensivists. They note that with the establishment of the

Comintern in 1919, Lenin's long-nurtured dream of encouraging global sovietization began to be realized in practice with the founding of this "General Staff of World Revolution." As a result, Soviet diplomacy began to run on "two tracks": one appearing as formally, legalistically "diplomatic" and conventional; the other, unconventional, illegal, and subversive, serving Marxist-Leninist goals of revolutionary expansionism worldwide. Perhaps the best metaphor for expressing the twofold, duplicitous nature of Soviet foreign policy and behavior in the international arena is an iceberg. The visible portion consisted of "legalistic" diplomacy (especially when aimed at developing trade and aid favorable to the USSR) and talk of "peaceful cohabitation" (later phrased "peaceful coexistence") for the purpose of gaining time (in Sovietese: a "breathing space"—*peredyshka*) while misleading the "deaf, dumb, and blind" enemy by "lulling him asleep." The latter tactics were commended by a high Comintern official as well as by Lenin. In this way, Soviet power worldwide would be enhanced along with abetting the global, revolutionary cause of sovietization, the two working together. The larger, submerged portion of the iceberg consisted of global subversion via legal or illegal Communist parties organized within countries throughout the world. These fifth-column forces, infiltrated into all layers of society in the given capitalist or Third World countries, served, to use Stalin's later phrase of 1952, as international "shock brigades."

Trotsky once made an apt comment on the defensist *appearance* the Soviets should sport publicly in the form of propaganda: "The offensive . . . develops better the more it looks like self-defense."<sup>6</sup> Throughout most of Soviet history, this principle lay at the heart of the "operational art" of Kremlin-style diplomacy.

The defensist school recognizes the above but only to an extent. First, it supports a "realist" view toward ideology (see chapter 1). This view places ideological "posturing" outside the circle of day-to-day

policy making. It describes the official ideology of Marxism-Leninism as virtually irrelevant. Second, it diminishes the importance of the Comintern. It regards this unique organization as little more than a toy pistol brandished by Stalin that, in any case, he dispensed with by the war year of 1943 after years of “neglect.” Yet, although ignored by those observers who question the importance of the Communist International, after the Comintern was disbanded, Comintern-like activities continued. They were taken over by the Central Committee’s Information and International Department (which later split in the 1970s into two departments, one for information, the other for sponsoring international expansionism). (The post-World War II “Cominform” also acquired some of the former Comintern’s tasks.) Ex-Communist International Executive Committee secretaries and officials were duly transferred to these departments in Moscow. Among them was Georgi Dimitrov, former general secretary of the Comintern, who after his death was followed by the well-known chief of the International Department during the Brezhnev era, Boris N. Ponomarev.

Post-1991 archive documents show that the investments in this “internationalist” enterprise cost the Soviets triple-digit billions of rubles during the seventy-plus years of such obviously serious, global subversive activity. It has been estimated that the Soviets spent on average some \$1.5 billion per year on subsidizing foreign subversion and its accomplice, international guerrilla warfare and terrorism. As the armed components of Marxist-Leninist “internationalism,” they were tasked with preparing the way for Soviet-style socialism via guerrilla armed actions and armed seizures of power.

In the heyday of the Comintern, Soviet national expansionist interests would be abetted by Soviet peace-mongering propaganda. This was tasked to weaken Western defenses. “Both you and I,” Lenin reminded Commissar of Foreign Affairs Chicherin, “have fought

against pacifism.... But where, when, and who denied the exploitation of pacifists by this party in order to demoralize the enemy?" Using Soviet Orwellian "newspeak," the Theses of the Sixth World Congress of the Comintern (1928) put it this way—"dialectically": "Revolutionary war by the proletarian dictatorship is but the continuation of a revolutionary peace policy."<sup>7</sup>

Such activity was combined with outright sabotage within the given countries—for example, as against British, French, and the U.S. defense factories during the Nazi–Soviet “honeymoon” of 1939–41. As detailed in the Mitrokhin Archive, disclosed in 1999, the subversives likewise would serve as sleeper forces waiting to be called into action by Moscow Center in case of war in the name of socialism. In times of war or peace, they would prepare the ground for Soviet-style takeovers whether by countries or by regions.

The offensivist historians, researching newly disclosed archive documents, further maintain that Stalin actually hoped for war, viewing it as he did as the “midwife” of revolution. In that way, revolution could be “exported on the tips of bayonets,” as Soviet spokespersons and military hawks openly declared in meetings of the Comintern in the 1920s and 1930s. In early 1940 the Soviet leader relished—indeed, encouraged—German expansionism against France, the Lowlands, Britain, and Norway. Shipments of war materiel through Brest-Litovsk on its way to Germany continued in gargantuan amounts right up to the Soviet–German war beginning in late June 1941. Moscow even broke off diplomatic relations with the governments of these West European countries out of respect for Hitler’s conquests.

Stalin stated openly to aides that he hoped to see all the “capitalist-imperialist” combatants self-destruct. In the Far East, Japan, Stalin said, would likewise become embroiled in a war with the United States, the advent of which would also serve Soviet interests by debilitating that distant capital-imperialist enemy. Stalin was informed by agents in



Tokyo of plans for the Japanese Pearl Harbor attack of December 7, 1941, but kept this information from the Americans, despite British and American Lend-Lease aid that had already begun to be shipped to the Soviets almost immediately after the German attack of June 22, 1941. Stalin still thought and spoke openly in this way at the end of World War II and up to the time he died in 1953.<sup>8</sup>

Some historians of this school present evidence for the fact that Stalin was planning to launch a preemptive war against Germany. It was to begin either by July 1941 (a minority view) or at the latest by mid-1942. Once it was fully supplied with modern weaponry, the Red Army would sweep clear through Europe, meeting the rebellious, war-fatigued masses in war-torn cities as it carried the red banner westward. Revisionist Russian historians note that in 1939 and in 1940–41 several of Stalin's closest aides—Molotov, Zhdanov, Mekhlis, Shcherbakov, and so on—spoke explicitly and assuredly of “extending the frontiers of socialism” on the wings of the “inevitable,” coming war. It was as though war, deemed “inexorable” by Marxist-Leninist ideology and often reiterated by Soviet spokespersons, would become a self-fulfilling prophecy for the expansionist aims of the communist leadership. Indeed, five years before the start of World War II, Stalin predicted ominously:

War will surely unleash revolution and put in question the very existence of capitalism in a number of countries, as was the case of the first imperialist war.... Let not the bourgeoisie blame us if on the morrow of the outbreak of such a war they miss certain ones of the governments that are near and dear to them, and now are today happily ruling by the grace of God.

It can hardly be doubted that a second war against the

USSR will lead to the complete defeat of the aggressors, to revolution in a series of countries of Europe and Asia. Victory in revolution never comes of itself. It must be prepared for and won.<sup>9</sup>

Although the revisionist interpretation is canvassed above, in the following chapters both arguments—defensist and offensist (or revisionist)—will be analyzed. This documented discussion—involving both Russian and Western historians in the post-1991 period to the present—will be viewed against the background of actual events and Soviet actions during the period. Readers can then draw their own conclusions from the arguments presented in these pages. In a concluding note, I will weigh both arguments as judiciously as possible on the basis of the latest available information.

## NOTES

The first epigraph is from V. I. Lenin, *Selected Works*, vol. 7 (New York: International Publishers, 1943), p. 33. This and other Lenin, Stalin, et al. statements of this type may be found in Albert L. Weeks, *Soviet and Communist Quotations* (New York: Pergamon-Brassey's Publishers, 1987), pp. 20–25.

The second is from A. N. Yakovlev, “Bol’shevizmu ne uiti ot otvetstvennnosti” (“Bolshevism Cannot Evade Responsibility”), *Rossiiskiye Vesti* (November 29, 1995), p. 1.

The third is from V. P. Ostrovskiy and A. I. Utkin, *Istoriya Rossii XX vek* (*A History of Russia in the 20th Century*) (school textbook) (Moscow: Drofa, 1997), p. 4. See appendix 4 for a review of some of the new Russian history textbooks.

**1** *The USSR Institutions and People: A Brief Handbook for the Use of Officers of the Armed Forces of the United States* (Washington, D.C.:

U.S. Government Printing Office, 1945), p. 64.

2 A. Z. Rubenstein, *Soviet Foreign Policy since World War II: Imperial and Global*, 2d ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1985), p. 19.

3 Edvard Radzinsky, *Stalin* (New York: Doubleday Publishing Co., 1996), p. 424. The respected poet and war veteran Bulat Okudzhava, after reading the offensivist émigré-author Viktor Suvorov (Vladimir Bogdanovich Rezun), who wrote the revisionist books *Ice-Breaker* and *M-Day*, remarked: “I have read Suvorov with interest.... It is hard for me to doubt that we [Soviets] likewise were preparing our own march of plunder. The Germans merely got the jump on us so that we were forced to resort to defense of our country” (interview in *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, May 11, 1994).

In an early 1941 entry in his diary, Chief of the German General Staff, General Franz Halder, disclosed the following about German awareness of Soviet offensivism (emphasis added): “*One cannot help admitting that their [Red Army] troop dispositions are such as to enable them to pass to the offensive on the shortest possible notice.*”

4 *Molotov Remembers: Inside Kremlin Politics. Conversations with Felix Chuev* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993), p. 63.

5 V. I. Lenin, “Ya proshu zapisyvat’ men’she: eto ne dolzhno popadat’ v pechat’” (“I Intend to Write Less Lest It Fall into the Hands of the Press”), *Istoricheskyyi Arkhiv*, no. 1 (1992), pp. 12–27.

6 Quoted by Stefan T. Possony in “Lenin and Meta-Strategy,” chapter 16 in Bernard W. Eissenstat, ed., *Lenin and Leninism* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1971), p. 269.

7 These and many other such statements may be found in Weeks,

*Soviet and Communist Quotations*, under “Peaceful Coexistence and Detente,” pp. 201–02. Former Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei A. Gromyko updated the concept as follows: “Peaceful coexistence creates the most favorable conditions for the mobilization of the masses in the struggle against imperialism” (quoted in Weeks, *Soviet and Communist Quotations*, p. 203).

8 Quoted in Robert Conquest, *Stalin: Breaker of Nations* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 278. Stalin remarked to the Yugoslavs in April 1945: “The war will soon be over. We shall recover in 15 or 20 years, and then we’ll have another go at it.” In his election speech in February 1946, Stalin again spoke of the inevitability of war, in this case between capitalist states. He repeated this thesis in his 1952 writing, *The Problems of Socialism in the USSR*, which was incorporated in the summation of the last Stalinite Party Congress, the Nineteenth, in October 1952. Soviet-sponsored international “shock brigades” (*udarniye brigady*) were referenced by Stalin at that time. Some say Stalin was anticipating World War III, fought at first between capitalist states.

9 J. V. Stalin, “Report to the 17th Party Conference, January 26, 1934,” in J. Stalin, *Selected Works* (Albania, n.d.), pp. 402–03.

# 1

## ***Soviet Expansionist Ideology: Propaganda or Blueprint?***

Ideology not only contributes to the development of unlimited national objectives, but it also eventually creates states whose goal is to overthrow the existing international system.

—Henry Kissinger

If war is waged by the proletariat after it has conquered the bourgeoisie in its own country and is waged with the object of strengthening and extending socialism, such a war is legitimate and “holy.”

—V. I. Lenin

Present-day Soviet leaders have determined upon a program pointed towards imposing Communism on those countries under their control and, elsewhere, creating conditions favorable to the triumph of Communism in the war against Capitalism which they consider to be inevitable.... The growth of Moscow-controlled Communist parties throughout

the world gives ample evidence that the international objective has never been neglected. World War II has resulted in long strides along the path that the Soviet leadership has chosen.

—General John R. Deane

It would be utterly simplistic to say that the Bolsheviks' foreign-policy course was something consistent and unilinear.... In certain situations it was guided by ideological mythmaking, in others it was a case of practical interests, while in another it was guided by imperial ambitions.

—Alexander Yakovlev, successively former Soviet  
Communist Party  
Central Committee Propaganda Department head, secretary,  
and  
Politburo member under General Secretaries Brezhnev,  
Andropov,  
Chernenko, and Gorbachev

Perennial disagreement among historians and Soviet specialists revolves about the role played by ideology in Soviet policy making, particularly toward foreign states. The argument is by no means academic. The dispute intersects with the main thrust of this book: Stalin's strategy on the eve of World War II and whether it was of an offensivist/preemptive or a defensivist nature. The underpinning for the making of Soviet policy, after all, must play a major role in deciding this question. It has been argued by some that this fundamental underpinning is, in the last analysis, ideological.

A new book on Soviet propaganda, written by one of Russia's young historian-specialists, makes this point about the ideological factor in Soviet policy making and military doctrine and strategy pegged to before and during World War II: "In the 1930's and 1940's . . . the Bolshevik leadership confronted itself with formidable foreign policy tasks, in the solution of which propaganda was used as a virtual 'transmission belt' between the governmental authorities and the population."<sup>1</sup> V.A. Nevezhin, the Russian Academy of Science historian cited here, also suggests that ideology guided Stalin in the making of defense policy. It also served as a "mirror," as he puts it, reflecting the decisions that the Soviet leader made in directives guiding indoctrination.

The question of the role played by ideology in the matters under study in this book must be addressed well ahead of the other factors that determine the thrust of Soviet military doctrine and strategy in 1939–41 and beyond. For if the direction taken by the Kremlin in its prewar as well as postwar relations with other states, not to mention its military doctrine, was guided by ideology, Marxism-Leninism then becomes as crucial as, say, Hitler's *chef d'oeuvre*, *Mein Kampf*, or the Japanese pre-World War II "bible," the Tanaka Memorial (or "Tanaka Plan").

Some observers wonder whether Lenin, Stalin, and their cohorts and propagandists really believed or meant what they so often said about spreading Communism and the Soviet system worldwide. Were they serious when they declared that the "revolutionary base" of the USSR, the "first socialist country," would be used in order to subvert "capitalist imperialism" and "colonialism"? Said Lenin: "We Marxists have always stood, and still stand, for a revolutionary war against counterrevolutionary nations. [We would be] in favor of an offensive revolutionary war against them."<sup>2</sup> Stalin noted: "The victory of socialism in one country is not a self-sufficient task. [It is] the

groundwork for world revolution.” The Soviet Union is prepared, Stalin declared, quoting Lenin, “to come out even with armed force against the exploiting classes and their states.” The program of the Communist International (Sixth Congress, 1928) puts it: “The USSR . . . raises revolts and inevitably becomes the base of the world movement of all oppressed classes.”<sup>3</sup>

As mentioned in the introduction, did the Soviet founding father, Lenin and his successors, Stalin, et al., seriously regard war as the “midwife” of revolution? Did they ever wage war with that in mind? In other words, was the ideological goal of fomenting world revolution according to the axioms of Marxism-Leninism mere *vranyo* (Russian equivalent of “verbal bravado”), so much mumbo jumbo?

Finally, this question arises: Was the forcible expansion of the borders of the young Soviet Republic immediately after 1918 and in the 1920s—into the borderlands of Ukraine, Byelorussia, Georgia, Armenia, Turkestan, and so on—basically nonideological? Was it merely the reflexive, nationalist assertion of long-standing Russian territorial expansionism into neighboring lands going back to the tsars?

On the other hand, if this Soviet borderland expansion—coupled to attempts to sovietize the independent Baltic states (after 1917) as well as the more distant countries of Hungary and Germany beginning in 1918 and then Poland in 1920—was inspired by the Soviet ideology of exporting the Soviet new “socialist order” and fomenting global revolution, then Marxist-Leninist doctrine, it would seem, becomes crucially determinant. It impinges significantly on the casting of both domestic and foreign policy. It therefore becomes necessary to view Soviet behavior to an important degree through the prism of the stated beliefs of the regime, its ideology, and its revolutionary program. And that includes, of course, the thrust of Soviet behavior in the immediate pre-World War II period, which is the central topic of this book.



Roughly two schools of thought have coalesced around the pair of opposing questions about the role of ideology in Soviet behavior. One school frames the question this way: Is ideology in general mere window dressing, an updated form of the ritualistic Indian rain dance as some political analysts such as Lewis Feuer have put it? Or, on the other hand, does ideology provide a realistic, practical “blueprint” for concrete policy making and action, a “lodestar” (the Soviet metaphor for Marxist-Leninist ideology) in order to guide the Russian ship of state in practical ways?

## **THE REALIST VIEW**

The first side in this dispute—the so-called realist school—argues that ideology is mostly extravagant propaganda. At best, its function is to supply ballast and legitimation to a top-heavy, autocratic regime whose legitimacy otherwise is questionable. Ideology is crucial in order to justify or legitimize a regime’s authoritarian or dictatorial rule. The absolutist regime’s set of doctrines must be believed by the people and followed to the letter. How else can the autocratic state bind together the comrades in realizing the common cause, the practical goals of the regime? (Plato apparently had something like this in mind with his “useful lie” (*κρήζιμος ψεύδοζ*) taught to the citizens of his ideal republic—a mythic ideology implanted in the youth to guarantee obedience to the philosopher-kings.)

Yet these dogmas, or “myths,” it is alleged by the realist school, are at heart impractical and visionary—in either the short or long term. To the realists, this makes the dogmas all but irrelevant. Marxist-Leninist principles and goals are like hymns sung to the choir.

For instance, consider the catchphrase for the much touted millennial paradise of “full communism”—“from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs”—together with the anarchist-like dream in Communist ideology that prophesies the ultimate, total withering

away of the state, the end of the division of labor and of differences between town and country, and so forth. These farfetched axioms of Marxism-Leninism are viewed by many Western observers as so much sugarcoating. They are at best rationalizations, they insist, in support of one-party rule. That anyone would believe such shibboleths, least of all take them literally as “blueprints” for the future, is almost like saying that American Indians performing a rain dance for tourists in New Mexico are to be taken seriously, as though truly endeavoring to produce rainfall.

In short, to the realist school, Marxism-Leninism is little more than advertising, boastful pontification. Realists might point out that in America clubs like Kiwanis, Rotarians, Masons, and so on likewise make vast boasts and millennial prognostications. But does such posturing and mumbo jumbo really mean anything? Does it affect their behavior in any concrete way? Or does it simply boost zealots’ spirits while rationalizing their very enterprise?

In its ideological formulations respecting foreign states and their societies, Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism’s dogmas, realists claim, likewise should not have been taken seriously at any given time or place. Surely, they claim, Lenin, Stalin, and their cohorts could not have seriously entertained the idea of a future “Soviet of the Whole World” (Lenin’s phrase, which he often repeated). The Soviet epigones may have *talked* that way to cajole or bemuse the workers, peasants, and intellectuals or themselves or to boost party morale and strut “militancy.” But that the leaders were actually planning and working to attain such farfetched goals, especially “world revolution,” was and is regarded by realists as largely fatuous. One can safely say that most authors, latter-day Western Soviet specialists, and Moscow correspondents writing on the Soviet affairs have hewn to this approach, at the very least since the 1960s.<sup>4</sup>

If the realists are right, then the many Soviet ideological

pronouncements of an expansionist nature in the pre–World War II period can be taken with a grain of salt or, in fact, ignored altogether. Such a view, of course, prompts a negative interpretation of, for example, the “Mr. X” essay by George F. Kennan, published in *Foreign Affairs* in 1949. The views stated in that article—in describing and analyzing Soviet ideology as a driving force of policy—were to underlie U.S. and Western “Cold War strategy” for the coming four decades. Mr. X’s views became cant as the verbal springboard for formulating and maintaining the long-term American view of vigilant “containment” toward Marxism-Leninism and Soviet expansionism. It was the subtext of the Cold War.

Even in Kennan’s earlier writings, for example, his “personal paper” drafted in Moscow in spring 1935, had a similar thrust. As he then wrote:

It is important to recall the fundamental peculiarity of Russian foreign relations.... The masters in the Kremlin are revolutionary communists . . . they themselves are leaders of the world proletariat. [The Russians can] tolerate ambiguities enough in practice but not in theory. *[Their] conception of foreign relations has had a profound effect, not only on the character of diplomatic life in Moscow, but also on the entire development of Russia’s foreign relations.*<sup>5</sup>

Kennan’s above observation—that there can be “ambiguities in practice” —ironically opens another realist front against the traditionalist view: Namely, if ideology is so binding—for example, as with the Soviet antifascist line in the Comintern from 1935 to late 1939—how was it that Stalin could conveniently discard this basic party line

when he concluded his agreements with the Nazis in 1939 and 1940? So doing, he thereby suspended the antifascist line in Soviet media and official pronouncements. In this process, Stalin's zigzag alienated many Communists and fellow travelers worldwide. Ideology was put through the wringer.

Put another way, fundamental Soviet national interests seemingly can cause contradictions between *raison d'état* and Moscow's official ideology. This in turn suggests that ideology can be relegated to secondary importance in favor of other, larger national considerations in policy making, such as contingencies that arise that do not neatly fit ideological dogmas. This was the case—presumably—in August 1939 when the Soviet–Nazi alliance was taking shape. Yet even this maneuver, as we will see, had an ideological motivation.

Some authoritative Soviet military spokespeople, moreover, have insisted that *diplomacy*, not necessarily ideology alone, can provide the best “preparatory,” favorable conditions for later waging of war. To wit, General Makhmut Gareyev, in his volume *M. V. Frunze—Military Theoretician*, writes: “Skillful diplomacy [*umelaya diplomatiya*] not only creates favorable conditions for waging war, but can lead to the creation of a totally new politico-military situation in which armed struggle can be conducted.”<sup>6</sup> He thus suggests that through “forceful” diplomacy (e.g., in acquiring [annexing] Baltic and other territory in the 1940), Stalin had prepared the USSR for waging war—whether defensive or offensive (see chapter 5).

Nevertheless, ideology, though playing a subsidiary role at times, was exploited at least as rationalization for the sovietization of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in that year, just as the previous sovietizations of foreign lands had been. The old “bourgeois order” had to be overthrown (as in Poland in 1920 and September 1939). This was deemed “historically inevitable.”

In noting Stalin's relegation of Communist International (Comintern) interests to a lower priority with the shift in the party line on Nazi Germany, the realists only seemingly make a good point. By making his pact with the class devil (fascism being the most "mature" form of capitalism) in August 1939, it is claimed, Stalin surely was prioritizing what he considered at least to be Soviet short-term, putatively nonideological "national" interests. He seemed to be placing the latter ahead of ideological principles. This, in turn, apparently makes the case that ideology can look irrelevant or expendable in certain crucial situations. As Soviet Charge d'Affaires Georgi Astakhov reassured German Foreign Office State Secretary Ernst Weizsaecker on May 30, 1939:

[Astakhov] explained how Russian relations with Italy . . . as well as other countries could be normal and even very good, although in those countries Communism was not favored at all. He strongly emphasized the possibility of a very clear distinction between maxims of domestic policy on the one hand and orientation of foreign policy on the other hand.... The ideological barrier between Moscow and Berlin [Astakhov said] was in reality erected by us.

Likewise, after the German attack on the USSR in June 1941, Stalin again executed a zigzag. It was a maneuver that seemed again to compromise the official ideology. For the Soviet leader lost no time closing ranks with those same "capitalist-imperialist" states of Britain and America, which the Soviets, particularly during the twenty-one-month Nazi-Soviet honeymoon from August 1939 to 1941, had singled out as "warmongers," the "main instigators of war" (e.g., against the Soviet ally, Nazi Germany). Yet, by the next month of July, Stalin was addressing these same capitalist democracies in the friendliest of

terms. He dubbed them fellow “democratic,” antifascist, war “coalition” members. They were no longer characterized as “plutocratic,” the Nazi-like epithet used in both Nazi and Soviet propaganda. Nor were they even described as “imperialist” states, the term used for them before July 1941 and restored again after the “two-camps” line of capitalist-imperialist versus socialist states developed in the Kremlin by 1946.

Forgotten, too, were those parallel “socialist” ideologies, Nazi and Soviet. Their compatibility had once prompted friendly statements in the German and Soviet press, 1939–41, that the two systems had much in common. Yet, the term *allies*—*soyuzniki*—was very seldom used to describe during the Soviet phase of World War II Stalin’s newfound, “friendly,” capitalist Western states that were later to compose the United Nations alliance along with the USSR. (Nor, for that matter, was *soyuzniki* used for Soviet–German ties during the Nazi–Soviet honeymoon.) Suspension of anti-Western, “anti-imperialist” ideology “for the duration” clearly had to be and was achieved for the sake of the common war effort. Disbandment of the Comintern in 1943 likewise fits in with this opportunistic tactic.

However, such ideological compromises and backtracking lasted only as long as the war did. And this is grist for the opposing, traditionalist mill. As referenced by Kennan in his 1949 *Foreign Affairs* essay, momentary twists and turns aside, Stalin and Co. never really renounced basic Marxist-Leninist ideology. The ideology, he suggests, still imparted thrust and guidance to Soviet behavior in the international arena during and after the war.

A case in point is the earlier promise in 1933 to suspend Soviet-sponsored Communist propaganda and subversion in the United States. This was the price for U.S. recognition of the Soviet Union. However, Soviet subversive activity, based on Marxist-Leninist principles and applied against the United States and other capitalist democracies,

continued unabated in the postwar era as it had in a concealed way after recognition twelve years before. (Even in the heyday of Nazi–Soviet friendship the Germans complained of the same Soviet perfidy.)

In contrast to Kennan and other “cold warriors” of the postwar period, author Gabriel Gorodetsky, a writer of the realist persuasion especially when it comes to Soviet foreign policy, describes Stalin’s basic attitude toward Marxism-Leninism as follows: “Stalin was little affected by sentiment or ideology in the pursuit of foreign policy. His statesmanship was rooted in Russia’s tsarist legacy, and responded to imperatives deep within its history.... It is not surprising that in the execution of his foreign policy Machiavelli rather than Lenin was Stalin’s idol; here was a man who had *The Prince* especially translated for him.”<sup>7</sup> Professor Andreas Hillgruber adds: “Stalin never made decisions of ‘grand policy’ on the basis of Bolshevik revolutionary ideology. He practiced above all a rationally calculated power politics with the aim of expanding the Soviet empire by exploiting the war that began in 1939 among the ‘imperialist’ powers. Social revolutionary transformation in newly-won territories was subordinated to strategic security.”<sup>8</sup>

## **THE TRADITIONALIST VIEW**

Among the postwar milestones of unabated, ideological, “internationalist” activity subsidized by Moscow are the famous Duclos Letter (*The Daily Worker* [the United States], May 24, 1945) and Stalin’s February 1946 electoral speech. These along with other Soviet tracts at the time sounded traditional communist ideological notes as to the “inevitability” of the demise of capitalism, the reemergence of capitalist imperialism and war in the immediate future, and the inevitability of world revolution. With this in mind, Churchill’s “iron curtain” speech in June 1946 can be viewed as a reaction to Stalin’s postwar reassertion of the traditional tenets of Marxism-Leninism and Soviet expansionism from the Stettin to the Balkans and

beyond that the ideology evidently inspired and endorsed.

By the 1970s upward, several dozen countries worldwide could be considered active members of the Soviet bloc or of the extended “socialist camp” of cooperative “client-states.” All were committed to enforcing the principles of Soviet foreign policy and expansionistic “internationalism.”

Citing such postwar facts as the above, the so-called traditionalist school rebuts the realists. These scholars take seriously ideological pronouncements like *Mein Kampf*, the Japanese Tanaka Memorial, and, correspondingly, Marxist-Leninist ideology as formulated in the writings of Lenin and Stalin and their aides and successors.

Traditionalists produce numerous quotations from the speeches and writings of Soviet leaders as they set out to prove their point about Soviet ideology as a practical, guiding set of principles, if not an actual blueprint of expansionism.<sup>9</sup> Such writers dovetail Moscow’s ideological formulations with actual Soviet policies. They demonstrate how the official ideology actually formed the basis for Soviet foreign policy. For example, Richard W. Harrison, author of the new study *The Russian Way of War: Operational Art, 1904–1940*, has written that “ideological absolutes and political controls imposed on [the Red Army] created an ethos not disposed to recognize limits, and which could hardly have failed to have an impact on the nature of its military operations. Consequently, the political-military belief that the Communist ideology represented the most dynamic historical forces naturally inclined the army toward offensive operations.”<sup>10</sup>

In assessing the intent of Soviet behavior on the foreign front, this school also emphasizes the practical importance of the global institution of the Third Communist International (Comintern). It also cites its postwar successor, the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform). Far from regarding Marxist-Leninist ideology and the Comintern/Cominform as mere window dressing, this school claims



that ideology and policy making work hand-in-glove in a practical way. Traditionalists might note that the Western realists habitually project onto the Soviet camp their own views. They write under the spell of the “end of ideology” in their part of the world.

An exploration of the validity of this point of view can start with an examination of the Mr. X (Kennan) analysis. If Mr. X’s presentation is convincing beyond reasonable doubt and Soviet ideology indeed functioned like the North Star to Kremlin policy making, then the argument that Stalin et al.’s militant, “offensivist” ideological pronouncements on the eve of World War II would seem to have more than dubious validity. Ideological pronouncements thus become determinants of actual Soviet behavior toward Germany and its goals in World War II. They may even be seen to underlie the Nazi–Soviet agreements along with Stalin’s scuttling of effort to conclude collective-security arrangements with the Western capitalist democracies (chapter 2).

Do, in fact, Soviet ideological, expansionist statements prior to the German invasion on June 22, 1941, provide any clues of actual Soviet intentions and actions? Several post-Soviet Russian writers refer to various militant ideological statements made by high Soviet officials in the months just before June 1941. They claim that such statements could not have been made unless approved by Stalin. Furthermore, the declarations themselves, they insist, reflect above all “offensivist” military planning that must have been endorsed by the dictator. For instance, in his chapter in the Afanas’iev volume, *The Other War*, V. L. Doroshenko, noting the discovery by another writer, T. S. Bushuyev, of a new, revealing document, a speech by Stalin to a secret meeting of the Politburo, August 19, 1939 (see appendix 3 for the text), writes:

Stalin needed the Second World War no less than Hitler.  
Stalin not only helped Hitler initiate it [in Poland], he

entertained the same goal as did Hitler: seizure of power in Europe as well as the immediate aim of destroying Poland. Stalin calculated that the war, started by Germany, would lead to the downfall of the European order. Meantime, he would remain out of the [war] for a time entering the war at the most opportune moment. [Stalin's plans] were not only to conquer eastern Europe but to help bring about a communist revolution in France by going at very least as far as the English Channel.

War, as viewed by Stalin and, before him, Lenin, suggests the writer, is the “midwife of the sovietization of the whole European Continent.” The Politburo speech by Stalin makes all this explicit. It states that “Communist revolutions inevitably will break out” there as the Soviet Army “liberates” Europe as a stage in the “development of world revolution.”<sup>11</sup>

The classical expression of this goes back to Lenin. When in exile in Switzerland as World War I began in 1914, Lenin viewed the war as a great opportunity for overturning the capitalist order. The war, whose destruction he relished for its usefulness to The Cause, would unleash massive chaos. It would create the impetus for antiwar sentiment that in turn would become fuel for socialist revolution that would put an end to all war by liquidating capitalism and, with it, imperialism. This perspective remained fundamental to Marxism-Leninism right up to the fall of the Soviet order in December 1991.

In M. I. Mel'tyukhov's contribution to the Afanas'iev volume, titled “Ideological Documents of May–June 1941,” first published in the Russian military journal *Otechestvennaya Istoriya* (no. 2 [1995]), the author reproduces a number of militant statements made by high Soviet officials. They strictly conform to Marxist-Leninist “revolutionist

principles.” He claims that they amount to blueprints for waging offensive war in the near future. The Russian historian quotes such officials as the No. 2 man to Stalin, Vyacheslav Molotov; Party Secretary Andrei Zhdanov; Aleksandr Shcherbakov, party secretary for ideology and a close aide of Stalin’s; Soviet president Mikhail Kalinin; and others.<sup>12</sup>

Several statements by the above illustrate Mel’tyukhov’s emphasis on ideology:

If you are Marxists, if you study the history of the party, then you understand that the basic concept of Marxist teaching is that under conditions of major conflicts within mankind, such conflicts provide maximum advantages to communism. (Kalinin, speech, May 20, 1941 )

War will come at the same moment when communism is to be expanded.... Leninism teaches that the country of socialism [USSR] must exploit any favorably-developing situation. In which it becomes incumbent on the USSR to resort on its own initiative to offensive military actions against the capitalist encirclement with the aim of extending the front of socialism. (Shcherbakov, speech, June 5, 1941)

When conditions are favorable, we will extend the front of socialism further to the west.... For this purpose we possess the necessary instrument: The Red Army, which as early as January 1941 was given the title, “army-liberator.” (Zhdanov, speech to a conference of film workers, May 15, 1941)

The overseer of political indoctrination of the Red Army, Lev Mekhlis, stated frankly at the Eighteenth Communist Party Congress (March 1939), referring to the views of Stalin in a manner similar to Molotov and Zhdanov (as quoted in the introduction): “If a second imperialist war turns its cutting edge against the world’s first socialist state, then it will be necessary for the Soviet Union to extend hostilities to the adversary’s territory and fulfill [the USSR’s] international responsibilities and increase the number of Soviet republics.”<sup>13</sup>

For Mr. X (Kennan), however, ideology is not everything; it does not cancel out other determiners of Soviet behavior. As he notes, “Soviet policy is highly flexible” and answers to real conditions beyond its borders, not exclusively to ideological dogmas. Moreover, he continues:

the Kremlin is under no ideological compulsion to accomplish its purposes in a hurry. Like the Church, it is dealing in ideological concepts which are of long-term validity, and it can afford to be patient. It has no right to risk the existing achievements of the revolution for the sake of vain baubles of the future. The very teachings of Lenin himself require great caution and flexibility in the pursuit of communist purposes.... Thus, the Kremlin has no compunction about retreating in the face of superior force. And being under the compulsion of no timetable, it does not get panicky under the necessity for such retreat. Its political action is a fluid stream which moves constantly, wherever it is permitted to move, toward a given goal.

Translating the above and adding elements from the rest of his *Foreign Affairs* essay, we might conclude that for Mr. X—who in his

monumental essay is surely reflecting on past Soviet behavior as well as what he anticipated for the coming years of the post–World War II Cold War—the Soviets may be guided or inspired by their ideology. Yet they will act cautiously, not “fanatically.” They will not engage in reckless, offensive behavior. They will assert themselves aggressively only where a political vacuum appears. In all, their patience is “Oriental” (Kennan’s word). They do not work according to a rigid, world-revolutionary timetable or blueprint.

Applying realist-Kennan’s views retrospectively, it would seem that Stalin would never risk war, in the offensist sense of initiating hostilities out of the blue. He did not actively prepare for waging an offensist war against Germany or all of Europe in the 1940s, it is alleged. Rather, as Soviet propaganda also stipulated, if war were forced on him, he would have more than taken up the cudgels and “extended socialism” abroad on the tips of bayonets—but only if attacked and “given the chance.” This might be called a “piggyback” strategy by which an opportunity (war launched by “imperialists”) is exploited but not necessarily instigated by the side seeking to profit from it, that is, the Soviet Union.

It follows that Stalin, assuming he was a pupil of the Chinese strategist Sun Tzu, might agree that the best victory is one that is obtained by a minimum of armed fighting or, in fact, by none at all. “Weapons are ominous tools,” Sun Tzu writes, “to be used only when there is no other alternative.” Stalin, after all, had won half of Poland, the Baltic states, part of Finland, Bessarabia, northern Bukovina, and other territory by virtue of his deal with Hitler and with a minimum of warfare, in some cases none at all.

However, this expansion was taking place when the Red Army was prepared to act merely as an intimidator or enforcer of sovietization. When it tried to be more than that—a latter-day Grand Armée in the expansionistic, Napoleonic tradition—it failed miserably (as in the

aggressive war against Finland, begun in December 1939, or the attempted seizure of Poland in 1920).

Could it also be said that the Soviets' massive, ongoing military buildup in 1939–41, accompanied as it was by threatening tones of militancy in its propaganda, was aimed mainly at scaring off any likely aggressor? Did the military buildup serve more as a deterrent than as real preparation for unilaterally initiating a “preventive” war?

Was Stalin so cautious that he was not about to risk what Kennan calls destruction of all the achievements of the Soviet Union—its factories and cities and the communist one-party rule and superstructure—in risky, untimely war making? As Stalin proclaimed in 1925: “If war is to break out, we won’t be able to stand by idly. We will have to enter the fray but we will be the last ones to do it in order to be the decisive weight on the scales, a weight that must tip the balance.”<sup>14</sup>

As we will see in the next chapter, nor was Stalin, as he put it in early 1939, about to “pull chestnuts out of the fire” for any other nation-states that got into trouble, such as in war or the threat of it—in Czechoslovakia’s case, invasion by the German Army in 1938. The Soviet Union would remain on the sidelines as destruction of other European countries was unleashed. It would be neither purely neutral nor directly involved. Until later....

Moreover, Stalin was coy in his negotiations (via Molotov) with Hitler and Foreign Minister Ribbentrop in 1940 about just what kind of active cooperation he would be willing to give the tripartite coalition of states (the Axis)—assuming the Soviets joined it—which the USSR was invited to join and toward which a memorandum was prepared in Moscow, notably on the Soviets’ own initiative. Yet any concrete plans for forming such a broadened alliance or an expanded Axis that would include the Soviet Union as a full-fledged member were at best put on

the back burner by Stalin and Molotov in that period. This is shown by close examination of the relevant texts of the negotiations during 1939–40.

Why such an expanded alliance was put on the back burner stems from the fact that Stalin evidently had another tactic in mind—an ideological subplot, as it were. It was a gambit that both he and Lenin had often mentioned in the context of war as the midwife of revolution: that is, *encouragement of intra-imperialist discord*. This tactical standby of the Kremlin will be explored later. Further, the former deputy chief of Soviet foreign intelligence of the NKVD at that time recalls the ideological-expansionist edge of Soviet foreign policy and of Soviet collaboration with Hitler, observing:

Once again for the Kremlin, the mission of Communism was primarily to consolidate the might of the Soviet state. Only military strength and domination of countries on our border could ensure us a superpower role. The idea of propagating world Communist revolution was an ideological screen to hide our desire for world domination. Although originally this concept was ideological in nature, it acquired the dimensions of realpolitik. This possibility arose for the Soviet Union only after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed. In secret protocols the Soviet Union's geopolitical interests and natural desires for the enlargement of its frontiers were for the first time formally accepted by one of the leading powers of the world [Germany].<sup>15</sup>

Whatever position one may take on the influence of ideology on any regime's policy making while assigning the priorities to ideology over or in conjunction with nonideological Realpolitik, the following must

be kept in mind. The Soviet regime in particular put a very high premium on ideology, and not merely *qua* rationalization or propaganda. No doubt ideology, in terms of some of its particulars, would have to yield or be changed to suit new circumstances. But to conclude that ideology was readily disposable, meaningless, or otherwise irrelevant to Soviet policy making, especially as concerned the global arena and long-standing Leninist revolutionary goals, is unrealistic, unhistorical, and inapplicable. For the Soviet regime, its ideological underpinnings were fundamental. It is no exaggeration to say, one must think, that, to use the Soviet expression, ideology served as the Soviet regime's "lodestar."

## NOTES

The first epigraph is from James E. Dougherty and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff Jr., *Contending Theories of International Relations*, 2d ed. (New York: Harper and Row), p. 114.

The second is from V. I. Lenin, *Selected Works*, vol. 7 (New York: International Publishers, 1943), p. 357. For many other similar statements by Lenin, Stalin, and other high Soviet officials, see Albert L. Weeks, *Soviet and Communist Quotations* (New York: Pergamon-Brassey's Publishers, 1987), chapter 16. Lenin welcomed World War I, remarking that a "nice, little war" would provoke world revolution.

The third is from John R. Deane, *The Strange Alliance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), p. 319. General Deane was in charge of the \$11 billion U.S. program of Lend-Lease to the Soviet Union. Oddly, earlier in his book (pp. 17-18) he opines that Stalin had abandoned the program of world revolution for an exclusively "nationalistic" policy. However, by the end of his book Deane concludes that Stalin had never neglected a policy of communist expansionism and fidelity to Marxism-Leninism in this respect. The book seems to have been written serially so that by the end of the



general's several-year experience with Stalin and his associates, such as Molotov and Vyshinsky, he had drawn new conclusions of the type reflected in the above quotation.

The fourth is from Aleksandr Yakovlev, *Omut Pamyati (Swarm of Memories)* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2000), p. 108.

1 V. A. Nevezhin, *Sindrom nastupatel'noi voiny* (Moscow: Airo-XX, 1997), pp. 252–53.

2 V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 21 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), p. 221.

3 Weeks, *Soviet and Communist Quotations*, pp. 246–47.

4 For instance, in author David Glantz's two excellent studies of Soviet prosecution of the Great Fatherland War—referencing its weapons and also its tactics and strategy—not a word is devoted to Marxist-Leninist ideology (*Stumbling Colossus: The Red Army on the Eve of World War* [Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998] and, with Jonathan House, *When Titans Clash* [Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995]). Yet concerted indoctrination of Red Army servicemen in those principles was aimed at making them better soldiers. It would seem that commanders, up to and including the commander-in-chief, Stalin, likewise were guided by the principles of the official doctrine. That ideology and instilling morale and a sense of purpose in soldiers are one and the same was first proposed by Napoleon. Yet even in ancient times parallels may be found (e.g., Pericles' propagandistic Funeral Oration extolling Athens). The point about the perennial uses of ideology in preparation for and waging war is strongly asserted in all editions of the *Soviet Military Encyclopedia*, including one article titled "Mythology."

5 Jiri Hochman, *The Soviet Union and the Failure of Collective*

*Security, 1934–1938* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 176–77.

6 M. A. Gareyev, *M. V. Frunze—Voyennyi teoretik* (*M. V. Frunze—Military Theoretician*) (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1986), p. 381.

7 Gabriel Gorodetsky, *Grand Delusion: Stalin and the German Invasion of Russia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 316–17.

8 Andreas Hillgruber, *Germany and the Two World Wars* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 82. The last sentence in the above quotation admittedly is puzzling. It is by no means clear how sovietization would be “subordinated” to strategic security. One would think they would work together. In any case expansion of the Soviet Empire is perfectly consonant with the world-revolutionary aims repeatedly asserted by Stalin as by Lenin before him. Compare NKVD foreign intelligence officer Sudoplatov’s observation concerning the dovetailing of Soviet Grand Strategy and revolutionary ideology.

9 Among the several books of this type published after 1945 in America is *Blueprint for World Conquest* (Washington, D.C.: Human Events, 1946), edited by William Henry Chamberlin. Chamberlin describes the excerpts from Comintern theses and programs reproduced in the book as follows: “These [are] authoritative blueprints of the communist scheme for world conquest.” He suggests that they are no less authentic and sincere than, say, Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*.

10 Richard W. Harrison, *The Russian Way of War: Operational Art, 1904–1940* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001), p. 272.

11 Yuri N. Afanas’iev, ed., *Drugaya Voina* (Moscow: Rossiisky Gosudarstvenny Universitet, 1996), pp. 60–75. The full text of Stalin’s

speech is reproduced in this chapter.

12 Afanas'iev, *Drugaya Voina*, pp. 95, 97. Yet, in his book *Upushchennyi Shans Stalina* (Moscow: Veche, 2000), Mel'tyukhov is ready to admit that ideology can be all but irrelevant: "It is easy to see that attributing all sorts of sins to ideology as V. Suvorov does that such a notion has little substance. Take famous figures of world history like Tutmose III, Ramses II, Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Attila, Charlemagne, Ghengis Khan, Napoleon, et al., none of them was a member of the Communist Party . . . yet this did not stop them from building an empire" (pp. 11–12). One might question the author's examples. Some of these empire builders—especially Napoleon and Alexander the Great—surely did exploit ideology in making their conquests.

13 M. I. Semiryaga, "Sovetskyi Soyuz I vneshnyaya politika SSSR," *Voprosy istorii*, no. 9 (1990), p. 61. Semiryaga is a respected doctor of historical sciences, State Prize laureate (USSR), and today a scholar in the Russian Academy of Sciences. A prolific researcher and writer, Dr. Semiryaga inclines toward the "offensist" school in interpreting Stalin's policies and actions before June 1941. He is one of the contributors to the Afanas'iev book cited above.

14 Quoted in Ernst Topitsch, *Stalin's War: A Radical New Theory on the Origins of the Second World War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), p. 7.

15 Pavel Sudoplatov and Anatoli Sudoplatov, *Special Tasks: The Memoirs of an Unwanted Witness—A Soviet Spymaster* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1994), p. 102.

# 2

## *Prewar Diplomacy and the Comintern*

For [the Bolsheviks], diplomacy was part of the capitalist superstructure.... Soviet diplomats had the impossible task of serving two causes, two professions, two masters: One of [world] revolution, the other of diplomacy. Essentially, [Soviet diplomats] had to bridge the enormous gap between a revolutionary Soviet regime . . . and capitalist governments to which they were accredited whose values, indeed existence, they were committed ideologically to destroy.

—Zinoviev, later chairman of the Comintern

Words must have no relation to actions, otherwise what kind of diplomacy is it? Words are one thing, actions another. Nice words are a mask for concealment of bad deeds. Sincere diplomacy is no more possible than dry water of wooden iron.

—Josef Stalin

Round us are small countries which dream of great adventures or allow great adventurers to manipulate their

territory. We are not afraid of these little countries, but if they do not mind their own business, we shall be compelled to use the Red Army on them.

—Andrei Zhdanov, close aide to Stalin

Whoever occupies a territory also imposes on it his own social system. Everyone imposes his own system as far as his army has power to do so. It cannot be otherwise.

—Josef Stalin

When Lenin strode triumphantly down the center aisle of the Tavrida Palace in Petrograd (later Leningrad, now St. Petersburg) to open the first, post–November 7 Second Congress of Soviets, he announced that, in his words, a “New Order” had been established by the Bolshevik revolution. This was not ideological posturing. Lenin had explicitly set out profoundly to change his country root and branch and, with it, as he said, the world. The Russian and, in fact, pan-European *ancien regime*, as French revolutionaries called the departing system in France, was to be buried and with it many customary “bourgeois” institutions composing the capitalist “superstructure.” Among these institutions were diplomacy and the “old way” of doing things in world politics.

With several ensuing decrees and pronouncements during the weeks following the Communist seizure of power, Lenin and his associates let it be known that, like it or not, Soviet relations with foreign states would be cast in totally new, “militant” ways. Treaties would be torn up, and the tsarist diplomatic tradition would be repudiated. Out of the destruction of the Old Order worldwide would come socialist construction. “Much remains in the world that must be destroyed by

fire and steel,” said Lenin during World War I, “in order that emancipation of the working class may be achieved.... Do not listen to sentimental whiners who are afraid of war”—or of world revolution. By *war* Lenin meant not only clashes between nation-states or, as he put it, between proletarian and bourgeois states, which he considered the wave of the future. Diplomacy, too, was regarded as a “weapon” for advancing The Cause worldwide.

## **EARLY DIPLOMACY**

Lenin’s tactics called for advance and retreat or what he called taking “one step backward in order to make two steps forward.” By 1918 Lenin was prepared in certain circumstances to look at interstate relations in quite conventional ways as viewed from the parapets of the Kremlin, the Soviet government’s new home (as of March 11, 1918, when the regime was officially moved there from Petrograd). Despite their revolutionary rhetoric and the adoption of radical-sounding governmental titles like “commissar” (an invention of Trotsky’s), the leaders of the Soviet Republic began to confront traditional problems of Realpolitik along with their preoccupation with their much touted revolutionary messianism. As this mix was being recipied, the Third Communist International, significantly, was founded in the next year, 1919.

Of utmost immediate importance, however, was the defense of the Bolshevik revolution in the grimmest, most realistic terms. The regime was acquiring increasing numbers of domestic armed and unarmed enemies— especially within the restive working class. Lenin had prorogued the democratically elected Constituent Assembly that was allowed to meet for only one day on January 18. The Bolsheviks had won only about one-quarter of the seats. The oppressive Cheka police (from the Russian acronym for Extraordinary Commission to Combat Counterrevolution) and its drumhead, firing-squad tribunals had already been set up in December. Civil war began to rage as domestic

and foreign enemies harangued and fought against the “Revolution” and the Lenin dictatorship. By 1921, on Kronstadt Island in Petrograd, Lenin’s Red Army was mowing down workers and sailors, his staunchest, former Bolshevik supporters. Throughout the rest of the country the Red Army and the Cheka tribunals, liquidating “counterrevolution,” were brutally suppressing peasant revolts.

The later, halfhearted, short-term Allied intervention in the Civil War (1918) further complicated the Soviet Republic’s external security. The aim of the Allied intervention, to be carried out only while World War I was still raging, had been intended mainly to defend against Bolshevik seizures of the large Allied stores of weapons and ammunition bunkered at such Russian wharves and depots as those at Murmansk, Archangel, and Odessa as well as in the Far East. Bolshevik propaganda, often later echoed in the West, depicted this limited enterprise solely as a concerted effort by the Western powers to snuff out Communist rule. George V. Kennan, a witness to these events, has described such propaganda about the “counterrevolutionary intervention” as just that—propaganda.

In early January 1918 Russia was still formally engaged in hostilities against the Central Powers in World War I. Soldiers on both sides died in this interval following the Bolshevik seizure of power in November 1917. In this continued fighting on the Eastern Front, Germany was about to fully occupy Ukraine and with it to gain control over 40 percent of Russia’s total industry and 70 percent of her iron- and steel-producing capacity. The bulk of Russian-exported grain was produced in this “breadbasket.”

How to extract the Soviet state with its emerging Red Army from World War I with minimal damage to the integrity of the New Order became central to Soviet diplomacy. Ukraine was not yet totally in German hands. It was Berlin’s price for German withdrawal from Russia in exchange for Russian closure of the Eastern Front against the

Germans. By a narrow margin of voting in the party's Central Committee, in which Trotsky opposed Lenin, the latter's plan to sacrifice the entire Ukraine to Germany was adopted. Trotsky and other officials of the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs thereupon traveled in Western-style civilian clothes (but without top hats or striped pants) to Brest-Litovsk in German-occupied Poland to work out the deal with the German emissaries for closing down the Eastern Front. This agreement became the famous Brest-Litovsk Treaty of March 1918, abbreviated simply as "Brest-Litovsk," an early example of Soviet willingness to compromise on the diplomatic front (though Lenin seemingly had no other choice) and in particular to strike a deal with the Germans.

It also signified winning what became known in Soviet tactics as a "breathing space," that is, time to recoup in order to later resume the revolutionary offensive following the Brest-Litovsk "retreat." Zigzagging was a well-known Bolshevik device, part of the "code of the Politburo." Lenin said at the time: "If you are not able to adapt yourself, if you are not prepared to crawl in the mud on your belly, you are not a revolutionary but a chatterbox." Such retreating, as with Brest-Litovsk or the New Economic Policy launched in 1921, did not mark the end of the Bolsheviks' revolutionary socialist mission; it only represented a pause—and a useful one in several respects.

Lenin had just barely sold his comrades on the usefulness of the treaty. Yet he had convinced a majority by arguing that *German troops fighting on the Eastern Front would be transported westward to fight the "capitalist-imperialist" states of France, Britain, and the United States.*<sup>1</sup> (The latter had been dispatching units of the American Expeditionary Force into France since early 1917.) The Germans soon carried out this deployment to the disadvantage of the Allied war effort against the Central Powers.

Brest-Litovsk provides a good example of dovetailing what looks superficially like mere reason-of-state diplomacy—namely, ending war



on Russia's western frontier—with the timeless dictates of Leninist ideology—namely, *encouraging interimperialist “contradictions” and interimperialist fratricidal war*. Here was set a lasting precedent, a harbinger of what was to become a perennial Soviet tactic in foreign relations—namely, helping the Western capitalist states self-destruct. As Lenin advised: In diplomacy, “we must exploit the contradictions and divergences in view between any two imperialisms, between two groups of capitalist states, pushing one against the other.”<sup>2</sup> The “pushing” included instigation of war between them.

Pondering Lenin's words with the realist-versus-traditionalist points of view in mind (see chapter 1), was this instigation policy motivated by nonideological “geopolitical interests” alone? Or was it based on Bolshevik revolutionism? It would seem that both factors were operating. Yet without ideological underpinning about the “laws” of capitalist imperialism, the policy of fomenting intra-imperialist tensions would have lacked a perspective, if not a motivation.

Because of the transfer of German troops to the Western Front, Germany in spring 1918 seemed to have come near to winning the war against the Allies, with its 200 divisions poised to drive on to Paris—at one point the French capital lying only some 35 miles distant from the invaders. However, French and U.S. reinforcements succeeded in stopping the last of Ludendorff's several offensives by summer 1918. By November the war was over.

Out of such internecine struggle within the imperialist camp of “bourgeois” capitalist states, as noted, Lenin hoped that strife and socialist revolution would grow. War, as Marx and Engels taught, is a catalyst of unrest and destruction. Later the Soviet leader gave Japan as an example of such a state with which the Soviets could help instigate future hostilities against capitalist America. He added that war between these two states in any case was “inevitable.” Referring to Japan, Lenin said: “To put it bluntly, we have incited Japan and America against

each other and so gained an advantage.” In a speech to the Moscow party “aktiv,” on December 6, 1920, Lenin further declared:

Until the final victory of socialism throughout the whole world, we must apply the principle of exploiting contradictions and opposition between two imperialist power groups, between two capitalist groups of states inciting them to attack each other.... If it should prove impossible to defeat them both, then one must know how to rally one’s forces so that the two begin to fight each other. For when two thieves quarrel, honest men have the last laugh.... As soon as we are strong enough to defeat capitalism [worldwide], we will seize it at once by the scruff of the neck.

As we shall see, in the 1920s and 1930s Stalin enlarged on this Leninist concept of Soviet encouragement of divide and conquer via intra-capitalist-sphere war. The policy as applied to the Far East was to include Japan. This would become a war that ultimately began at Pearl Harbor and in the South Pacific in December 1941 and involved the capitalist powers, America and Britain. (Months in advance of Pearl Harbor Stalin had intelligence about the impending attack on December 7 but did not share that information with Washington; this, after all, would have violated the tactic of helping capitalist states commit fratricide.) Shrewd, overtly “nonideological” Soviet diplomacy, but a foreign policy that was in tune with the regime’s ideology, was the tool by which in an important way Soviet fundamental goals were to be realized.

## **DIPLOMACY IN STALIN’S INDUSTRIALIZATION**

“Trade diplomacy,” the art of winning trade partners and achieving profitable trade deals that would strengthen the Soviet Republic

especially in the military sense, had been an integral part of Soviet foreign policy at least since the inauguration of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1921. This was when Lenin ordered his temporary, tactical retreat in Soviet domestic and foreign policy under NEP. By this means he sought to repair some of the economic damage wrought by the previous three-year stint of radicalized “War Communism” and by the disruptive civil war of the same period. The Soviet leader thereupon began to open up the young Soviet state to intercourse with capitalist nations. This opened the period of intense Soviet-German military collaboration (see chapter 3) that set a lasting precedent right up to 1939 and the Molotov-Ribbentrop pacts.

After Lenin’s death and Stalin’s consequent consolidation of power, elaboration of Lenin’s commercial opening to the West was effected by Stalin. This partial rapprochement with the capitalist states, confined mainly to commerce, was linked to Stalin’s industrialization program, which was initiated with the First Five-Year Plan in the late 1920s.

Josef Stalin well understood that for the USSR to become a major player in the world arena, which he repeatedly said was his principal goal, it would have to be powerful in the military-industrial sense. He was not satisfied to relish the Soviet Union as the model socialist state merely in the idealistic sense or as an isolated “Soviet garden” lacking influence on the global chessboard. As he once asked matter-of-factly about the Vatican, the capital of Western Catholicism and a fountain of myths, “So, how many divisions does the Pope have?” Spiritual monumentality did not impress Stalin—except as propaganda frosting on the cake. Heavy industry and motorized infantry divisions were what really mattered to him.

Before Stalin could supply the Red Army with guns, tanks, motorized infantry vehicles, aircraft, naval ships, and ammunition, it was necessary, of course, to develop the basic “producer-goods” or heavy industries of mining, power (energy), iron and steel, and machine

building of several types. Here again diplomacy would come to the rescue. In this case it took the form of fostering foreign trade and on-site aid together with sales of foreign patents to the Soviets.

It is sometimes forgotten that the process of industrializing Russia had proceeded at an impressive pace under the tsars before World War I, from the 1890s to 1914. But the devastation of that war had set back this impressive, nascent Russian industrial growth. Stalin picked up where the tsars had left off. Now, however, the Soviet leader's emphasis was on defense production, which after Stalin's death in 1953 had left per capita food and consumer goods output in Soviet Russia where the tsarist Russian economy had been forty years ago back in 1913. (First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev was obliged to disclose this embarrassing fact in September 1953, perhaps on Premier Georgi Malenkov's urging.)

During the Five-Year Plans, Stalin repeatedly emphasized what the basic intentions of the Soviet buildup were, what its sacrifices were for. As he proclaimed, Soviet Russia would become a major power, in his words the "prototype of the future world socialist Soviet Republic," calling it the "base for world revolution": "The Russian proletariat is the vanguard of the international proletariat," he said.<sup>3</sup> In order for it (meaning Russia) to fulfill that role, it must become a world power. Moreover, in so doing the USSR would be more than able to defend itself against the "capitalist encirclement." (Stalin ignored the fact that this "encirclement" had been distinctly passive since 1918 with the end of the war-related Allied intervention.) All of Soviet Russia's "defense needs," Stalin promised, would be met by the completion of the several quinquennial plans. By then, he promised, the country would be ready to meet any expediency—war being the most likely such event, as he himself had predicted.

As Mr. X documents with numerous citations directly from Lenin's and Stalin's speeches and writings, both Lenin and Stalin on many

occasions predicted that a new world war was “inevitable.” They predicted that it would be one in which imperialism would perish—with Soviet help. For the Soviets, developing weapons of war was not, in their view, simply a case of militarism, Soviet style. The policy flowed from geopolitical as well as ideological premises formulated in Moscow.

Foreign economic assistance to the Soviet Union, aid that was developed through diplomacy, became crucial for the process of industrializing the USSR. Significantly, although not surprisingly, the Soviets’ main supplier in the 1920s and 1930s was Germany. The United States came in a close second. It is no exaggeration to say that without this foreign assistance the Soviet industries could not have developed apace, including its power industry (represented, above all, by the great Dnepropetrovsk Dam in Ukraine, built with U.S. help and equipment); its manufacturing industries (including not only heavy industry but also textiles); its mining and oil-drilling equipment; its railroad construction; its tractor-, tank-, and aviation-production facilities; and much else. And this was not solely because of German and American assistance; other states gave assistance, too.<sup>4</sup> The Soviets likewise purchased foreign patents where needed. When I visited the USSR, as late as 1966, I still saw old foreign trademarks stamped on metal labels affixed to factory machinery—in this case, at a major plant in Moscow, the Zhelyabov Textile Factory.

As the Red Army was training and equipping itself for mobile war, during 1934–39 alone its fleet of tanks tripled. *Before* the Soviet-German war began in June 1941, Soviet tank production already was up to 12,000 per year, with the total number of the fleet reaching 24,000 by summer 1941.<sup>5</sup> This was a defense-production feat far exceeding even Germany’s, let alone the combined levels of tank production in France, Britain, and, not surprisingly, the United States in its defense-poor, pre-Pearl Harbor years. By means of the heavy industries that

made all this possible, the USSR boosted itself to first, second, or third place in the world in the production of various kinds of electrical power (thermal and hydroelectric) as well as crucial raw and manufactured materials—iron, coal, and steel being among them.

Soviet production of tanks, planes, and many types of field weapons at that time exceeded the production of all the major Western countries combined! That is, of course, before U.S. arms production had made the United States by 1942–43 the “arsenal of democracy.” But even during World War II, the USSR far outproduced the United States in machine guns and mortars as well as cannons and tanks. Also, the unique, multiple-rocket firing “Katyusha” (or mobile “organ” artillery, so named because of its resemblance to a nest of organ pipes) was coming on line as the Great Fatherland War began. Like other new, world-class weaponry just starting to come off Soviet assembly lines in 1941, the Katyusha ultimately played a major role in Soviet victories.

Among the new Soviet tanks was the low-profile, diesel-driven, *semiamphibious* (fording) T-34, developed in the late 1930s. This was the only such tank of its kind in battle in 1941 and was the envy of the Wehrmacht. Early Soviet artillery likewise was impressive, as were several other types of ground-force weaponry, including mortars and infantry guns and vehicles (the hardiness of the latter under Russia’s severe winter conditions became a crucial factor). Moreover, the Soviet aircraft industry was developing apace. Many innovations, and some flight world records, were chalked up by the Red Air Force in the 1930s. (Pre-1917 Russian progress in aviation is, of course, well known to anyone who has ever heard the names Mozhaisky, Tsiolkovsky, or Sikorsky.)

Not the least of the impressive new Soviet aircraft were the twin- and four-engine, medium- and long-range bombers and transport aircraft. The latter especially would be used for transporting airborne troops. The long-range heavy bomber TB-3, to cite one example, could carry

four light aircraft mounted atop its wings or slung below them and the fuselage. Such Red Air Force planes, powered by impressive engines, could carry more weight than any foreign equivalent. In some ways the power plants of these planes were the forerunners of the powerful rocket engines developed in the USSR in the 1950s.

From 1940 to mid-1941, the Soviet aviation industry was mass producing the MiG-3, Yak-1, LaGG-3, 11-2, Pe-2, and other aircraft. In that mere one-and-a-half-year period, the total fighters and bombers produced in the USSR came to 1,200 MiG-3s, 400 Yak-1s, 250 Il-2s, and 460 Pe-2s. According to British and other military analysts, the Soviet planes in some cases were, indeed, world class. Too, the rate of their production in the USSR in the late 1930s, even before Operation Barbarossa was launched against the USSR in summer 1941, exceeded German aircraft production by four to one. These machines included the Ilyushin-2, or “Shturmovik” air-ground support fighter; the heavily armed fighter Polikarpov (“Po-2”), which saw service in the Spanish Civil War; and the flyushin-16, Version 17, a Polikarpov design appearing in 1938, an outstanding aircraft with ShKAS machine guns mounted atop the engine cowling plus two 20-millimeter cannons mounted in the wings, firing 1,600 rounds/minute with a muzzle velocity of 2,700 feet/second. These were exceptional specs for its time. The 11-16’s armament and ordnance weight exceeded that of the Messerschmidt 109-E1 by double and that of the British Spitfire by three times.

The specs of several other types of Soviet planes also led their equivalents worldwide. Some broke records in long-distance flight and in the power of their engines. Red Air Force fighters could attain speeds of up to 260 miles/hour and outclassed in several respects the German single- and twin-engine Me-109, FW-190, and Ju-87 and -88.

By mid-1941, the total Red Air Force fleet consisted of 10,000 planes, with a monthly production rate of 1,630 aircraft. By 1942, this

latter figure had risen to 2,120 on the production base already established during the two preceding years. The designers of such world-class aircraft included A. S. Yakovlev, S. A. Lavochkin, A. I. Mikoyan, N. E. Zhukovsky, V. M., Petlyakov, N. N. Polikarpov, S. V. Ilyushin, G. M. Beriyev, A. N. Zhuravchenko, D. A. Ventsel', V. S. Pugachev, and G. I. Pokrovsky.

Soviet defense-production organization and experience became vital when the German penetration of the industrial Ukraine in the opening weeks of the Great Fatherland War in June-July 1941 forced the Soviets to step up the movement of their production facilities to the rear to the Ural Mountains industrial region, the easternmost boundary of European Russia. At this time the Soviet's own production of war matériel rather dwarfed subsequent Lend-Lease aid—as vitally important, however, as the latter was, as per Stalin's public postwar admission to U.S. Lend-Lease administrator Eric Johnston.

## **TRAIL OF BROKEN “FRIENDSHIP” TREATIES**

As the Soviets built up their industrial and military strength, their diplomatic relations with the outside world appeared confusing. In the pre-World War II years, the “dialectical” twists, turns, and zigzags of Soviet tactics became standbys in Soviet diplomacy.<sup>6</sup> Some Western analysts even thought that the Soviets were using such mind-boggling on-again /off-again tactics as a form of psychological warfare to baffle and “wear down” the adversary. Soviet policy toward the League of Nations is one of many examples of this zigzagging. The “Nazi-Soviet honeymoon,” suddenly inaugurated in August 1939, to the world's surprise and certainly to that of the world's Communist Party apparatuses, was only the latest of a string of such policy gyrations.

At times, such zigzag behavior profoundly disoriented foreign observers, especially pro-Soviet ones and fellow travelers. Why, some might ask, would Stalin and the Soviet Union conclude a friendship



treaty with each of the Baltic states—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—while at the same time using Communist Party legals and illegals in those same countries to overturn their capitalist system, private ownership of property, and political order? Indeed, as early as 1918 as well as in the 1920s Lenin followed a policy of attempting to sovietize countries as far to the west as Hungary and Germany. Was this merely old-fashioned Realpolitik based on the basic Russian geopolitical situation? Or did the regime's expansionist ideology serve as more than a contributing factor to such behavior?

The same could be asked about Moscow's overtures to and agreements with Poland, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, and other nation-states with which Moscow made nonaggression, friendship, or mutual-assistance treaties in the 1930s while at the same time fomenting unrest in those same countries or eventually in the postwar period even taking them over. In fact, a U.S. Senate staff study, compiled in 1959, found that in thirty-eight short years after 1917, the USSR

had broken its word to virtually every country to which it ever gave a signed promise. It signed treaties of nonaggression with neighboring countries then absorbed these states. It signed promises to refrain from revolutionary activity inside the countries with which it sought "friendship." [One may] seriously doubt whether during the whole history of civilization any great nation has ever made as perfidious a record as this in so short a time.

Trade was a strong motivating factor in such diplomatic intercourse, to be sure, although not the only one. Not even trade—say, as embodied in the Anglo-Soviet trade pact of 1921—was allowed to interfere with Moscow's pursuit of world revolution and subversion in all of the

countries without exception with which it had diplomatic and other dealings.<sup>7</sup>

The several precedents in this respect established in Soviet behavior in the 1920s and 1930s shed light on Soviet serpentine maneuvering throughout 1939. This was at the time, namely, when negotiations were held simultaneously with the Germans on one hand and the French and British on the other (see chapter 4). In these negotiations the Soviets secretly shared the texts of their talks with the British and French with the Germans to win the favor of the latter. They did not perform this favor for the other two capitalist states. By contrast, on occasion the British kept Moscow informed of its talks with the Germans—and, of course, informed Stalin of some of the contents of Enigma Machine intercepts of German General Staff coded messages that pointed to the opening of German hostilities against the USSR in June 1941. The British and Americans never revealed, of course, the top-secret source of their information.

The United States was also the object of two-track duplicity. In 1933, Moscow, via the Soviet emissary to Washington, Maxim Litvinov, the same accomplished, wily Old Bolshevik who had taken part in the Rapallo negotiations with Germany and who, despite his Jewish ancestry, favored Soviet-Nazi rapprochement (see chapter 4), spoke for his government as he agreed to terminate Communist Party-supported activities in the United States. This was in exchange for recognition of the Soviet Union by the Roosevelt administration. But this promise, too, was to be broken, despite repeated U.S. protests.

## **THE COMINTERN**

Lenin was a uniquely innovative political actor in several respects. Not the least of his extraordinary accomplishments was the founding of the modern world's first totalitarian state. Another such innovation was his establishment in 1919 of the Third Communist International—the

“General Staff of World Revolution.” World politics had assumed an entirely new character. Now organized, global subversion by a major power would cast a shadow over the ways in which the diplomatic game had been played traditionally in Europe since the 1600s. Lenin had broken entirely new ground by creating this world-girdling organization with its headquarters in Moscow.

A good deal more than a Kremlin toy but less than a world-revolutionary Red Army ready to march against the world, the Comintern and its mission assumed several effective forms. It cannot be underestimated as an influential tool used by the Kremlin in order to promote Soviet interests and ideology on a global scale. Specifically, it was tasked to do the following:

1. Propagate Soviet-style communism that Lenin described as the sole model for all bourgeois and colonial societies in order to make the transition to socialism via the dictatorship of the proletariat on the Soviet model.
2. Establish Communist-led vanguard political forces in the target countries, capitalist and pre-capitalist, that would unite with subsidiary “front” organizations in order more broadly—for example, via parliamentary struggle, through the trade unions, and so on—to wage class war to bring down bourgeois democracy.
3. Use the “citadel” of the Soviet Union, or “base of world revolution” (Stalin), as guide and leader of the world movement, even using its military force, the Red Army “of liberation,” wherever appropriate or feasible to bring about the Communist revolution in a given country or region. This was known as exporting revolution on the “tips of Red Army bayonets.”
4. Exploit pacifism by use of peace campaigns to sap and stop armed, defensive containment of Soviet-sponsored world revolution in capitalist countries, above all in Britain, France, and the United States. (An old piece of barracks humor in the Soviet Union had it

that “one day the Soviet peace effort will be so successful that not a brick will be left standing anywhere.”)

5. Recruit spies and subversives within capitalist or colonial countries.

The Comintern’s life span was twenty-five years—from 1919 to 1943. During that time it was far from successful in its ongoing labors to trigger world revolution. Yet, at the very least, it was the source for recruiting numbers of effective spies and subversives. It also helped promote pro-Sovietism and *poputchikestvo* (fellow travelership). This it did not only in the industrialized capitalist countries but also throughout the Third World. Actually, the Comintern acted as an arm of the Soviet secret police (OGPU, GPU, later NKVD), which had thoroughly penetrated the organization.

Moreover, with clever operatives like Soviet Comintern agent Willi Münzenberg, who organized outwardly non-Communist, though Communist-backed movements and demonstrations in the Western democracies, an impressive number of leftwing people and organizations there were bamboozled into accepting various Communist-supported radical stands. A number of very well known Western intellectuals were taken in. These Comintern positions revolved about such issues as opposing Western rearmament and military defense preparations, supporting unqualified Soviet friendship even if it meant disloyalty to one’s home country, and smoothing the way via innocuous-looking “fronts” toward spreading Communist propaganda and influence within the target societies. The Comintern’s work combined with national Communist parties’ activities worldwide succeeded in some places in thoroughly penetrating labor unions, youth groups, and even the media—though much less successfully in those days in the United States than in such European countries as the United Kingdom and particularly France and the Lowlands.

## **UNITED FRONT/POPULAR FRONT**

Much has been written about the “Popular Front” tactic developed within the Comintern in the mid-1930s. Historians have described how this party line transitioned into the Comintern-backed anti-Fascist movement. Actually, Lenin invented the front tactic back in 1922, calling it at that time the “United Front tactic.” Later, under Stalin’s tutelage after 1924, the Comintern began sharply to distinguish Communist parties from Social-Democratic parties (SDs). Under Stalin’s direction, it sought to put them on diametrically opposite sides of the barricades. The SDs were stigmatized as “Social Fascists” by the Stalinite parties throughout Europe and the Americas.

By thus following Stalin’s orders in the Comintern, the German Communist Party adamantly refused to cooperate with the popular Social-Democratic Party, which opposed Hitler’s and his Nazis’ rise to power. With this in mind, as well as displaying his usual penchant for believing that “worse is better”—for communism and world revolution—Stalin instructed in the late 1920s:

It is necessary that Social-Democracy be unmasked and defeated and be reduced to being supported by an insignificant minority of the working class. Without this happening, it is impossible to speak of establishing a dictatorship of the proletariat.... The most favorable circumstances for a revolution in Germany would be an internal crisis and a significant increase in the forces of the Communist Party accompanied by serious complications within the camp of Germany’s external enemies.<sup>8</sup>

It is now a consensus view held among Russian historians, a view

that began to surface under *glasnost*’ near the end of Communist rule in the USSR, that Stalin’s aversion to democratic socialism as represented by the SDs helped pave the way to Hitler’s ascent to power in 1933 and with it German military aggression. Stalin believed that Hitler’s Nazis would only aggravate the German class struggle in ways he thought were useful to the Soviets. Because of Stalin-decreed splittism within the German Left, the anti-Hitler camp in Germany became divided. The German Communists refused to join forces on the Left to block the Brown Shirts.

When Lenin’s United Front tactic was refurbished and unfurled again as the “Popular Front” at the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in August 1935, the organization’s leader, Georgi Dimitrov, described it as a boring-from-within tactic to be used among Communist-supported, leftwing forces worldwide in order to attract supporters of the USSR and of world revolution. These front groups were designed ultimately to fall under the leadership of the Communists. (I actually witnessed such a stratagem in the postwar period. It was used by Communists within the Chicago chapter of a World War II veteran’s organization, known as the American Veterans Committee [AVC]. The AVCs elected leaders got wind of this tactic and expelled the Communists. Similar episodes occurred within U.S. labor union executive bodies.)

Dimitrov explains the tactic quite candidly in his widely distributed pamphlet, with its yellow, red, and black cover, titled *The Working Classes against Fascism*: “Comrades, you will recall the ancient tale of the capture of Troy.... The attacking army was unable to achieve victory until, with the aid of the famous Trojan Horse, it managed to penetrate to the very heart of the enemy camp.” Dimitrov is quite frank about the fact that the forming of Popular Fronts with leftist-minded collaborators was not an end in itself. It was a step, he says, toward eventually capturing power for the Communists.

As to the anti-*Fascist* side of the Popular Front, this side, or thrust,

of the movement did not in the least deter Stalin's efforts to close ranks with the German Nazis (see chapter 3). This was true despite mutually hostile propaganda attacks shared between both parties' propagandists, those of the Reds and of the Browns, throughout the 1930s and despite Hitler's plans, as stated in his bible, *Mein Kampf*, to seize territory from Russia for the purpose of securing German "Lebensraum." As author Stephen Koch explains:

Münzenberg's apparatus, in turn, was ordered to transform the "peace" movement and use it to mount a new, world-wide anti-Fascist campaign.... The Soviet state under Stalin was assuming the moral high ground. Or so it seemed.... As such, communism seemed to represent the only real resistance to the new horror so obviously taking shape [in Nazi Germany]. The democracies, through their real or supposed inaction, were depicted as bound by capitalism either to the ineffectiveness of liberalism—or worse, to a secret sympathy for the Nazis, "Fascist brothers under the skin." This myth therefore assigned moralized roles, casting the struggle between the two states as the definitive struggle between good and evil in the century. In it, the Stalinist line became good or at least necessary to the good, by virtue of its supposed opposition to Hitler's evil....

The tremendous moral credit inuring to this myth, which was added to (and was much greater than) the already existing moral credit of the Revolution itself, came flowing toward the Soviets at exactly the moment that Stalin's government was moving toward its most sinister and brutal phase. Paradox? It was not a paradox born in coincidence. It was a deception, and it was planned. For this great confrontation between the [two] totalitarian powers was

itself a deception, and in every way a very different thing from what it appeared to be.<sup>9</sup>

Soviet aide Karl Radek, who had supervised the anti-Fascist line (and who, when he was briefly in prison in Germany in the 1920s, had been approached by representatives of the German General Staff who urged him to promote German-Soviet collaboration), had made the same points to Walter Krivitsky. He disclosed to Krivitsky the grand deception of the anti-Fascist movement sponsored worldwide from Moscow: “Only fools,” Radek said, “could imagine we would ever break with Germany. What I am writing here [of an anti-Fascist nature] is one thing. The realities are something else. No one can give us what Germany has given us. For us to break with Germany is simply impossible.” Stalin shared these sentiments.

Koch adds that just as Münzenberg was placing himself in Paris in charge of executing the Popular Front line in France, Radek was sent by Stalin into top-secret contacts with the German ambassador in Moscow, Radek acting as the Soviet dictator’s direct, confidential emissary. These confidential discussions, *in which the Soviets were initiators*, took place without the knowledge of the Soviet diplomatic service or of the Army. The contents of the talks amounted to negotiations based on mutual benefit. In other words, they were the prelude to the Nazi-Soviet negotiations of 1939 in which the Soviets once again were the initiators.<sup>10</sup>

In July 2000, the Russian journal *Voprosy Istorii* published for the first time long excerpts from the diary of the head of the Comintern, Georgi Dimitrov. The document was unearthed by a Russian Academy of Sciences historian, F. I. Firsov, from the Archive of the Soviet Communist Party Central Committee. Classified “strictly secret” (*strovo sekretno*), the Dimitrov diary contains many revealing facts



about Stalin's attitude toward world revolution, the capitalist states, Germany, and the coming war.

We learn, for instance, that far from downgrading the importance of the Communist International's activities at any juncture in its history, Stalin took a special interest in its work. In remarks to Dimitrov on September 7, 1939, he explained the rationale behind the Nazi-Soviet agreements that, superficially at least, seemed only to help Germany. As Stalin explained:

War between the two groups of capitalist states (poor ones vs. rich ones in terms of their colonial possessions, raw materials, etc.) is taking place for the redivision of the world and for world domination! We won't prevent them at all from fighting among themselves all they wish as they go about damaging and bringing down the capitalist system. Communists who are in power take a different position from those who are in opposition [seeking power]. We are masters in our own household. The Communists in capitalist countries, on the other hand, are in opposition to the bourgeois boss. So, we are able to maneuver, pitting one [bourgeois state] side against the other so that they will fight all the harder with each other. The [Nazi-Soviet] Nonaggression Pact helps Germany to a degree but at the next juncture spurs on the other side.<sup>11</sup>

Here Stalin was suggesting that in helping Germany with the formidable shipments of Soviet matériel to buttress the German war machine (see chapter 4), the Soviets thereby aggravated the military balance between Germany and its potential enemies (World War II began September 1, 1939; it did not become a truly fighting war in

Western Europe until the next year).

Stalin went on to say that while the antifascist line of the Comintern was useful before the war had begun, once it began, the line made no sense. Nor did distinguishing fascist from democratic states: “The war brought about a basic change. The united Popular Front of yesterday was merely to alleviate slavery under conditions of capitalism. But once the imperialist war begins, it becomes a question of destroying this slavery!” Another historian writes:

The main purpose of the “anti-fascist solidarity of all democracies” [line] had been to prevent a rapprochement between Hitler and the Western powers. When war was declared, this goal had been achieved; furthermore, the Kremlin now supported Germany for reasons of power politics—Hitler’s forces could be used as a battering ram against the “imperialists.” Anti-fascism had served its purpose and—at least for the time being—it was finished. It was perfectly clear at the time that the main thrust of Soviet policy was directed at the Western powers; this was true before, during, and after the Second World War. The anti-Hitler coalition, which came later, did not alter this fact. Very much to Moscow’s advantage, however, it veiled it from the eyes of democratic politicians and public opinion in the Western countries.<sup>12</sup>

At the sixteenth anniversary of Lenin’s death held in the Bolshoi Theater, January 21, 1940, Stalin defined world revolution under the new conditions of actual, ongoing *war* as follows: “World revolution seen as a single act is pure nonsense. It proceeds through several stages at various times in the several countries. Actions by the Red Army also

are part of the world revolution.”<sup>13</sup> On November 25, 1940, Dimitrov heard Stalin say the following in discussions between him and Foreign Commissar Molotov upon the latter’s return from Berlin: “In the lands destroyed by the occupation of German troops we will pursue a course there of carrying on our work but not screaming from the rooftops what we’re up to. We would not be Communists if we did not follow this course. The thing is to do this quietly.”<sup>14</sup>

Stalin closed down the Comintern in 1943 after almost a quarter century of it playing the role as something more than a mere disposable tool of the Kremlin. For some authors, the Comintern’s demise, on Stalin’s orders, testifies to the dictator’s demeaning of its importance. Yet the Comintern’s *functions* did not cease as the USSR allied itself with the Western powers in World War II. On the contrary, Comintern-like activities were continued. They were even strengthened in the name of spreading Soviet-style socialism worldwide by the Comintern’s successors, the Cominform and the CPSU Central Committee’s International Department, which was run by former Comintern executives. These “internationalist” organs by no means were vestigial. Their program for global subversion and Soviet expansionism was solidly within the traditions of the Comintern, the “General Staff of World Revolution.”

## NOTES

The first epigraph is from *Soviet Diplomacy and Negotiating Behavior*, vol. 1, Committee on Foreign Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives, 96th Congress (1979), p. 56. Zinoviev, later chairman of the Comintern, referring to treaties like that signed at Brest-Litovsk between Germany and the Soviet Republic in March 1918 that provide for momentary truces, remarked: “We should use breathing spaces so obtained in order to gather our strength.” Theodore J. Uldricks, specialist on the Soviet Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, has written: “In the early days of the

Soviet regime, the conception of ‘Bolshevik diplomacy’ seemed impossible to both friend and foe of the revolution. Could bomb-throwing revolutionaries suddenly don striped pants and sit down to tea with representatives of imperialism?” According to Uldricks, this they did with consummate ease because, in his view, ideology was no imperative to them or later to Stalin (*Soviet Diplomacy and Negotiating Behavior*, p. 47).

The second is from *Soviet Political Agreements and Results*, staff study, Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. Senate, 86th Congress, First Session (1959), p. ix. The report, written by the Democrat-led committee, states: “The staff studied a thousand treaties and agreements [that] the Soviets have entered into not only with the United States but with countries all over the world. The staff found that in the 38 short years since the Soviet Union came into existence, its government had broken its word in virtually every country to which it ever gave a signed promise. It signed treaties of nonaggression with neighboring states and then absorbed those states. It signed promises to refrain from revolutionary activity inside the countries with which it sought ‘friendship,’ and then cynically broke those promises.” The dates and circumstances for the Soviet takeovers of neighboring states after 1918 are given in Albert L. Weeks, *The Other Side of Coexistence: An Analysis of Russian Foreign Policy* (New York: Pitman, 1970), pp. 32–44; and in Martin Gilbert, *Atlas of Russian History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 103, 113–14, 116.

The third is quoted in Weeks, *The Other Side of Coexistence*, p. 54.

The fourth is Stalin’s remark to Yugoslav No. 2 Communist official in Milovan Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin* (London: Harmondsworth Publisher, 1969), pp. 90–91. Two books on Radek are highly informative on Soviet-German ties established in the pre-1939 period: Jim Tuck, *Engine of Mischief: An Analytical Biography of Karl Radek*

(Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1988); and Warner Lerner, *Karl Radek: The Last Internationalist* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1970).

1 A. N. Yakovlev, *Omut Pamyati* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2000), p. 83. Yakovlev, former member of the Soviet Communist Party Politburo, describes the “new” Soviet diplomacy as follows: “The post-October 1917 Soviet pose of renouncing secret diplomacy and going over to above-board diplomacy quickly changed. Deceit, lying and dissimulation, so much a part of the history of diplomacy, were wholly adopted by Soviet foreign policy” (*Omut Pamyati*, p. 110).

2 Weeks, *The Other Side of Coexistence*, pp. 295–96.

3 For both quotations, see Albert L. Weeks, *Soviet and Communist Quotations* (New York: Pergamon-Brassey’s Publishers, 1987), p. 194.

4 Details are provided by many sources. Two suggested ones are Ellsworth Raymond, *The Soviet State* (New York: New York University Press, 1978), chapter 6; and Weeks, *The Other Side of Coexistence*, chapter 5.

5 Raymond, *The Soviet State*, p. 96. Raymond was in charge of analysis of the Soviet economy in the U.S. Embassy in Moscow in the late 1930s. He was regarded as one of the best-informed experts on the Soviet economy and Soviet war planning in the West. He played an advisory role in Washington, D.C., during the Lend-Lease period of aid to Russia in World War II.

6 For an analysis of the Soviet policy of “collective security,” see chapter 4.

7 A comprehensive, levelheaded exposition of Soviet “two-track” pursuit of diplomacy plus export of revolution may be found in Stanley

W. Page, *Lenin and World Revolution* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1959). Also see *Soviet Political Agreements and Results*.

8 J. V. Stalin, *Sochineniya*, vol. 7 (Moscow: Ogiz, 1947), p. 86.

9 Stephen Koch, *Double Lives* (New York: Free Press, 1994), p. 54.

10 Yevgeny Gnedin, *Iz istorii otnoshenii mezhdu SSSR i fashistskoi Germanii. Dokumenty i sovremenniye komentarii* (New York: Izdatel'stvo "Khronika," 1977), p. 262. One of historian Gnedin's specialties is the career of Karl Radek, who headed a special foreign affairs directorate set up by Stalin whose main task was to solidify Soviet-German relations.

11 V. B. Mar'ina, "Dnevnik G. Dimitrova," *Veprosy Istorii*, no. 7 (2000), pp. 36–38.

12 Ernst Topitsch, *Stalin's War: A Radical New Theory on the Origins of the Second World War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), p. 54.

13 Topitsch, *Stalin's War*, p. 40.

14 Topitsch, *Stalin's War*, p. 41.

# 3

## *The Soviets' Pro-German Posture*

It is not Germany that will turn Bolshevist, but Bolshevism will become a sort of National Socialism. Besides, there is more that binds us to Bolshevism than separates us. There is, above all, genuine revolutionary feeling.

—Adolf Hitler

The Soviet Government, with an eye on its internal situation in Russia and fearing a war on two fronts, must hold aloof from military enterprises [related to enforcing collective security with the Western powers]. [It] is hardly likely to march in defense of a bourgeois state [such as Czechoslovakia].

—German Ambassador to the USSR Count  
Friedrich Werner von Schulenburg

In striving to secure safe external conditions for undertaking the remodeling of Russia along lines drawn by her rulers, Soviet foreign policy's primary goal was to prevent the formation of a hostile combination of foreign powers, and to

keep the Soviet Union out of international conflicts before such time as she would be strong enough to enter them without risk.

The Soviet-German Brest-Litovsk Treaty of 1918 followed by the Treaty of Berlin (1926) were harbingers of future, significant bilateral cooperation between the two “loser” states. Brest-Litovsk became the symbol of Soviet diplomatic flexibility forced under dire circumstances on the emergent revolutionary state. It became a classic precedent in which the Soviets had struck a temporary deal “in league with the devil” in order to enhance Soviet Russia’s own national interests and external security—at others’ expense—regardless of “appearances.” Ironically, Germany in 1939 again became such a devil when Stalin made a second Brest-Litovsk-like deal with the leader of the Nazi German state (see chapter 4), including discussion of an even broader pact with the German-led Axis to divide up the world between the other totalitarian states—Germany Italy, and Japan—together with the USSR.

The Brest-Litovsk deal was struck with *Germany*, the birthplace of Hegel, Lenin’s favorite philosopher, and of Marx and Engels, the holy ghosts of Leninism-Stalinism. It was the country Lenin most admired for, among other things, its socialist-like wartime economy designed by General Erich von Ludendorff. The latter, incidentally, was the author of the influential military writing *Notes on Offensive Battles*, a work doubtlessly familiar to Lenin, a zealous reader of military theory (e.g., as per his deep reading of Carl von Clausewitz).

Lenin was a dedicated Germanophile. Germany was the Central European country that he considered to be the linchpin of pan-European revolution. “When you see a Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies in Berlin,” Lenin remarked in 1918, “you will know that the proletarian world revolution has been born.” It was the same Germany, then under



Kaiser rule, that had recognized Lenin's notoriety and influence in world politics. Berlin provided the funds to Lenin and his Bolshevik cohorts to take the famous "sealed train" (a misnomer) from Switzerland safely through the battlefields of Germany, thence by ship and rail to Sweden and Finland, and finally on to St. Petersburg, Russia, in April 1917. This was perpetrated just a month following the overthrow of Tsar Nicholas II. The kaiser wanted Russia out of the war as well as embroiled in internal strife to keep it paralyzed and out of the fight.

It was a shrewd and effective game played by the German leaders. Regarded as a useful "bacillus," as German officials called him, Lenin was utilized by Berlin as an agitator who would help "neutralize" Russia. Lenin had been bitterly opposed to Russian participation in the "imperialist war" then reaching a climax across Europe—a story told effectively as historical fiction in Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Lenin in Zurich*.

Dispatching millions of Reichsmarks to Russia, the Germans continued after April 1917 to subsidize the subversive bacillus Lenin as well as his subsequent Bolshevik regime from late 1917 into 1918. The details of the large funding and the way the money was "laundered" and reached Lenin and his comrades in Petrograd (to fund Bolshevik newspapers, propaganda, demonstrations, etc. throughout 1917) were disclosed as Communist archives began to be opened in Moscow under "glasnost" and to a much greater degree after 1991. The post-Soviet weekly *Argumenty i Fakty*, under the headline "Reichsmarks for the Dictatorship of the Proletariat," was among the first large-circulation publication in Russia to provide complete evidence on the German funding of Lenin and Bolshevism.<sup>1</sup> The paper notes the dates, locations, and amounts of the bank deposits made in Russia and includes photostats of Soviet memoranda concerning the depositing of the subsidies. Along with this article *Argumenty i Fakty* published a

photo montage depicting Lenin in a German World War I helmet replete with *Pickelhaube* (ice-pick point). (Accusations that Lenin was a German spy, however, are doubtful and have never been confirmed.)

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (1918) became another milestone in Soviet-German relations. By the treaty, seventy German divisions, which had been fighting against Russia on the Eastern Front in the Great War, were transferred to the West European front. Had America not entered the war and sent the American Expeditionary Force to Europe to fight alongside the Allies, it is quite possible Germany would have won the war or at least it might have dragged on interminably. At one point, the German Army had driven within 35 miles of Paris.

With Lenin's encouragement and initiative, post-World War I Weimar Germany in 1922 eagerly became the first major country to have entirely normal relations with the young Soviet Republic (although a modest Anglo-Soviet trade deal, later abrogated by London, was concluded the year before). In his earliest diaries of the mid-1920s, Josef Goebbels, who was to become Hitler's propaganda minister some eight years later, relished the advent of German-Soviet cooperation. Goebbels in Germany was about to pen his encomium to both Hitler and Lenin under the title *Lenin oder Hitler?*

Russian-German cooperation began in tsarist times. It is a long story that goes back to the eighteenth century when Peter the Great encouraged close relations with Prussia. The Russian Army began copying Prussian uniforms and drills and adopted the goosestep (which the Red Army also adopted).

With German unification after 1871, Russia again closed ranks with Germany. Under the German chancellor, Bismarck, a "Reinsurance Treaty" was concluded with Russia that protected Germany's rear in the case of trouble with France and Britain, which were being alienated by Bismarckian expansionist ambitions. After Bismarck was dismissed

in 1890, Kaiser Wilhelm let the reinsurance deal with Russia flounder. This decision paved the way toward World War I, in which Austria united with Germany against Russia and the Western Allies.

As a follow-up from the Genoa Conference (1922) came fruitful diplomatic negotiations and the resultant treaty, including its secret clauses, signed between the Soviets and Germans at Rapallo in 1922. An era of close, active collaboration between the two states then opened. In fact, this process of Soviet-German collaboration never really ceased—with the exception of a few ups and downs for a while after Hitler consolidated his power in 1933—until June 22, 1941.

Lenin and Stalin were always attracted to Soviet-German friendship, those “natural allies,” Germany and Russia, who confronted a “common enemy.” As in the Hitler period, the two Soviet dictators relished the fact that Germany was a have-not capitalist state that was bent on revenge against the capitalist-imperialist victors of World War I. Moscow fully concurred with Berlin that German lands had been “extorted” from a “defenseless” Germany by what Lenin called the Versailles Treaty “robbers with knives in their hands.”

## **RED ARMY-GERMAN ARMY COLLABORATION**

Always in awe of German efficiency, German industriousness, and the Prussian military, Lenin closed ranks with Weimar Germany on several levels and with several purposes in mind. Among other actions, he invited German military (Reichswehr) officers to come to Soviet Russia, despite Versailles Treaty prohibitions, to practice their arts of war on the broad plains of European Russia, which they proceeded to do beginning in 1924. This cooperation was based on a secret follow-up of the Rapallo Treaty that had been signed on April 16, 1922. The names of the officer-participants on both sides later became famous in World War II. The Soviet officers cooperating with the Germans were among those purged in Stalin’s bloodbath of Red Army General Staff

and line commanders in 1938.

On the German side in this early Soviet–German military collaboration were noted generals, marshals, chiefs-of-staff, and Nazi Army commanders-to-be. These men included Brauchitsch, Guderian, Blomberg, Marx, Model, Horn, Manstein, Kestring, and others. Figuring in the collaboration on the Soviet side were Tukhachevsky, Triandafillov, Blyukher, Yakir, Svechin, Frunze, Voroshilov, Kork, Alksnis, Budyenny, Shaposhnikov, and others. Directly supporting this “strictly secret” (*sovershenno sekretno* or *strovo sekretno*, the highest degree of Russian secrecy—in American parlance, “top-secret”) Soviet-German military collaboration from the Communist Party and civilian-administrative side were Lenin, Stalin, Trotsky, Radek, Rozengoltz, Krestinsky, and so forth. Their names appear on documents disclosed in archives opened since the demise of Communism in Russia in 1991.

A decade-long period of bilateral cooperation ensued during which the Red Army together with the German Reichswehr pioneered development of the tactics of what was later to become mobile “blitzkrieg” warfare or, as the Red Army called its own form of it, rapid “deep-battle operations.” These were based on air-ground support tactical aircraft, mechanized infantry (the Germans called them “panzers”), tanks, and airborne paratrooper formations.

The Russians had laid out a large, underdeveloped airfield at Lipetsk just south of Moscow especially for this purpose. Under the secret agreement, this spacious area was transformed into a modern airbase replete with hangars, repair shops, and stands and rigs for testing aircraft engines. Other facilities on the several hundred acres of grounds included dispensaries, barracks, and administrative buildings. The whole area, surrounded with barbed wire, was designated off-limits and guarded around the clock. Neighboring Soviet citizens in the town could only guess what was going on.

Military collaboration proceeded apace for years. In 1923 General Paul Haase purchased 100 Fokker D-XIII aircraft from Holland and flew them to Russia. The German aircraft industry, already famous from World War I, built new experimental craft. These were secretly flown to Russia from a secluded airbase at Rechlin, Germany, although their military character could no longer be camouflaged to elude Versailles inspectors.

By the mid-1920s some sixty German pilots and flight instructors were attached to Lipetsk, Russia. In the summer the contingent of German airmen reached 100. Trainees were replaced every six months by others who had graduated from basic training schools in Germany. The entire German unit was masqueraded as the “Fourth Squadron of the Red Air Force.” Out of this came 120 outstanding German fighter pilots and 450 flight personnel—all thoroughly trained at Lipetsk. Later in the Hitler years these personnel served as the core of Hitler’s Luftwaffe. Who knows how many of the Lipetsk cadre later found themselves behind the controls of German military aircraft—fighters, dive-bombers, and medium bombers—engaged in combat with Russians in the skies over the USSR during the Great Fatherland War?

Moreover, thanks to Lipetsk, Germany’s aircraft industry—despite the “watchful eyes” of the Versailles powers—was able to draw up and test designs that otherwise could not have been developed until the time when Hitler, after 1935, began openly rearming. According to Luftwaffe General Helm Speidel, who worked in the administrative sector of the so-called Zentrale Moskau, the most lasting contribution made by Lipetsk to Hitler’s air force was “the conceptual foundation laid up for the future Luftwaffe in actual flying practice.”<sup>2</sup>

The famous Junkers Stuka dive-bomber (Ju-87) was actually first produced in a Soviet factory. Poison-gas warfare was tested in the German-Soviet war games fought on the Russian steppe. Joint military ventures were undertaken, and airfields and aircraft factories were built

at Lipetsk. Tank and flying schools and defense-production facilities were constructed. Soviet–German collaboration also involved both navies. Out of this cooperation came the German “pocket battleships.”

The Soviet-German relationship in these years was mutually beneficial: The Soviets tested their mobile, mechanized-corps tactics under the rubrics of “deep-battle” operations aimed at rapid destruction of the enemy forces on their own territory—that is, blitzkrieg. (This term was coined by *Time* magazine; it was not used by either the Russians or the Germans in those years.) Soviet military officers also underwent studies in Germany—all conducted in utmost secrecy, of course, lest the terms of the Versailles Treaty be openly violated and Soviet Russia’s much touted “peaceful intentions” be sullied by public knowledge of such illegal activities of war preparation.

Ironically, this was the time when Lenin first unfurled the Soviet concept of “peaceful coexistence” or, as it was then called in the 1920s, “peaceful cohabitation.” It was the earliest form of a Soviet “peace offensive.” The talented people’s commissar of foreign affairs of this earliest period, Georgi V. Chicherin, was Lenin’s conduit in this respect.

British Prime Minister David Lloyd George later got wind of the Soviet–German collaboration. He wrote in his memoirs in the 1930s: “The greatest threat at present consists, to my mind, in the fact that Germany can bind its destiny with Bolsheviks and may place all its material and intellectual resources, all its huge organizational talent at the service of revolutionary fanatics, whose dream is conquest of the world by force of weapon for Bolsheviks. Such a threat is not chimera.”<sup>3</sup>

The salient feature of the weapons development and the war games in Russia, as first developed in theory by Red Army senior officers Mikhail Tukhachevsky and Vladimir Triandafillov, was seen in the

employment of tactics of surprise in massive use of tank-based motorized units together with air-ground offensives and paratroop drops against an overwhelmed enemy.<sup>4</sup> The Soviets applied these methods for the first time on a large scale in real war against the Japanese in the armed skirmishes bordering Mongolia in the Far East throughout 1939. The smaller Japanese forces in Japanese-occupied Kwantung Province in Mongolia were overwhelmed and decimated, especially once Red Army General Georgi K. Zhukov took command of the Soviet forces there in mid-1939.

## **SOVIET–FASCIST TOTALITARIAN KINSHIP**

After he had outmaneuvered his political rivals among the Old Bolsheviks and took over the helm in the Kremlin by the late 1920s, Stalin embarked the country on a concerted program of building the USSR into a world-class power, especially in the military sense. It was to be “socialism in one country” but with “other countries” kept definitely in mind, in the sense that Stalin intended for the USSR to outclass and overpower them, especially in the military sense as the “vanguard of world revolution.”

The ensuing Five-Year Plans after 1929 were geared, above all, to building a heavy-industry base. From this base, defense production would be given top priority while consumer goods would be relegated to what was designated as the lower “Category B.” The whole thrust of Stalin’s program of economic buildup was aimed in the long term at making the Soviet Union a major player on the world scene in both the political and the military senses or, as the Soviets called it, “politico-military” terms.

Some Western writers have suggested that the leader’s typical dictator’s megalomania was not the only thing motivating these ambitious policies. They allege that Josef Vissarionovich Djughashvili, who adopted the name “Stalin” (from the Russian word *stal*’, meaning

“steel”), was a devout Russophile. For him, his Georgian roots were scarcely a source of pride. The trait of Russophilia in Stalin was noticed by a number of his comrades as early as 1912. Several writers and film producers in the 1930s flattered the dictator by comparing him—at his own prompting—with the Great Russian tsars, Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great.

Stalin became the first Hitler-like dictator on the world stage of the twentieth century. Later, Hitler himself acknowledged magnanimously that he and Stalin were the most impressive leaders in the modern world. In comparison to them, he said, Mussolini, Churchill, and Roosevelt all paled. During the Nazi–Soviet honeymoon of 1939–41 the *vozhd'* (i.e., Supreme Leader) Stalin returned the compliment to Hitler by praising the *Führer*, the German form of *vozhd'*, for his leadership of the German people. He congratulated him in 1940 on his “splendid” military victories against the “plutocratic,” “warmongering” countries of France and England—common enemies, the Soviets said, of both Germany and the USSR.

By the time Hitler came to power in Germany in 1933, Stalin had set a number of enviable precedents for effective police-state totalitarianism, some of which drew praise from Hitler, Goebbels, and *il Duce* Mussolini. These were one-party dictatorship; the ubiquitous political police; punitive labor camps; an official ideology, or “world outlook,” upheld as exclusive and binding with its “world-historical,” world-girdling pretensions; one-man dictatorship and glorification of “the Leader”; etatization of the trade unions, press, schools, and all other social, political, and economic institutions; a rubberstamp “parliament”; ascendant militarism; and the singling out of a scapegoat, pariah class (as Hitler did with the Jews and Lenin did with the “bourgeoisie”), the bourgeoisie being forced by the Bolsheviks to wear yellow cards (Hitler used yellow stars) in their hats so that the public could recognize and condemn them.



The Soviets' huge sports and military rallies and parades, reviewed by the top party leaders, likewise were copied by the Italian Fascists and German Nazis. Even the Soviet use of the color red on the banners and their utterly new (as a state symbol) hammer and sickle are praised by Hitler in *Mein Kampf*. These were emulated by the Nazis with the latter's red, black, and white banners and their own reinvented symbol, the swastika (Lenin had once considered adopting the swastika). Mussolini adopted his own, particular symbol, the ancient Roman ax-with-fascies.

For good reason, Mussolini called Stalin a "crypto-Fascist," whereas Hitler said, "We must learn from the Marxists," recognizing the similarities between the two regimes' philosophies. Making the best Nazi recruits in Germany, Hitler added, were ex-Communists. Speaking of Mussolini, Lenin found much to admire in Italian fascism—an early example of the affinities felt between totalitarian states. The "Black Shirts" were notorious in Lenin's lifetime, and the Soviet Republic eagerly opened relations with Fascist Italy. Mussolini had made his triumphant march on Rome in 1923, just six years after Lenin seized power in Russia. Having passed through a phase of Bolshevik-like socialism in his pre-World War I political evolution, Mussolini later adopted a nationalistic platform. When he became Italy's "Duce," he developed a form of corporate-state socialism that was derived from his earlier prewar socialist, Marxist-Bolshevist views. In his system, dictatorship of the proletariat would be transmogrified into a centralized state running most affairs in the country from the center. Hence, Lenin's admiration for the Italian regime.

Mussolini, like Goebbels in the 1920s, was impressed with Lenin's one-man leadership. "The masses," he once wrote in the fascist newspaper *Il Popolo d'Italia*, "need a hero." (In the early 1930s Molotov was to pen an identical observation concerning the need for a powerful leader like Stalin.) Moreover, like Lenin and Stalin,

Mussolini had no use for “bourgeois liberalism” and “bourgeois democracy”: “[We] throw the noxious theories of so-called liberalism on the rubbish heap,” he said, “[along with] the more or less putrid body of the Goddess of Liberty.” Hitler agreed.

Whereas Lenin and Stalin created “Soviet Man,” Mussolini sought to create the “Fascist Man,” just as Hitler was later to create the new “Aryan Man.” In 1921, Mussolini declared in the Chamber of Deputies in Rome: “I recognize that between us and the Communists [there are] intellectual affinities.”<sup>5</sup> Italian Fascist affinities with Leninism aside, the main point is as follows: The totalitarian affinities between the Germans and the Soviets, that is, the “Communazi”/“Red-Brown” kinship, definitely played a seminal role in the Soviet–German coming together in late 1939. At one point in the Ribbentrop negotiations with Stalin, the German foreign minister blurted out after a toast or two in the Kremlin on the night of August 22–23, 1939, during the signing of the first of several Nazi–Soviet agreements, that he felt comfortable in the camaraderie of his Soviet hosts. It was, he said, as if he were “among old party comrades.” At other times Soviet and German spokesmen let it be known that the two states and their regimes had more in common than not, despite verbal on-again/off-again propaganda wars between them.

There was much between them, in other words, by way of common interest and feeling that paved the way to that fateful day of August 23, when the Nazi–Soviet Nonaggression Pact was signed before a broadly smiling Stalin and a grateful Ribbentrop. It also marked the culmination of a long-brewing close relationship embracing many spheres.

## **RIDING THE CURRENTS OF EUROPE**

In the interwar period, many conflicting tidal currents were flowing among the states of Europe, some of them new “Versailles”-born

nation-states, such as Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Rumania, and the three Baltic states, all newly established since World War I. One such ebbing current put Germany and the Soviet Union on the same side of the barricades. This stemmed from the fact that the Versailles Treaty had drawn the boundaries of several countries—among them France, Czechoslovakia, and Poland—in ways that disadvantaged, in the German and Russian perceptions at least, both Germany and Soviet Russia, the so-called losers from the war.

In the west in the coal-rich Ruhr, Germany lost vital land and industrial assets to France. On its eastern borders, Germans had been “arbitrarily” included in the new, Czechoslovak-ruled territory of the Sudetenland. Former German territory and people were also packaged into an enlarged, postwar Poland when part of Silesia with its German population became Polish territory. Much to Germany’s dismay, the “Polish Corridor,” also created by the Paris settlement, “artificially” separated Prussia from the “cristianized,” postwar Germany.

On the Russian side, the enlarged Poland also “encroached” on Russian territory in the east, land that was formerly part of White (Byelo-) Russia. Also, the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, former duchies of tsarist imperial Russia, were granted independence. Russia also lost Bessarabia to Rumania, another fledgling state created out of the old Ottoman Empire on the basis of the fuzzy Wilsonian concept of “self-determination.”

The Paris peace treaty had not only offended Germany and Russia, which, of course, were left out of the postwar territorial resettlements concluded at Versailles. It had likewise aggravated tensions among minority peoples everywhere, especially where new boundaries drawn under the Versailles regime put them unwillingly under “foreign” rule. It was inconceivable that the two large states of Germany and Soviet Russia would ever accept their position of inferiority as the result of the “bandits’” treaty of 1919. Not surprisingly, when both powers had

regained their strength, nationalist-minded elements proclaimed in their countries that they would seek to rectify the “injustices” of the Versailles “victors.”

As a consequence, Europe became divided into states and political movements that included, on the one hand, territorial “revisionists” and, on the other, “antirevisionists.” As revisionist capitals, both Berlin and Moscow therefore sought to create a New Order for Europe that would replace the Versailles Treaty’s “artificial” one. It was against the backdrop of these tensions and common interests that Germany and Russia were driven together.

We will see in the discussion of the Nazi–Soviet agreements in autumn 1939 that the mutual interests of the two “deprived” states were reasserted in the Nazi–Soviet Friendship Pact concluded in September 1939. In the manner in which the pact’s secret protocols carved up Poland between Germany and the USSR (presaging Foreign Commissar Molotov’s announcement in fall 1939 that “the Polish state has ceased to exist”), long-standing German and Soviet interests dating from 1919 were well served.

## **FAR EAST WRINKLES**

Not without relevance in the 1930s kaleidoscope is the Far Eastern picture. To Soviet Russia, affairs in this region looked particularly unfavorable to its national interests. Soviet foreign policy toward the East Asian nations of Japan and China thus displayed those same contradictions as it did toward the West. Perhaps these contradictions were unavoidable considering Moscow’s notorious “double track” of illegal export of revolution versus normal diplomatic intercourse.

Thus, in Asia (as later in Africa and South America in the postwar years) Leninist-Trotskyite strategy included the tactic of stirring up the colonial “rear” of the Western “imperialist” nations. This was another way of weakening and bringing down the industrialized capitalist

countries, which relied on the natural resources they obtained from what later was called the “Third World.” The way to Paris and London, said Trotsky and Sultan Galiyev (who sought to create what he called a “Colonial Comintern”), lay via the West’s colonies—the metropolitan countries’ sources of raw materials and cheap labor as well as potential cauldrons of revolution.

Playing on anticolonialist discontent in, for instance, China in the 1920s—which had been undergoing a nationalist transformation before and after World War I—the Comintern under Stalin’s direction allied itself with the Chinese nationalist party, the Kuomintang. While they were allied with the Kuomintang and its leader, Chiang Kai-shek, the Soviets, via their emissary in China, Mikhail Borodin, built up and trained the Chinese nationalist army (the contemporary Taiwanese Army, of the Republic of China, still bears traces of this training) and developed the security police. Stalin’s plan was to embrace “anticolonial” nationalist forces in the largest East Asian country. Eventually they would facilitate Communist seizure of the reins of leadership over the mainland.

However, by the late 1920s this “United Front” tactic, an updating of Lenin’s similar tactic, as pursued by Stalin failed on the mainland. Chiang, sensing what the Soviets and their Chinese Communist Party comrades were up to, turned against his Soviet advisers. He began a bloody liquidation of the Communists in his midst. The failure signified that “the road to Paris and London” that lay through the Far East would not at this time, at least, be able to run westward from Kuomintang Nanking or Beijing.

Meanwhile, farther to the east, Japanese expansionist militarism came to power in Tokyo. This led in 1931–32 to Japanese seizure of Manchuria and parts of Mongolia—territory bordering directly on the Soviet Union (some three-quarters of Russian territory stretches eastward into Asia from the Ural Mountains). Relations between Japan

and the Soviet Union steadily worsened as the two states soon got on a collision course.

Their interests directly clashed, for instance, in Outer Mongolia, which had become by 1921 a Soviet client-state, or “People’s Republic.” There, local, independently acting Japanese generals, ruling like mandarins in areas on the Chinese mainland that were remote from the Japanese islands, often made their own arbitrary decisions in spreading—on bayonet tips—Japanese control throughout China and Mongolia. However, when the local Japanese commander took on the Soviet “bear” aggressively in Kwantung Province by assaulting Soviet troops across the Mongolian border there in spring 1939, he and his over two-division-sized, primitively equipped forces of upward of 40,000 men met from the Russians what the Soviets proudly called a “firm rebuff.”

In fact, the Soviet-Japanese conflict on the Mongolian Khalkin-Gol River plain became the occasion for the Red Army to test, successfully, all those advanced tactics of the art of utilizing surprise in waging modern, mechanized warfare while employing “overwhelming force” that were so prized by the more offensivist-oriented Red Army commanders. One of those commanders was then-General Georgi Zhukov, who earned his first laurels as an impressively effective, hard-driving commander at Khalkin-Gol in summer 1939. But, as we saw, the Soviets’ main focus remained on Europe—and in particular on Germany.

The German–Russian connection was a permanent fixture during periods of Lenin’s, Stalin’s, and their successors’ reigns. Going back to Peter the Great, Russians have always respected German efficiency and public administration. In the Soviet period this extended to appreciation of and exploitation of traditional German militarism via the German–Soviet military collaboration of the 1920s and beyond.

Toward Hitler's Germany, Stalin was both cooperative and wary. As will be seen, there is little doubt that Stalin would have liked to get the better of Hitler by the terms of the Nazi–Soviet agreements of 1939–40 as well as by exploiting Germany's own involvement in war with the Western Allies. He planned his own “stab in the back,” in other words, but Hitler himself executed one before Stalin could realize his own offensivist plans. Stalin's long-range planning, in fact, called for eventually trumping the Nazi dictator's control of Europe—the continent that both Lenin and Stalin had long sought for themselves and the cause of world revolution.

With the fading of the German militarist tradition at the end of World War II and with the birth of a democratic Germany, Russian admiration of Germany has by no means ceased. It was already visible in the time of Brezhnev in the 1970s. In the present, post-Communist period in Russia, Moscow's ties with Germany can be described as at least as strong as with any other Western state. Moreover, since the coming of power of Vladimir V. Putin in 2000, this new Russian leader, who once served as a KGB officer in East Germany and, like Lenin did, has voiced his admiration for this key Central European state, Russo-German amity has grown even tighter.

## NOTES

The first epigraph is from Hermann Raushning, *The Voice of Destruction* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1949), p. 131.

The second is quoted in Jiri Hochman, *The Soviet Union and the Failure of Collective Security, 1934–1938* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 152. Schulenburg, German ambassador to Russia, made this astute observation at the time of the German-Czech crisis in 1938. Hochman's book, incidentally, provides a well-documented argument against those observers, such as Gabriel Gorodetsky, Alvin Rubenstein, Geoffrey Roberts, and so on, along with Soviet-period semiofficial

authors of books and articles on the history of Soviet diplomacy in the interwar period, who take seriously Stalin's alleged "determined" efforts to reach collective-security agreements with the West European powers. Such authors blame the Western governments for failing to agree with Moscow on establishing collective security, which, they say, was Stalin's serious intention.

The third is from Hochman, *The Soviet Union and the Failure of Collective Security*, pp. 172–73.

1 "Reichsmarks for the Dictatorship of the Proletariat," *Argumenty i Fakty*, no. 3 (1992), p. 4.

2 Gerald Freund, *The Unholy Alliance* (London: 1957), p. 208. See also F. L. Garsten, "The Reichswehr and the Red Army 1920–1933," *Survey* (U.K.), nos. 44–45 (October 1962), p. 92ff.

3 Yuri Dyakov and Tatyana Bushuyeva, *The Red Army and the Wehrmacht: How the Soviets Militarized Germany, 1922–1933, and Paved the Way for Fascism, from the Secret Archives of the Former Soviet Union* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1995), p. 17. For an analysis of early Soviet-German friendship and Lenin's motivations for it, see Stanley W. Page, *The Geopolitics of Leninism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982). The author reproduces a prophetic quote from Friedrich Engels, penned in 1882, with which Lenin, a punctilious reader of Engels, was doubtlessly familiar: "Four hundred years ago, Germany was the starting point of the first upheaval of the European middle class. As things stand now, is it outside the limits of possibility that Germany will be the scene, too, of the first great victory of the European proletariat?" When Leninist-communist forces in Germany set up "soviets" in several German cities in 1918, Engels's prophecy seemed to be in the process of fulfillment. These bolshevized urban centers in Germany, however, were to be overturned when armed German nationalists, organized into the proto-Nazi Freikorps,



overthrew them after only a few months' of their reign. For additional details of Soviet-German military collaboration, see Fritz Becker, *Stalins Blutspur durch Europa* (Kiel: Arndt, 1995), pp. 179–81. Film footage of the collaboration may be found in *Stalin and Hitler: Dangerous Liaisons. Films for the Humanities and Sciences*, 3 vols. (Princeton, 1999).

4 Christopher Donnelly, *Red Banner: The Soviet Military System in Peace and War* (London: Jane's Information Group Ltd, 1988), pp. 73–74.

5 Quoted in Domenico Settembrini, "Mussolini and Lenin," *Survey* (U.K.) 23, no. 3 (1977–78).

# 4

## *Nazi–Soviet Agreements (1939–40)*

The ideological contradictions between National Socialist Germany and the Soviet Union were in past years the sole reason Germany and the USSR stood opposed to each other in two separate and hostile camps. The developments of the recent period seem to show that differing world outlooks do not prohibit a reasonable relationship between two states, and the restoration of cooperation of a new and friendly type.

—German Foreign Minister Ribbentrop

The Reich Government and the Soviet Government, judging from all experience, must count it as certain that the capitalistic Western democracies are the unforgiving enemies of both National Socialist Germany and of the USSR.

—German Foreign Minister Ribbentrop

On the whole, there are only three great statesmen in the world. Stalin, myself and Mussolini. Mussolini, the weakest,

has not been able to break either with the power of the Crown or of the Church. Stalin and I are the only ones that see only the future.

—Adolf Hitler

In the case of an armed showdown between Germany and the Western democracies, the interests of the Soviet Union and of Germany would certainly run parallel to each other. The Soviet Union would never stand for Germany's getting into a difficult position.

—Josef Stalin

Ekh, together with the Germans we would have been invincible.

—Josef Stalin

We don't have a mutual assistance pact with the Germans, but if the English and the French declared war on us, we would fight alongside the Germans.

—Josef Stalin, to the Turkish minister of foreign affairs,  
October 1, 1939

The hatred Stalin felt toward England was much more intense than his hatred of Hitler. He considered the British Empire to be the bastion of capitalist civilization. He was

convinced that the destruction of this fortress would help spread Communist forces worldwide.

The twentieth century, rivaling all other centuries in surprises, delivered to mankind a number of world-historical shocks and wake-up calls. In 1914 the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria and the modern world's bloodiest war to date got the century off to a tragic start. Then followed the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II and the demise of the 300-yearlong dynasty of the Romanovs, who had ruled the world's largest, most resource-rich country and contiguous empire stretching over eleven time zones. This was followed by the Bolshevik seizure of power in Russia and the establishment of history's first totalitarian state. This set a grim precedent that other such autocratic, totalitarian regimes followed in Italy and Germany in the twentieth century. Their leaders duly admitted their indebtedness to the Bolsheviks.

In the third decade of the century, the Far East ignited in war as Japan began forcibly expanding its empire to the Asian mainland—to Korea, Manchuria, and all of China as well as southward to Southeast Asia. It euphemistically called this ambitious enterprise a “Co-Prosperity Sphere.” Besides threatening Soviet Russia and the British Empire in Asia, Japanese expansionism, now marching in step with the German–Italian Axis in Europe by virtue of a tripartite agreement with those countries, was to cause another great shock: its attack against the United States at Pearl Harbor.

Before that momentous event the world had been staggered by three other incredible shocks: first, the Nazi-Soviet Nonaggression Pact, announced seemingly out of the blue in August 1939, which created an alliance between the world's two most powerful totalitarian states. Out of this agreement came the secret Soviet–German plans to jointly invade and destroy Poland while giving a nod to Stalin to expand the

Soviet Empire further to the west—north in the Baltic region and south bordering Rumania.

Above all, the Soviets under Stalin also agreed eagerly to supply Hitler with the raw materials that he required in order to conquer most of Western, democratic Europe. Destruction of European and British-imperial “plutocracy,” the two sides agreed, was a common goal shared by the an-tiplutocrat, “socialist” regimes of both Hitler and Stalin.

With the German and Soviet invasions of Poland in September 1939 came British and French declarations of war against Germany, marking the formal start of World War II. The war was to turn into a much bloodier, world-girdling conflict than even the preceding Great War. On March 10, 1939, six months before the war began, Stalin declared openly at the Eighteenth Communist Party Congress that World War II had already begun. <sup>1</sup>

As the midcentury point approached, the world was in for still another huge shock. Within twenty-one months of the signing of the Nazi–Soviet pacts, the first partner of the emerging German–Soviet alliance launched a large-scale invasion against the second partner’s country on June 22, 1941. This started the second war that Stalin was to call the “Great Fatherland War” (sometimes translated the “Great Patriotic War”). The latter was World War II’s war-within-a-war on the Eastern Front that took upward of 35 million civilian and military lives on the Soviet side alone.

When this war ended amid the usual postwar calls for “no more wars,” Stalin and the Soviet Union resumed the pursuit of Soviet expansionism approximately where it had left off before June 1941. The “buffer” territory seized by the Soviets to the west of its frontiers in 1940—deemed by Moscow and fellow travelers abroad merely as insurance in order to absorb any future German attack—was absorbed into the USSR. It became permanently sovietized as a part of the ever

expanding Soviet Empire. Then began a period of additional expansion and determined sovietization in Eastern, Central, and Southeastern Europe.

In other words, another “struggle,” to use the Soviet term, had begun. This one was a cold one but a Cold War with very hot overtones and violent episodes, such as the Soviet-supported proxy conflicts fought on the Korean and Vietnamese Peninsulas in the 1950s and 1960s. Over 100 other conflicts, as tabulated in the 1970s by the Yugoslav paper *Polytika*, were also part of the post–World War II landscape. All these wars, the paper says, had a Marxist-Leninist edge to them.

To some observers it seemed in retrospect that, as far as Stalin and the “lodestar” of Marxism-Leninism were concerned, World War II and the “strange alliance” in it of East and West against the common Axis foe had only been a passing interlude. It appeared that the Soviet dictator was serious when he remarked to the Yugoslav Communist aide, Milovan Djilas, in Moscow in 1946 that soon, as he put it, “We’ll have another go at it”—meaning another “big war”—World War III—a war that, as Molotov said of the preceding big war in an interview in the 1980s, would further “extend socialism” worldwide.

## **SOVIET–GERMAN FEELERS**

In the previous chapter, I surveyed the beginnings under Lenin and Stalin of a deepening German–Russian relationship after World War I. These ties were being forged, as we saw, on the basis of several uniting principles. The lines of magnetic attraction involved the two countries’ uniquely common interests: political, military, and economic (trade). Yet this process seemed to be abruptly interrupted by the coming to power of Hitler and one-party rule under his National Socialist German Worker’s Party (the Nazis). In calling such a regime “fascist” (a term borrowed from Italy’s own dictatorship under the Fascisti “Black Shirts”) and terming it an “advanced stage” of imperialistic capitalism,

Stalinite Russia, it appeared, had thereby put itself on a collision course with this new regime that was now ensconced in the Soviets' "favorite" Central European country of Germany.

But the ideological gulf seemingly opening between the two states after 1933, while real in certain respects, was in a bigger sense a chimera, a figment of propaganda *but not a substantial element of Realpolitik*. Their mutual animosity—anti-Soviet and antifascist—in any case was soon to dissolve. More tangible factors would draw the two nation-state dictatorships together.

How did this process start? Surprisingly, it actually started early on with the consolidation of the Hitler regime in Berlin in 1933. It was taking place even as Hitler was haranguing the Reichstag with fulminations against the "Jewish Bolsheviks." Yet in a speech on March 23, 1933, Hitler declared significantly that "the struggle with Communism in Germany is our internal affair.... Our political relationship to other powers with whom we have common interests will not be affected by this."<sup>2</sup> This was a clear signal directed at Moscow and was received as such. It indicated, namely, that ideological differences between the two states need not interfere with their long-standing common interests. (For the earlier origins of these ties, see chapter 3.)

A number of other straws in the wind in the early 1930s likewise pointed in a friendly direction as concerned Moscow and Berlin. This process began when initiatives began emanating from the Soviet side,<sup>3</sup> as per the following events:

- In 1933–34 Lev Lebedev, a Communist Party Central Committee apparatchik in Moscow, visited Berlin on a secret mission to study Gestapo techniques. This was followed by transfer to the Germans of the table of organization used by the Soviet Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD) for establishing Soviet labor camps as

well as the design for mobile, poison gas “liquidation wagons,” invented in the USSR and used against recalcitrant peasants in Stalin’s collectivization drive.<sup>4</sup>

- According to Leon Gelfand, former counselor at the Soviet embassy in Rome, who defected to the United States in 1941, “Stalin had been obsessed with the idea of an agreement with Germany since 1933.”<sup>5</sup>
- On a visit to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Berlin, on December 21, 1935, Sergei Bessonov suggested openly that it would be highly desirable if the neutrality agreement signed between Germany and Soviet Russia in 1926 were supplemented by a “mutual nonaggression pact,” as official German documents from the period show. Bessonov again brought up this idea to German officials in July 1936.<sup>6</sup> In this it is clear, of course, that no Soviet official, especially one on assignment in a foreign country, would ever make such bold statements unless they were approved by the Kremlin.
- Ex-Soviet security officer Walter Krivitsky relates that in 1936 one A. Slutsky, chief of a foreign intelligence section of the Russian secret police, confided in him, “We have set our course towards an early understanding with Hitler and have started negotiations.”<sup>7</sup>
- In December 1936 and February 1937 David Kandelaki, Soviet trade emissary with the cover designation of “Commercial Attaché” and one of Stalin’s personal aides, had an audience with Hitler’s finance overseer, Dr. Hjalmar Schacht. Kandelaki read a statement, presumably coming directly from Stalin, that said in effect that Soviet-German trade should be stepped up sharply while with it a bold improvement should be made in overall Soviet-German relations.<sup>8</sup>

There were several other wrinkles in the pre-1939 “feelers” period



that signaled significant rapprochement between Moscow and Berlin. Some of the initiatives originated on the Soviet side, others, on the German.<sup>9</sup> But the milestone year in the process of forming a Soviet-German alliance, of course, was 1939. Early in that year Stalin sounded the first undeniable hint, a hint so strong that during the later Nazi-Soviet negotiations in Moscow in August 1939 Ribbentrop specifically referred to it favorably. So did Stalin.

Speaking from the rostrum of the Eighteenth Party Congress in the Bolshoi Theater, March 10, Stalin made some startling statements. They were delivered in the typically subtle, low-toned, droning way in which the Soviet dictator customarily exploded his verbal bombshells. First, Stalin blasted the Western democracies for trying to incite, he claimed, the Soviet Union against Germany and “to poison the atmosphere and to provoke a conflict with Germany without any visible grounds.”<sup>10</sup> Then, after making overtures to Germany, with which the Soviets, he indicated, surely should have better relations than they did presently, he dropped his classic “chestnuts-out-of-the-fire” remark, how, he implied, the Soviets were not about to come to the aid of other threatened capitalist states. The remark clearly indicates that Stalin was not about to engage in any serious collective-security negotiations with the Western capitalist states. This would be the case despite appearances or the fond hopes nurtured among pro-Soviet observers or officials in the West (such as British envoy and ambassador to Moscow, Sir Stafford Cripps).

Both Austria and Czechoslovakia, after all, would have been such “chestnuts” in 1938. In both cases, Moscow reacted more or less disinterestedly to Hitler’s bold annexations of both of those states in the preceding year. The fact that a country had been occupied by Germany did not cause any radical change in Communist tactics. In Czechoslovakia the Communists accused the government officials there of being lackeys of French and British capitalism. In France, the

Communists spread defeatism.

Later, the memoirs of Czechoslovak and Polish diplomats show, as the memoirists claim, a pattern of false Stalin pursuit of “collective security.” One of these diplomats has reported that he viewed Moscow as actually playing the role of instigator of war. He says he detected a Soviet plan to provoke war with Germany by urging the Czechs to stand fast against the Germans while at the same time ostentatiously offering, and while not delivering any, military support to the former—support that was never, in fact, forthcoming and was never intended to be.<sup>11</sup>

No such capitalist-state chestnuts would be pulled out of the fire. The fire of future war, it seemed, was too valuable to Stalin. Or, at the very least, he intended to keep the Soviet Union out of it until an appropriate time.

## **STALIN’S GAMBIT WITH FRANCE AND ENGLAND**

Soon after Hitler came to power in 1933, the Soviet government launched the policy of collective security. Sometimes known as the “Litvinov policy” —it was named for Maxim M. Litvinov, whose real name was Vallach and who served as commissar of foreign affairs from autumn 1930 to May 1939. The policy was seemingly designed to rally West European opposition to Hitler. That the Soviet Union would take a truly active part in stopping Hitler in the military sense is regarded by some latter-day historians, especially Russian scholars, as, if not doubtful, at best problematical.

As we have seen, Stalin had opted for a policy of staying out of the “inevitable” coming war until the last moment. At that propitious time, he predicted, the USSR would enter the war and tip the balance in its own favor. In his speech to the Eighteenth Party Congress, March 1939, Stalin made a telltale accusation against the then-neutral Western countries. He imputed to them a policy that seemed to presage the very

one designed by Stalin himself for the USSR: “The official policy of neutrality [as pursued by France and Britain] can be described as one that says in effect, ‘Let each country fend for itself from aggressors any way that it can. For our part,’ it says, ‘we will trade with aggressors as well as with their victims.’ In reality, however, the policy of noninvolvement means giving a go-ahead to aggressive war.”

The case of Czechoslovakia, which was abandoned to the Nazis by the Western powers after the Munich Agreement of 1938, is instructive in terms of illustrating Soviet policy. The Soviet Union itself made no concrete effort to defend Czechoslovakia when it became obvious that the Wehrmacht would settle the issue of the so-called oppressed German population in the Czechoslovak territory of the Sudetenland. For their part the Germans were well aware of Moscow’s uninterest in defending Czechoslovakia. German Ambassador to the USSR Schulenburg observed at the time:

The Russians are not making great efforts. [It is obviously] no pleasant thought for them to have to go to war on account of Czechoslovakia.... The Soviet Government, with an eye on the internal situation in Russia and fearing a war on two fronts, must hold aloof from military enterprises for the time being.... It follows, therefore, [their] proved tactics of mobilizing other powers, particularly France, against its foes, or fomenting those conflicts which do break out—as for example in Spain and China—by delivering war materiel, and of spreading [such conflicts] as much as possible by political agitation and intrigues of all kinds.<sup>12</sup>

As though to buttress its collective-security policy, the USSR in September 1934 became a member of the League of Nations—which

Lenin had called a “band of robbers” and an “imperialist conspiracy” directed against the Soviet Union. This had been a long-standing Soviet ideological line that undoubtedly reflected basic Soviet uninterest in collective efforts against aggression launched under the league aegis. For his part, Stalin reiterated this basic Bolshevik attitude toward the league. Yet, for the USSR to have influence in Europe, league membership was an obvious prerequisite. During the short time the USSR was a member, it used the international forum largely as a sounding board for Soviet propaganda and as a way of contrasting the “good” Soviet Union with the “bad” capitalist states (not unlike Soviet policy in the United Nations Organization after World War II).

Also, Moscow supported the French proposal, put forward in 1934 by Premier and Foreign Minister Louis Barthou, for an “Eastern Locarno” pact. By its terms the USSR was to take over France’s obligations to defend her “allies,” Poland and Czechoslovakia, if they were attacked by Germany. However, neither of these two countries, nor indeed any other East European state, wanted or requested direct Soviet military aid. Least of all did Poland want such Soviet assistance, given her experience with Russian domination and an offensive Soviet war waged against her just fifteen years before in 1920. (Czechoslovakia was willing to accept Soviet help—but only if France helped first.)

Furthermore, Germany did not want to sign any such pact, nor would Great Britain support it unless Germany did. In any case, Barthou was most interested in an alliance with the USSR. He and successive French governments saw this as a diplomatic means of keeping Hitler in check. So, although it is true that Polish opposition counted for something, it was not decisive in the failure of the Eastern Locarno or “Eastern security pact” project.

Evidence brought forward by historians in recent years seems convincing, moreover, by demonstrating that *Stalin never seriously considered collective security to be anything more than a ploy to*

*involve the West European capitalist nations, sans the USSR, in an effort to block Hitler.* Collective actions undoubtedly would entail the kind of intra- or intercapitalist state war that Stalin, like Lenin before him, expected as a means of defeating “capitalist imperialism” and eliminating the so-called capitalist encirclement of the Soviet Union. It would also ensure the latter’s domination of the Continent, as top NKVD foreign intelligence officer at the time, Pavel Sudoplatov, frankly points out in his memoirs.

Furthermore, France and Britain did not see eye to eye on Germany; they had not agreed on this point since 1919. In early May 1935, on its own France signed an alliance with the Soviet Union, and so did Czechoslovakia. These alliances were interconnected but, significantly, were not accompanied by military conventions. Their primary goal was to deter Hitler by diplomatic means from using force but not to *fight* him. This was partly because the French did not have a high opinion of Soviet military power and partly, too, because they mistrusted the Soviets. In any case, the distrust was mutual. Just as important was the fact that France was committed to the doctrine of a “defensive war” protecting its own territory, not another’s. Under Popular Front rule, France was hardly “war minded.”

At the same time, Benes, as foreign minister and later president of Czechoslovakia, inserted into the Czechoslovak–Soviet Pact of 1935 the provision that the USSR would help his country only if France did so first. He assumed that this condition would secure French military aid while averting accusations that Czechoslovakia was pro-Communist.

For its part, London, disagreeing with the French approach to Germany, sought above all not to antagonize Germany. On the contrary, under Prime Minister Chamberlain’s administration, Britain wanted to reach some sort of settlement with Berlin that would somehow ward off war anywhere on the Continent. In fact, London was fundamentally

opposed to concluding *any peacetime alliances* with any countries, even with France. The British regarded themselves primarily as an imperial power with overseas interests. To pursue these interests while maintaining their empire, the British needed peace, not war. It was a policy that was based in part, one might say, on the old “Manchester Doctrine.” This principle assumes that commercial and imperial priorities dwarf all other considerations while they also, by their peaceful nature, preclude war.

So, in March 1935, London made only a weak protest when Hitler restored conscription—which was forbidden by the Versailles Treaty of 1919. Moreover, the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, signed in June 1935, allowed Germany to build a navy (“pocket battleships”) up to one-third of total British surface tonnage and to an even greater percentage in submarines. The British rationales for this step were (1) they did not want to go to war with Germany over her violations of the military part of the Versailles Treaty, whose revision they considered inevitable; (2) they believed it would take Germany years, in any case, to challenge the British navy; and (3) they assumed that Hitler would honor agreements he had signed or if not, as a result, lose face. This belief, of course, reflected *British* thinking, not Hitler’s.

At the same time, the naval agreement reflected widespread British pacifism as well as the view that swift rearmament would be disastrous to trade, which was, after all, the lifeblood of Britain. British public opinion, expressed as late as summer 1939, strongly opposed British involvement in war (this was to change dramatically within a year). Chamberlain’s much criticized policy (pilloried in the famous American musical comedy of the time, *The Red Mikado*) nevertheless reflected this public sentiment, which can be seen in the results of public opinion polls held in England in that era. Popular sentiment in France was similar.

Another important consideration was the danger of Japanese

expansion in the Far East. This constituted a threat to British et al. colonial possessions and interests there. At the same time Anglo-Italian relations were endangered by the aggressive Italian dictator, Benito Mussolini. Speaking of a new “Roman Empire,” he was ready to use force to acquire Abyssinia (Ethiopia). Indeed, *il Duce*’s forces, after launching brutal aerial bombing attacks, invaded this country in October 1935.

This overall state of affairs led the British chiefs of staff to advise the civilian government that Britain, in its essentially weak military condition, could not simultaneously fight Italy in the Mediterranean, Japan in the Far East, and Germany on the Continent. Britain was in no shape to fight any of the three powers singly and certainly not a group of them at once. Finally, it should borne in mind that not until 1939 did the British choose to consider an alliance even with France against Nazi Germany. Still less did it seek an alliance with her putative East European “allies” such as Poland, and least of all with the USSR.

The goal of British policy was a European settlement agreeable to Berlin. Until about 1936, British statesmen, such as Prime Minister Chamberlain, believed that such a settlement would avert a European war. Later, by 1938–39, while still hoping to save the peace, the British by now—among much of the officialdom, at least—were more than aware of war dangers. They wanted to gain time for gradual British rearmament. The latter policy was strongly advocated by Winston Churchill, Conservative Party rival of Chamberlain.

Meanwhile, however, by assenting to a buildup of the German navy (even though it was expected to take a long time), Britain indicated that she did not care if the Baltic Sea were dominated by Germany, albeit Germany could then threaten Poland and the Baltic states, not to mention the USSR. The fact is that Britain was not all that seriously concerned about the security of Eastern Europe. This “remote” region, after all, had never played a major role in the scheme of British trade or

foreign policy. As a result, most British statesmen believed that it was not a sphere of Britain's truly vital interests. Instead, they viewed Eastern Europe as a natural sphere of German influence provided British trade was not excluded. However, this reservation seems to have been mainly a matter of prestige with London. Eastern Europe accounted for only 2 percent of total British foreign trade.

For their part, it would seem that the Soviets—Stalin and Molotov in particular—interpreted London's policy to mean tacit British support for German eastern expansion. This Stalin saw as being directed primarily at the USSR. Yet this may not have been the case at all. At any rate, it has never been proved. On the other hand, one can question Soviet sincerity and ask if the Soviets on their part were serious in calling for overarching “collective security” to prevent such German expansion. Had they been serious, would they have erected so many verbal impediments to its realization? Would they have left Czechoslovakia in the lurch when the Wehrmacht got on the move? Any alliance, collective-security arrangements, and so on with the Western capitalist nations were, in any case, anathema to Stalin. Obviously, he had other fish to fry.

Doubt about Soviet motives at the time, moreover, arises from the fact, for instance, that the ink was hardly dry on the Franco-Soviet alliance of May 2, 1935, when Litvinov—ironically, titular spokesman for collective security—himself suggested to the German ambassador in Moscow, Count Friedrich von Schulenburg, that now was the time to improve German–Soviet relations by concluding a mutual nonaggression pact.<sup>13</sup> Other pro-German Soviet initiatives followed (see chapter 3). One might thus conclude that Stalin supported collective security merely as a means of pressuring Hitler to cut a deal with the Soviet Union. This was a form of “blackmail,” as several Russian and some Western authors have suggested.

To judge from Litvinov's proposal, Stalin seems as early as 1935,



perhaps even as early as 1933, to have envisaged a pact with Germany. So might one assume from examining the papers of Karl Radek, Stalin's secret go-between with Berlin. (Radek was among the purge victims of 1936–37, many of whom knew too much for their own good.) This proposal would be renewed at the turn of 1936–37. It finally bore fruit, as we will see in the next section, in the German–Soviet Nonaggression Pact of August 23, 1939.

## **THE WATERSHED YEAR**

In the crucial year of 1939, however, not only did Germany and Soviet Russia make concerted approaches to each other, many of them in secret. Simultaneously, Stalin began to respond, it now appears disingenuously, to intense British and French feelers aimed at possibly closing ranks with Stalin in opposing Hitler. The latter by now was all but universally perceived as a menace to peace. As Russian historian Edvard Radzinsky writes, from Stalin's vantage point "Hitler was really drawing Europe into war and Germany would bring down in ruins the whole capitalist system. It was no longer a [Marxist-Leninist] mirage, no longer a dream—world revolution was advancing on empire. All that was needed was to egg Hitler on."<sup>14</sup> NKVD foreign intelligence officer Pavel Sudoplatov, as we saw, confirms this Stalin ploy in his memoirs.

Thus, Stalin began playing a new game well beyond the frontiers of his own country and its "geopolitical borderlands." Besides opening the way to an accord with Germany, the Soviet dictator began simultaneous negotiations with France and England—in effect, creating a kind of ersatz "Popular Front at the top." This was a "typical Stalin ploy," Radzinsky writes. He continues:

He knew in advance that the Western democracies [against which he had directed so many venomous attacks] would

never trust the new Genghis Khan. He inspired in them only fear and revulsion. The talks [between the French and British and the Soviets in Moscow] were meant to gain leverage on Hitler. This gambit worked. Fearing an alliance between Stalin and the Western democracies, Hitler was soon responding to Soviet advances.

The customary fulminations against the USSR disappeared from official German statements, and the campaign of mutual insult petered out. A New phase had begun: the irreconcilable foes seemed to have stopped noticing each other.

In midsummer 1939, Hitler told Nazi Propaganda Minister Josef Goebbels that he no longer expected London and Moscow ever to reach an agreement. “That leaves the way open for us,” Goebbels wrote in his unpublished diary: “Stalin doesn’t want either a won or lost war. In either case, he’d be history.”<sup>15</sup>

Goebbels cleverly ordered German editors not to express glee at Stalin’s stalling of the Anglo-French negotiations in Moscow or to comment on differences emerging between Moscow and Tokyo. Newspapers were also told to ignore German–Soviet trade talks. After the first, August 23 Nazi–Soviet agreement, Goebbels’s comment was laconic: “How times change,” he wrote.

However, a few weeks later Hitler fully described to Goebbels the deal he had made with Stalin. To the *Führer*, “the question of Bolshevism,” Goebbels wrote in his diary, “is for the time being of lesser importance.” Then to the press he controlled Goebbels ordered: “You can indicate that the purpose of this [nonaggression] pact is to enable Germany and Russia alone to settle all outstanding problems in the *Lebensraum* [living space] between them, i.e., in eastern Europe....

Newspapers are permitted to display a degree of *Schadenfreude* [malicious pleasure], though not in their editorial columns.”

Nineteen thirty-nine, as already indicated, was the cardinal year in the process of forming an active Soviet–German alliance. Early that year it was Stalin who sounded the first undeniable hint of impending Soviet–German rapprochement at the highest level. It was a hint so strong that during the Nazi–Soviet negotiations in Moscow in August 1939, Ribbentrop in Stalin’s presence specifically referred back to it as the spur to Hitler that got rapprochement going between Germany and the USSR. To Ribbentrop’s observation, Stalin replied, “That was precisely my intention.”<sup>16</sup>

Speaking from the rostrum of the Eighteenth Party Congress in the Bolshoi Theater on March 10, 1939, Stalin made his several startling statements. He had entirely rewritten the draft of the speech he was to give and that had been prepared for him, as usual, by the Administrative Department of the Communist Party Central Committee. The gist of his speech was the following:

- The French and British were trying to poison relations between the USSR and Germany by means of “malicious rumors.” In fact, he went on, nothing stands in the way of sharply improving those relations.
- He reassured his audience that Germany had no base designs against Soviet Russia, least of all any plans to seize the Ukraine.
- Referring to Western hopes of Soviet cooperation in stopping Hitler and dashing such hopes to pieces, Stalin bluntly asserted: “We will not allow our country to be drawn into conflicts by warmongers [*podzhigatel’yami voiny*] who are accustomed to getting others to pull chestnuts out of the fire for them.”<sup>17</sup>

To make sure Berlin understood what Stalin was saying in Aesopian language between the lines, he ordered the Soviet press to soften its

“antiFascist” line. Then he made an undeniably friendly gesture: On May 3 he fired Maxim Litvinov, formerly promoted as a collective-security advocate, as longtime Soviet commissar of foreign affairs. Stalin even removed him from the Central Committee. In Litvinov’s place he appointed his closest aide, Vyacheslav Molotov (real name Scriabin, a Great Russian, who was untainted in Nazi eyes because he was not, as Litvinov was, Jewish; that Molotov was married to a Jewish woman was of little concern). As soon he was in charge of that ministry, Molotov (who had in any case supervised the ministry for many years) weeded out some of the deputy commissars and other officials closely associated with Litvinov. (As we will see, Litvinov, always willing to oblige The Boss, was later—after the German attack on the USSR in June 1941—brought out of limbo and appointed ambassador to the United States. By that time it was useful to have such a personality in Washington helping to arrange Lend-Lease aid for Soviet Russia.)

Berlin got this politically telegraphed message, too. During the Nazi-Soviet honeymoon German officials acknowledged that the departure of Litvinov (as well as that of the Jewish Soviet ambassador to Berlin, Georgi Astakhov) was welcome news. It signified, they concluded, that Stalin was adopting a form of “national Bolshevism” and was virtually “de-ideologizing” his foreign policy and returning it to a “non-Jewish-Bolshevik, Great Russian orientation” without global pretensions. This, obviously, was a foolish assumption on the Germans’ part. The details and events immediately leading up to signing the final Nazi–Soviet Nonaggression Pact are related in many books. A brief summary follows here.

Marshal Voroshilov had been assigned to sounding out the Germans on the precise designs of the ensuing agreements; Molotov, too, was active in the preparatory period of July and early August. All told, two major pacts and several other agreements together with several secret

protocols came out of the August–September negotiations in Moscow in which Stalin personally always played a key role. (Documents made available to researchers since 1991 show a pattern of the Soviet dictator’s deep, personal involvement in all aspects of Soviet foreign policy as well as defense policy.)

Before the memorable day of August 23 arrived, Stalin ordered all talks with the French and the British—this “silly game,” as he called the negotiations—to be terminated. Diplomats such as the pro-Soviet British Ambassador Sir Stafford Cripps were enraged and disillusioned. They had tried for months to win Stalin over, little suspecting that the Soviet dictator, as it turned out, had bigger game in his cross hairs. Such talks with the British and French by now, of course, had become pointless if they were not from the start.

First came the Soviet–German Nonaggression Pact, signed on August 23. The secret protocol attached to it, whose existence was denied by the Soviets up to and during the Gorbachev period of putative *glasnost*, was designated top secret (*sovershenno sekretno*)—and for good reason. The Polish state was to be utterly destroyed. Its corpse was to be divided in two—Germany acquiring the western half and the Soviets, the eastern, but with the eastern demarcation line drawn to Soviet advantage considerably further west of the old post–World War I “Curzon Line.”

Furthermore, with Germany’s blessing, Moscow won its long-prized “spheres of influence” in the Baltic region as well as to the south bordering Rumania. (Previous attempts under Lenin in 1918 to sovietize the Baltics had failed; the three countries had been independent ever since; Lenin, earlier in 1917, had disingenuously acknowledged their independence.) This meant that soon Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania would be absorbed into the Soviet Union, thus increasing the number of Soviet republics to sixteen. Bessarabia, to which Stalin laid claim without any historical basis for it, likewise was

assigned to the Soviet sphere and was duly absorbed in 1940 to become the thirteenth Soviet republic, the Moldavian SSR. Thus, what publicly was touted as a “nonaggression pact” actually turned out to be a deal for joint Soviet-German carving up and occupation of foreign lands.

The pact was duly ratified by the rubberstamping Soviet “parliament,” the USSR Supreme Soviet, at its next meeting, on August 31. In his speech to the assembly, Molotov described the pact as being “in the interests of universal peace [that every sincere supporter of peace will realize].... It is a turning-point in the history of Europe, and not only of Europe.” Within a month that same speaker was to announce that Poland “has ceased to exist as a state.” Too, it was ironic that the text of the first Nazi-Soviet agreement, unlike the texts of other nonaggression treaties signed by Moscow with several other countries in the 1920s and 1930s, stated that the provisions should apply only in the case of *defensive* war. This suggested that if either Germany or the Soviet Union launched an offensive war against whatever other state, it would not affect their agreement.

The “booty” thus acquired by the USSR by 1940 via its deal with Germany was considerable: at least 130,000 square miles of land, counting Carpathian Ruthenia, where the Soviets were granted sovereignty. Populations in the new territories totaled about 16,000,000. Stalin himself had predicted the Soviet rationale for such seizures. Back in 1920 he had written:

Central Russia, that hearth of World Revolution, cannot hold out long without assistance from the border regions [former territories of the tsarist empire], which abound in raw materials, fuel, and foodstuffs. The border regions of Russia in their turn are inevitably doomed to imperialist bondage unless they undergo the political, military, and organizational support of the more developed Central

Russia.<sup>18</sup>

Before the next major Nazi–Soviet agreement was concluded in mid-September, Poland had been invaded by the Wehrmacht—on September 1. Two days later Ambassador Schulenburg agreed with Molotov that the Red Army should move into the territory designated as the “Russian sphere of influence.” However, the “sphere of influence” became annexed Soviet territory.

## **NAZI–SOVIET PACT DETAILS**

When the two sides got down to business in August, amid friendly toasts and extravagant ceremonies staged by the Soviets for the visiting German emissary, Joachim von Ribbentrop, two major agreements with their secret protocols followed:

- The Treaty of Nonaggression, known as the Nonaggression Pact, was signed on August 23, 1939. By its terms each side pledged not to attack or support an attack against and not to ally itself with any group of powers directed against the other contracting party. Each promised to consult the other on all questions of common interest. A secret protocol was attached to the pact that established the northern boundary for Lithuania, an independent, sovereign state, so that German and Soviet spheres of influence would be divided up between the two powers. Likewise with sovereign, independent Poland, its boundary was redrawn so that its western half at the rivers Narew, Vistula, and San would fall to Germany while the eastern portion would fall to the Soviet—details of which were to be settled later “by friendly agreement.” Germany declared her “disinterestedness” in the Soviet demand that Bessarabia fall under Soviet “influence” but had not intended that the Soviets would usurp Lithuania as they did in August 1940. (Between August 4 and August 6, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia became the

fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth union republics, respectively.)

- The Soviet-German trade agreement was signed on August 19 and then augmented and reaffirmed on August 29, and two days later the Wehrmacht invaded Poland. Soon from the USSR the Germans were receiving oil, phosphate, food, platinum, and other raw materials in exchange for German machines, machine tools, and munitions. Over 50 percent of Soviet foreign trade at this time was with Nazi Germany.
- By September 6, foreign observers noticed a diametrical shift in Soviet propaganda. It began to assume a friendly, pro-German stance while the Western powers, England, and France, Czechoslovakia, and others were scorned in the Soviet press. Later, when the German Army triumphantly entered the Polish capital of Warsaw, Moscow sent its hearty congratulations to Berlin.
- On September 9, the Kremlin indicated that Soviet military action against Poland would begin in “several days.” On September 14, Molotov asked Berlin to clarify when exactly it thought Warsaw would fall and Poland would collapse so that Moscow could say that Russian minorities would be “protected.” Then, on September 16, Molotov stated that Soviet military action in eastern Poland was “imminent.”
- On September 17, Stalin announced that the Red Army would cross the Polish frontier that day, which it did, occupying its (larger) half of Poland, whose boundary, as noted, was jointly drawn to Soviet advantage west of the Curzon Line. On September 20, Molotov proposed that the Soviet Union and Germany should finalize their joint Soviet–German destruction and occupation of Poland, or “Polish settlement,” as they termed it euphemistically, respecting the former Polish state that was now moribund. On October 1, 1939, Stalin sent Hitler a congratulatory telegram in which he stated: “The friendship of Germany and the Soviet



Union, sealed in blood, has the necessary foundation upon which to become long-term and solid.” In remarks to members of the Comintern on September 7, 1939, and in his address to the Politburo on the same day, Stalin observed with typical sangfroid:

The war is going on between the two groups of capitalist countries—namely, the poor ones vs. the rich ones for colonies, sources of raw materials, etc.—is for the redivision of the world, for world domination! We have no objection if they fight very hard and weaken one another. It’s not bad at all if at the hands of Germany the wealthiest capitalist countries are shattered and the capitalist system undermined.... We can maneuver and instigate one against the other so that they can fight against each other all the better. The nonaggression pact [with Germany] to a degree helps Germany. But at the next moment it instigates one against the other.<sup>19</sup>

- Thus followed on September 28 the second major Soviet–German agreement of 1939: the German–Soviet Boundary and Friendship Treaty. As with the first pact, this one was accompanied by a secret protocol respecting the status of Lithuania and other matters. The protocol also affirmed joint Soviet–German suppression of any hostile “agitation” within Polish society. This “suppression” took the usual harsh Soviet and German forms. The Katyn Forest Massacre of Polish officers by the Soviet NKVD troops is one such example. Like the very existence of the secret Nazi–Soviet protocols, the Katyn Massacre was vehemently denied by Soviet authorities (as well as by foreign fellow travelers) right up to and during the Gorbachev period after 1984.
- An apparently major spin-off for the Germans from the secret

protocols was use of a northern naval base on Soviet territory near Murmansk known as Basis Nord. The Germans were given the right to use the base facilities for their surface naval ships and submarines. As a specialist on Hitler's northern war has observed, "The securing of a Soviet base illustrated the ability of the Germans and Soviets to work together in accordance with the secret Protocols and to labor toward the implementation of their cozy agreement—the division of Europe."<sup>20</sup>

- Other cooperative Soviet–German talks and agreements followed in late 1939 and early 1940. The most important of these was the German–Soviet Commercial Agreement signed in Moscow on February 11, 1940. By this deal, the Soviets were to ship billions of Reichsmarks' worth of war-related materials and goods to the Germans. These were freighted to Brest-Litovsk, then offloaded from the wide-gauge Soviet railroad cars to freight cars on the narrower-gauge tracks and hauled west to Germany. In the first eighteen months following the signing of this important agreement, the following were shipped to the Germans:

1,000,000 tons of grain for cattle plus legumes valued at 120 million Reichsmarks;

900,000 tons of mineral oil costing about 115 million Reichsmarks; 2

00,000 tons of cotton costing approximately 90 million Reichsmarks;

500,000 tons of phosphates;

100,000 tons of chrome ore;

500,000 tons of iron ores;

300,000 tons of scrap metal and pig iron;

2,000 kilograms of platinum; and manganese ore, metals, lumber, rubber, and numerous other raw materials including especially grain.

- In addition the Russians granted Germany the right of transit for German traffic to and from Rumania, Iran, Afghanistan, and other countries of the Near and Far East. Russian freight rates for any foodstuffs purchased by the Germans from Manchukuo (under Japanese occupation) were reduced by 50 percent.

The goods received in return by the USSR from Germany as part of the trade deal did not substantially enhance the Soviets' defense posture. One such example is the German "gift" of the unfinished German battle cruiser, the *Lutzow* (whose design resembled that of the *Bismarck*). It had been towed through the Baltic Sea and Gulf of Finland to Leningrad. The work on the cruiser by German engineers, assigned to the project, continued for over a year until it was "interrupted" by the German attack of June 22, 1941. By the end of the war in 1945 the unfinished hulk of this German ship lay on the bottom of the gulf near Leningrad.

## CARVING UP THE WORLD

One of the most intriguing aspects of the Nazi–Soviet negotiations and discussions during 1940 were those that revolved about joint German–Soviet "carving up of the world" into zones of influence. Such vast concepts became part of the cooperative, "geopolitical" discussions that took place between Molotov and Ribbentrop in Berlin in November 1940. The deception in such talks on the German foreign minister's part only became known later. (For instance, on November 12, 1940, Hitler had issued his secret "Instruction No. 18" to prepare for war in the east "irrespective of the results yielded by these discussions [with Molotov in Berlin].")<sup>21</sup> After the war the secret documents revealed

Hitler's earlier decision in July 1940 to consider an attack on the USSR. Ribbentrop himself had been let in on this decision. Yet he presented Molotov with an invitation to join the Axis (that also included Japan), which Molotov dispassionately said "interested" him.

It was the Soviets who proffered a draft of a proposal for such a joint Soviet–Nazi redivision of the world. By its terms the USSR would become a formal ally of the three other Axis powers (the concept of Quadripartite Axis); Moscow proposed that this could become an additional "secret protocol." In the Soviet draft of this protocol, which was to become part of the Nazi–Soviet global carve-up, it was stated that Soviet "territorial aspirations center south of the national territory of the Soviet Union in the direction of the Indian Ocean." Later this was refined by both sides to read in the concluding phrase "south of Batum and Baku in the general direction of the Persian Gulf." Stalin obviously had his eye, as Peter the Great had 200 years before, on warm-water egress into the Indian Ocean. (Russia has historically resented being "locked out of the seas" by ice in the north, by Copenhagen guarding egress from the Baltic Sea to the west, and in the south where the Turkish Straits potentially block Russian exit from the Black Sea.)

## **NEW TENSIONS**

Such an agreement for a Quadripartite Pact including the Axis powers and Soviet Russia never materialized. It seems not to have been realized largely because of new demands put on the Germans by Moscow, the latter prioritizing these demands in the short term above the Soviet–Axis global carve-up of the long term. The new, barbed Soviet demands were mixed with complaints about German moves in closing ranks with Finland, which had been the victim of Soviet aggression from December 1939 to March 1940 and which sought German aid.

Molotov made other demands, especially concerning the Balkans. Among other things he stipulated that Bulgaria should be part of the Soviet security sphere. A Soviet military base should be built at the Dardanelles. Both Italy and Germany should assist the Soviet Union in realizing its goals in the Balkans and at the straits, especially if Turkey should resist Soviet pressures toward the latter. “Hitler had every reason to fear,” writes historian Ernst Topitsch,

that as soon as their present wishes were granted, the Soviets would be making new and even more dangerous demands.... Molotov’s further extravagant claims amounted to nothing less than an encircling movement from Poland to the Balkans—one which would have made a successful defense against [Soviet] attack from the east impossible, and which would reduce Germany’s role from representative to satellite.<sup>22</sup>

Dimitrov recorded in his diary on November 25 that Molotov had remarked to him, upon the latter’s return from Berlin, that “our relations with the Germans look lively but there exist serious differences between us.... We are pursuing a course of demoralizing the German troops that are occupying the various countries. But we’re going about this without shouting about it.” To which Dimitrov responded, “But won’t this interfere with Soviet policy [toward Germany]?” Molotov replied: “Of course. But it must be done anyway. We wouldn’t be Communists if we didn’t follow such a course. It’s only that it must be done quietly.”

The same day, Stalin told Dimitrov that in the event that Moscow concluded a mutual-assistance treaty with Bulgaria and helped it realize its own expansionist ambitions throughout the Balkans, “we

would not only not object if Bulgaria joined the Tripartite Pact [with Italy, Germany, and Japan]. We ourselves would join it.” This was the same date on which Molotov submitted his statement to the German ambassador on Soviet readiness to draw up a proposal for a Four-Power Pact that would include itself and the Axis powers—Molotov adding some provisos (concerning Soviet “rights” to the straits and other extravagant demands) that stunned Berlin.

In aggravating relations in this way, Stalin may have also perceived that Germany had entered a difficult phase in the post-May 1940 period of occupying part of France and coping with British military pressure in North Africa, the Balkans, and the Mediterranean. It appeared that by autumn 1940 Nazi Germany for all intents and purposes had reached the pinnacle of its expansionist power. It now had to face, Moscow may have perceived, a downhill peril in the form of a strengthened Britain and the looming danger from America. “Interventionist” Roosevelt’s reelection in November 1940 and the defeat of the “peace monger,” Wendell Willkie, only underlined this perilous future for Germany.

Topitsch notes that in his meeting with Molotov in November 1940 the *Führer* “let slip the remark that Germany was engaged in a life-and-death struggle with Britain”—an unusual admission on Hitler’s part. Molotov replied that “obviously Germany was fighting for her life [but that] Britain was fighting for her death.”

The Soviet–German relationship was further strained by German thrusting into the Balkans. By late 1940 Molotov and Stalin on their part were claiming this region as their own exclusive sphere of influence. Here Rumanian oil and German access to it were on Stalin’s mind, not to mention the strategic “lake” of the Black Sea and the geostrategic straits providing Soviet egress from the Black Sea.

In retrospect it appears that by 1940 both sides were well aware of

the other's ultimate war plans. As the new archival documents in Russia now show, Stalin was on to Hitler's *Drang nach Osten* war plans. Yet he evidently thought the Germans would not launch their attack against the USSR at least until they had defeated England in the ongoing air battle to conquer it and in their plans to attempt an invasion over the English Channel code named Operation Sea Lion, which was later tabled.

Stalin may also have been aware of Germany's relative unreadiness as of late 1940 to wage war in the east. By the time the Wehrmacht would be ready for further adventures, the Soviets, too, would be ready—at least by 1942 if not earlier—to overcome any such offensive threat from the Wehrmacht. The Soviets also were wondering, given a German two-front war, east and west—assuming the Germans had not yet brought England to its knees—how Hitler could possibly think he could conquer Soviet Russia, especially considering Russia's eleven-time-zone breadth as well as its actual and potential military might.

However, because of faulty military intelligence and in its overestimation of the debilitating effects of the military purges in the USSR of 1937–38, Hitler and his military intelligence entourage had grossly underestimated overall Soviet strength.<sup>23</sup> Such assumptions on Stalin's part—known, of course, to the Germans—fed the Soviet dictator's doubts about the presumed imminence of a German attack by mid-1941 (see chapter 6).

## **POST-SOVIET RUSSIAN HISTORY TEXTBOOKS**

Tangential to the above discussion are the latter-day treatments of the Nazi–Soviet agreements found in contemporary Russian history texts widely read at public and private secondary school levels and in the institutions of higher learning in today's Russia. One of the most salient post-Communist developments in that country—one that up to now has received little or no attention from Western observers—has

been “operation textbook-rewrite” taking place in the Russian Federation. One of the main topics discussed in the new texts is the period of Nazi–Soviet collaboration.

Throughout Russia today, high school and college textbooks are being entirely recast and rewritten. The old Soviet-period schoolbooks and the propaganda in them, except for in a few independent schools that choose to educate in Soviet ways, no longer are used in the public secondary schools and in the institutions of higher learning.

I have collected a half dozen of these new texts that have been published since 1991. As one reviews how the new volumes treat major, “sensitive” events related to Soviet foreign relations, Marxist-Leninist ideology, the Nazi–Soviet pacts and their secret protocols, the Great Fatherland War, the Cold War, and so on, it soon becomes obvious that a significant change—*though not in all respects or in similar ways in all of the new history textbooks* that I have examined—has come over Russian education. Russian society, the intellectual community, and the state now seek to educate the youth and college-aged men and women on subjects touching Soviet and post-Soviet history.

One of the examined history textbooks, unlike some of the others (see appendix 4) follows a much more conventional line on the run-up to the signing of the Nazi–Soviet pacts of spring and summer 1939.<sup>24</sup> The collegium of authors of this particular text, in fact, place the blame for the failure to reach common ground with England and France on collective-security arrangements with the USSR to oppose Hitler’s expansionism, namely, on those two Western countries. This textbook introduces events of this period in non-Soviet fashion as follows:

The prospect of a future war led the Soviet leadership to mobilize domestic resources for the rapid building of heavy



industry and a well-developed military-industrial complex which in turn further led to a harsher regime in the country.... As a result of the Bolshevik victory in Russia stabilizing the post-World War I correlation of forces in the international arena could not take place.... The rise of totalitarianism in both Russia and Germany signified their joint rejection of universal human values.... They became “genetically” united.

Continuing in this vein, the authors allege that the 1938 Munich appeasement policy of France and England, the passive “wait-and-see attitude” toward Hitler’s Germany assumed by both countries, and “above all, their attempt to use Germany against the Bolshevik threat merely increased Hitler’s appetite.... Munich was a gigantic miscalculation on the part of Western diplomacy and opened the door to military expansion of fascism bringing nearer the beginning of a ‘big war’ in Europe.” The Russian authors then claim that, given the appeasement policy and the West’s rejection of Soviet proposals for collective security, “a great change” in Soviet policy perforce resulted “as Maxim Litvinov was dismissed in favor of V. M. Molotov as Commissar of Foreign Affairs.”

Another textbook reviews, in objective fashion and without editorial comment, the contents, including the secret protocols, of the Nazi–Soviet agreements of late 1939.<sup>25</sup> The book makes no value judgment; it simply reports the seizure of territory by the USSR (Poland, the Baltic countries, etc.) under terms of the agreements and their protocols. Nor does the textbook make any reference to Soviet–German discussions in 1940 for dividing up regions of the world into zones of influence, German and Soviet. Instead, it mentions only that the Axis powers sought to “carve up the world.”

Although the Nazi–Soviet agreements shook the world, a few astute observers were not taken by surprise at the time. Some officials in Britain actually worried over the likelihood of such an alliance. Perhaps they were aware of that long tradition of Russian, and particularly Lenin’s own, admiration of Germany.

In retrospect it seems that London (and certainly not Washington, which had no leverage at all with the Kremlin) could not have prevented this Moscow–Berlin alliance—to be activated in war, present and future—no matter how forthcoming and accommodating the British were toward the Soviets in spring and summer 1939. In any case, there was precious little of that given democratic Britain and its establishment’s scorn for Soviet Communism. Moreover, it seems to me to be untenable to allege metahistorically that if London had been more accommodating toward the Kremlin during the negotiations in 1939 prior to the first Soviet–German pact of August, Stalin could have been “enticed” away from his tilt toward Nazi Germany. There were too many impediments for that to happen, not the least being Stalin’s own scorn for and suspicions toward the British.

It is even possible to argue, as some Russian and Western researchers and historians have, that Soviet talks with British envoys in Moscow were a mere Soviet game, a ploy or “inducement” to goad Hitler into coming to terms with Moscow in ways, as we saw, that were extremely favorable to the latter—at least in the short term. Even in the long term, by these agreements Stalin had won large amounts of territory from the Baltic south to the borders of Rumania that were to become part of the large bloc of post–World War II captive nations known as the Central, East, and Southeast European “People’s Democracies” along with the permanently established Soviet republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

It could be said that Stalin had, indeed, honored the famous “behest” made in his funeral oration over Lenin’s bier in January 1924 to carry

Soviet-style revolution abroad. In his memoirs, Stalin's No. 1 aide, Molotov, remarked to his interviewer, Felix Chuev, that Stalin, to be sure, had not done too badly in this respect.

## NOTES

The first epigraph is from German Foreign Minister Ribbentrop's message to the German ambassador in Moscow, August 14, 1939, in *Nazi-Soviet Relations 1939-1941* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 1948), p. 50.

The second is from *Nazi-Soviet Relations 1939-1941*, p. 51.

The third is from *Conspiracy and Aggression*, vols. 1-8, Office of the U.S. Chief Counsel of the Prosecution of Axis Criminality (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946).

The fourth is from *Nazi-Soviet Relations 1939-1941*, p. 125.

The fifth is from Svetlana Alliluyeva, *Tol'ko odin god* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 392.

The sixth is quoted in S. Z. Sluch, "Sovetsko-Germanskiye otnosheniya v Sentyabre-Dekyabre 1939 goda I vopros o vystupolenii SSSR vo vtoruyu mirovuyu voinu," *Otechestvennaya Istoriya*, no. 5 (2000), p. 55.

The seventh is quoted from the magazine *Free Europe*, October 4, 1940, reproduced in Robert Ivanov, *Stalin i Soyuzniki 1941-1945* (Smolensk: Rusich, 2000), p. 83. Ivanov is a historian working at the Institute of General History, Russian Academy of Sciences.

1 J. V. Stalin, *Otchetnyi Doklad na XVIII S"ezde Partii o Rabote Ts.K. VKP(b)* (Moscow: Ogiz, 1948), p. 8.

2 Quoted in Ernst Topitsch, *Stalin's War: A Radical New Theory on the Origins of the Second World War* (New York: St. Martin's Press,

1987), p. 26.

3 William L. Shirer has observed: “The first suggestion ... for a Nazi-Soviet nonaggression pact came from the Russians—at the very moment they were negotiating with France and Great Britain to ... oppose further German aggression” (*The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959], p. 521). The author fails to note, however, that the primary voice himself of collective security, Maxim Litvinov, served as one of the first major purveyors of Stalin’s wish to close ranks with the Nazis.

4 Anton Antonov-Ovseyenko, *The Time of Stalin: Portrait of Tyranny* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1980), p. 257. See also various editions of the post-Soviet weekly *Argumenty i Fakty*.

5 Mikhail Geller and Aleksandr Nekrich, *Utopia in Power* (New York: Summit Books, 1986), p. 322.

6 John Kolasky, *Partners in Tyranny* (Toronto: McKenzie Institute, 1990), p. 30. In sharp contrast to Rossi, Kolasky, Krivitsky, Tucker, Conquest, and a few others, defensist writer Gabriel Gorodetsky staunchly maintains that British, Polish, et al. recalcitrance toward Soviet overtures of collective security “drove the Russians into German arms” (*Grand Delusion: Stalin and the German Invasion of Russia* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999], p. 6). Retired Red Army officers General Oleg Sarin and Colonel Lev Dvoretzky write in their 1996 book, based on their research from the archives: “We have found documents that disclose quite another picture”—namely, that the initiative for Nazi-Soviet collaboration originated in Moscow, not Berlin, and manifested itself *well before* Soviet-British talks got under way in mid-1939 (*Alien Wars: The Soviet Union’s Aggressions against the World, 1919–1939* [Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1996], p. 41). To the ambassador of Turkey, on October 1, 1939, Stalin remarked: “We

don't have a mutual-assistance pact with Germany. But if the French and British declared war on us, we'd fight alongside the Germans" (quoted from archival documents in Sluch, "Sovetsko–Germanskiye otnosheniya v Sentyabre–Dekyabre 1939 goda i vopros o vystuplenii SSSR vo vtoruyu mirovuyu voinu," p. 55). Some historians claim that the British had contingency plans to bomb the Caucasian oil fields in retaliation for the Soviet war against Finland in December 1939. Soviet "neutrality" was indeed abandoned with the era of collaboration between the Kremlin and Berlin. "*Ours is a unique kind of neutrality. Without fighting, we acquire territory,*" declared A. A. Zhdanov with heavy irony to the plenum of the Leningrad Province Party Committee, November 20, 1940, amid laughter from the delegates.

7 Kolasky, *Partners in Tyranny*, p. 31, quoting W. G. Krivitsky.

8 Kolasky, *Partners in Tyranny*, p. 32; Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 197. Kandelaki was executed in the purges of 1937. Like others whom Stalin liquidated, he probably "knew too much."

9 Several authors give some of these particulars. Besides those already cited above are two especially useful sources: Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*; and Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above, 1928–1941* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1992). See the concluding chapter of the present book for a roundup of views.

10 Gerhard L. Weinberg, *Germany and the Soviet Union 1939–1941* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1954), p. 12. Weinberg's two excellent books, this one and his monumental *A World at Arms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), contain some of the best, most balanced analyses of prewar Soviet-German relations. Weinberg is critical of Gorodetsky's "defensist" position on Soviet actions in 1939–41.

- 11 R. C. Raack, *Stalin's Drive to the West 1938–1945: The Origins of the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 185.
- 12 Quoted in Jiri Hochman, *The Soviet Union and the Failure of Collective Security, 1934–1938* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 151–52.
- 13 On Litvinov's proposal, see the telegram from German Ambassador to Moscow Schulenburg, May 8, 1935, in *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918–1945*, ser. C, vol. 4, no. 78, p. 138.
- 14 Edvard Radzinsky, *Stalin* (New York: Doubleday Publishing Co., 1996), p. 440.
- 15 David Irving, *Goebbels: Mastermind of the Third Reich* (London: Focal Point Publishers, 1996), pp. 306–08. Irving unearthed Goebbels's unpublished diaries. Doubtlessly, the Soviets as well were aware of Hitler's attitude toward the fruitlessness of British overtures to Moscow.
- 16 A. Rossi, *The Russo-German Alliance August 1939–June 1941* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1951), p. 9. Note the word order used by Rossi in his title. Some historians note that the term *Nazi–Soviet* to describe the pacts of 1939–40 was deliberate on the part of whoever coined that word order in order to indicate that the initiative for making the Soviet–German alliance was Nazi rather than Soviet. Whether or not deliberate, this word order affectation began to be discarded by Russian historians around 1991. They began to employ the expression “Molotov–Ribbentrop pacts,” which has become the common expression used in Russian histories. It carries the implication that the primary impetus for the alliance had come from the Soviet, or “Molotov,” side.

17 Weinberg, *Germany and the Soviet Union 1939–1941*, p. 12.

18 Albert L. Weeks, *The Other Side of Coexistence: An Analysis of Russian Foreign Policy* (New York: Pitman, 1970), pp. 32–33. In his book *Grand Delusion*, defensist author Gorodetsky insists that Stalin's motive for annexing half of Poland was "to bring war to a hasty end before Russia too became involved in the conflict." Yet Stalin, following the dismemberment of Poland, immediately embarked on a policy of supplying Hitler with war-related matériel so that he could wage war more effectively against France, Britain, et al. See discussion of Dimitrov above. Far from wishing the war to stop, he hoped to keep it going.

19 See A. N. Yakovlev, ed., *1941 god. Dokumenty*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Mezhdunarodniy Fond "Demokratiya," 1998), p. 584; from Comintern General Secretary Georgi Dimitrov's diary. (For the full text, see appendix 3.)

20 Adam A. Claasen, *Hitler's Northern War: The Luftwaffe's Ill-Fated Campaign 1940–1945* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001), p. 11.

21 Topitsch, *Stalin's War*, pp. 86–87. This author quotes an English biographer of Churchill, E. Hughes, to the effect that Molotov (and Stalin) were actually encouraging Hitler to attack the USSR: "Molotov curtly demanded further concessions in the Balkan area and the Dardanelles, fully knowing that this would enrage the Fuehrer and so lure him to declare war on Russia" (*Stalin's War*, p. 88). The idea is that if Hitler were provoked into attacking the Soviets, the latter would not only easily defeat the aggressor but be seen as the victim of an "unjustifiable act of aggression." Russian researchers so far have remained silent about the possibility that it was Stalin's intention to provoke Hitler into "committing suicide" by attempting the

impossibility of invading, conquering, and occupying the huge USSR.

22 Topitsch, *Stalin's War*, pp. 84–85.

23 This is based on new research by Russian historians. Historian M. I. Mel'-tyukhov argues uniquely that the decimation of Red Army staff and line officers from the 1930s purges may have been exaggerated in terms of the purges' alleged crippling effect on the Red Army's overall war-fighting capabilities (*Upushchennyi shans Stalina Sovetskyi Soyuz i bor'ba za Yevropu 1939–1941* [Moscow: Veche, 2000], pp. 368–69).

24 M. Yu. Brant et al., *Rossiya I mir. Uchebnaya kniga po istorii* (Moscow: Vlados, 1994), pp. 173–75.

25 O. S. Soroko-Tsyupi, ed., *Mir v XX veke* (Moscow: Proveshcheniye, 1997), pp. 168–72. For other accents in the new Russian textbooks, see appendix 4.



# 5

## *Stalin Prepares for What Kind of War*

The decisive battle can be considered imminent when all the class forces hostile to us have become sufficiently entangled with each other. When they are fighting sufficiently with each other, and when they weakened each other sufficiently for the conflict to be beyond their strength.

—J. V. Stalin

But now, when our army has been reconstructed and has in its hands the technology for contemporary battle, now that we have become strong—now is the time to go from defense to offense. While securing defense of our country, we must act in an offensive way. We must switch over in our defense policy to offensist [*nastupatel* ‘*nikh*] actions. We need to instill in our indoctrination, our propaganda and agitation, and in our media an offensist spirit [*nastupatel* ‘*nom dukhe*]. The Red Army is a modern army. It is an army that is offensist.

—J. V. Stalin, May 5, 1941

I do not accept the idea that Stalin planned to attack Hitler in 1941 or perhaps in 1942. No document supports this theory.

—Oleg Kalugin, former chief of Soviet foreign intelligence

The existence of the General Staff's May plan [for launching a preemptive attack] and the start of implementing it does not exonerate the German attack on the USSR as an act of aggression.

—Pavel Bobylev, Russian military historian  
with the RF Ministry of Defense

In the preceding chapters, it is shown how Stalin and the Soviets seemingly intended to exploit war—namely, the “next war,” World War II—to spread communism into other countries. Lenin, Stalin, and their associates ascertained and often repeated in their writings that war breeds both destruction and discontent. Stalin said to the Seventeenth Party Congress on January 26, 1934: “[A new imperialist war] is sure to unleash revolution and jeopardize the very existence of capitalism in a number of countries as happened in the first imperialist war. [The imperialists] are ready to rush headlong into the abyss.”<sup>1</sup>

This war, Soviet officials explicitly said, would especially trigger revolution if the conflict were seen by the public to have been an unjust, merely interimperialist conflict aimed against the interests of the working masses. The working people are exploited as little more than cannon fodder by such warring capitalist imperialists. If it were an imperialist war against the “socialist citadel,” it automatically would be an unjust war. The Soviet war against such an aggressor, of course, would be a just war.

Yet even if a given big war seemed to be just—such as World War II fought against Fascist-Nazi-Japanese totalitarianism—Stalin thought the postwar period would be filled with exploitable chaos in Western Europe. This would stimulate revolutionary change of the Soviet type. This view was reflected, for example, in the Soviet economist Yevgeny Varga’s memorandum to Molotov in June 1947 at the time of East–West discussions over the Marshall Plan.<sup>2</sup>

## **THE SOVIETVIEW OF GLOBAL WAR**

When it started in late 1939, how did World War II appear to Stalin? The Nazi war against the West had begun in earnest in spring 1940. This followed the exchange of formal declarations of war on September 1, 1939, between Germany and France and Britain that in turn saw several months of the so-called phony war in the West. From the beginning, Stalin viewed the war as a strictly interimperialist affair. The capitalist-imperialist states would destroy each other while the Soviets remained neutral. They would observe and relish the destructive conflict from afar.

Nevertheless, during the twenty-one-month Nazi–Soviet honeymoon after August 1939, Stalin and Co. viewed the two, warring capitalist sides—at least to gauge by official Soviet propaganda—in strongly contrasting ways. Germany, the Soviets said, was the “victimized” country, whereas England and France were the “plutocratic” aggressors. Just as the war began on September 1, 1939, Stalin remarked to the leaders of the Communist International on September 7:

The war is going on between two groups of capitalist states (the poor vs. the rich ones in terms of colonies, sources of raw materials, and so on) for a redivision of the world and for world domination! We’re not opposed to the idea of their fighting among themselves very well. Nor would it be bad if

by the hands of Germany the position of the richest capitalist countries were shattered (in particular that of England). Hitler himself does not appreciate this fact nor does he wish to, but he is demolishing and undermining the capitalist system.... On our part we will maneuver while pitting one country against the other so that they can fight each other all the better. The nonaggression pact to a degree helps Germany. But in the next moment, it batters the other side.<sup>3</sup>

When Hitler entered Paris in May 1940, Stalin sent the German dictator a message congratulating him for his “splendid” victory. Soviet propaganda kept up a barrage of criticism against “imperialist” England as it was undergoing bombing attacks by Goering’s Heinkel bombers during the air war in 1940. During this period, too, domestically in the USSR everything German was extolled. Sergei Eizenshtein, the film and stage producer, was ordered to stage Wagner’s *Die Walküre* at the Bolshoi Theater; previously the proto-“Nazi” composer Wagner had been banned—*za-preshchën*—in the USSR. The anti-Fascist ideological cold war, in fact, was terminated in the USSR. The Germans reciprocated, if in a somewhat low-key, pro-Russian way.

Meanwhile, what kind of war were the Soviets themselves preparing for? As we have seen, Stalin had no doubt that the war would continue and spread and seemed to prefer that it did, thus weakening the Western capitalist powers. Sooner or later, he thought, the Soviets would enter the war, as he put it, at the right time in order to “tip the scales” to Soviet advantage. He appears also to have calculated, depending on ensuing events in the war, that he might have to compromise and pick up a few Western allies, including France, Britain, and the United States, in the event that Hitler was on the way to defeat (see chapters 6–7).

Moreover, in the Stalin regime's indoctrination and propaganda, soldiers and civilians were informed that the Soviets would enter the war only if attacked. This was the traditional "defensist" line in Soviet doctrine (as opposed to strategy). It respected the idea that a just war is a defensive war, not a preemptive, preventive, or offensive ("aggressive") war. In the context of just war, Red Army indoctrination never openly touted aggressive, offensive war from the Soviet side.

Yet Lenin, many times quoted to this effect in the military literature (even as late as the 1970s), was on record as having said that it does not matter which side starts a war when Soviet class or revolutionary interests are on the line: "The character of a war (whether reactionary or revolutionary) is not determined by who the aggressor was, or whose territory the enemy has occupied. It is determined by the class that is waging the war, and the politics for which this war is a continuation."<sup>4</sup> And he said: "If war is waged by the proletariat after it has conquered the bourgeoisie in its own country, and is waged with the objective of strengthening and extending socialism, such a war is legitimate and 'holy.'" He said too:

The victorious proletariat of this [one] country, after having appropriated the capitalist and organized socialist production, rises up against the remaining capitalist countries while also coming out with armed force against the exploiting classes and their states ... using the combined forces of the proletariat of the given country in the struggle against those states that have not yet become socialist. [This is] a stubborn struggle waged by socialist states against the remaining states.

To these Leninist views, Stalin added his own offensist language: "We

are for a liberating, anti-imperialist, revolutionary war despite the fact that such a war, as is known, is not only not free from the ‘horrors of bloodshed,’ but abounds in them.”

In using the above and other aggressive phraseology when discussing Soviet war aims—yet without publicly commending offensive or preventive war—Lenin and Stalin instructed that the coming wars between “proletarian” and “capitalist” states about which they spoke were not only inevitable, as they so often said. They would be wars that under certain circumstances would favor the interests of world revolution. Thus, it would seem, such “just wars” might be logically initiated by the proletarian side. On one occasion Lenin even proclaimed outright: “When we are strong enough, we shall take capitalism by the scruff of the neck.”<sup>5</sup>

The Red Army’s visible, *declaratory* military doctrine and indoctrination (operations and “operational art” were a different category, as we will see) mostly stressed the “just war” thesis. Namely, the defender, the Soviet Union, fights justly in order merely to defend itself against an attacking, capitalist-imperialist aggressor. In other words, the crime of initiating war against the Soviet “citadel of socialism” is presented as an onus lying solely with the aggressor. This idea ran like a red thread through Soviet military thought, with few exceptions. Yet it overlooks the fact the Soviets themselves could—and did—violate their own principle of defensiveness.

How seriously or sincerely, in fact, the Soviet leaders embraced these outwardly defensist, indoctrinational principles can be seen in the way they depicted the beginnings of wars, specifically the wars in which they participated as the unadmitted aggressors themselves—starting, say, with the war against Poland in 1920 or against Finland in December 1939. In both cases, the aggressor stigma was laid disingenuously on the other side, not the Soviet. (This double standard has cropped up many times in Soviet history. It was seen in later years

in the cases of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 and of Afghanistan in December 1979.) In these cases, however, the Soviets hardly acted as mere defenders (compare Lenin's prediction that the Polish War of 1920 could be converted into a revolutionary war against the West as noted in the introduction).

So obviously, in fact, were the Soviets aggressors in the Finno-Soviet "Winter War" (December 1939-March 1940) that the League of Nations took the unusual step of expelling the USSR from its membership. The world body's Lytton Commission, investigating the outbreak of that war, produced the incriminating evidence that the Soviets had actually shelled their own territory as a pretext for opening hostilities against Finland. They blamed the Red Army artillery attacks on themselves on Finland (much as the Nazis had done by faking "Polish attacks" against themselves before launching their war against Poland on September 1, 1939). Defensist propaganda and indoctrination of Red Army soldiers naturally would have made no sense if the Soviets openly declared to their soldiers and the world that they had been planning war against Finland and that they themselves had begun the hostilities.

Many years later, in the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, the same ruse was employed by Moscow to lay the blame for the conflict on the government in Kabul, which, in fact, had been taken by surprise by the December 25 attack. Before that, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 was explained to soldiers as a defense against a "counterrevolutionary" takeover of that Central European Communist-ruled state, a plot reflecting "activization of imperialism's machinations against socialist countries."

So, the Soviet record in practice is by no means clean as concerns the USSR's putative status as a merely defensist war fighter. The suspicion concerning Soviet motives in launching its attack against Finland was provoked by another factor: Soviet intentions and overt Soviet attempts

to sovietize that country. A “revolutionary government”—the Finnish Democratic Republic—to be led by Comintern official Otto Kuusinen was established by Stalin as the invasion proceeded.<sup>6</sup> A clandestine radio station and a Communist headquarters were set up on the Soviet–Finnish border to swing into action once the country was conquered. Documents confirming all this and more are now available from former-Soviet archives. They tell the story of outright Stalinist aggression in the name of “proletarian revolution.” But can we conclude that ideology led the way in this aggression? Or was Stalin merely preparing for what he considered to be an inevitable German attack on Soviet Russia at some future time? If the latter is true, then Finnish territory had an undeniable geostrategic military importance to the USSR.

Along these lines, an interpretation of these moves lingers abroad among some observers that all Stalin really had in mind vis-à-vis Finland was securing some crucial territory from that country in order to defend Leningrad against future attacks led by Germany. Yet for other authors it appears in retrospect that Stalin really sought to sovietize Finland, much as Outer Mongolia had been conquered and sovietized in 1921 together with the rest of the borderland nations annexed during the preceding and succeeding years under Lenin and Stalin. These were nations that had composed the former tsarist empire and which had sued for independence and had become independent since 1917.

Thus, Finland, too, it seems, was to be restored to the Soviet Empire as it had been under tsarist imperial control before 1917. Part of it was incorporated as the Karelo-Finnish Soviet Republic, the USSR’s sixteenth republic. Stalin, so runs one version, was prevented from achieving sovietization of the entire country of Finland—as he did later succeed in the case of each of the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—because he knew he could not conquer the plucky



Finns. He would only inherit a thorn-in-his-side civil war and endless anti-Soviet guerrilla warfare. A compromise, the Soviet–Finnish peace treaty of March 1940 that ended the bloody war—bloody especially for the Soviet side—appeared to show that Stalin had been chastised as far as Finland was concerned.

As to Soviet instigation of past wars as a means of sovietization, not surprisingly military reference books destined for soldiers' libraries—such as the *Soviet Military Encyclopedia*, including the two editions up to the latest in 1980—never admit to any such Soviet instigation of any past conflicts. To admit otherwise, it seems, would be to upset Soviet doctrine on “just war” and undermine Soviet efforts at indoctrinating its soldiers to defend the Soviet Union, not expand its borders imperialistically.

Yet Soviet military writings published even in the dangerous thermonuclear age after 1970 still carried “offensivist” Lenin quotes of the type reproduced above. Even that kind of war was not totally unwelcome, official Soviet statements claim, because it would destroy once and for all world imperialism. Is this mere ideological posturing? Possibly it is. In any case, here are relevant Soviet statements along these lines whose meaning readers can ponder for themselves:

It is disorienting to think that there can be no victors in nuclear war ... a thermonuclear war would be fatal to capitalism ... Marxist-Leninist teaching on war and politics is applicable to the nuclear age.

The Marxist-Leninist definition of the essence of war is fully applicable to nuclear world war. [The root cause of such a war] would be the capitalist system and imperialist policy. [Consequently,] as long as war exists in the world, it

always ... will continue to be the continuation of politics by violent means [in which] the complete victory of socialism throughout the whole world is inevitable.

Marxist-Leninists decisively reject the assertions of certain bourgeois theoreticians who consider nuclear missile war to be unjust from any point of view.<sup>7</sup>

## **DEFENSIST/OFFENSIST CONTROVERSY**

As canvassed briefly in the introduction to this book, Russian military and civilian historians together with a few Western foreign specialists have in recent years taken up the issue as to whether Stalin was planning to wage offensive war against Germany and, in fact, all of Europe after he closed the deal with Hitler in August 1939 (this issue is explored at greater length in the conclusions in chapter 8). Why is this issue important? The German war against the USSR took upward of thirty million Soviet lives. It wrought incredible havoc on European Russia. Some of the battles were horrendously brutal. One recalls, for instance, the 900-day German siege of Leningrad that extracted a monstrous sacrifice by the Soviet people in the starvation and death of upward of two million citizens—the price paid for the defense of the “second city” of the Soviet Union during the war years 1941–44. Even Shostakovich’s dramatic and tragic *Leningrad* symphony could not capture the terrible suffering of the city’s population. Men, women, and children—everyone, in fact—were fighting the “Great Fatherland War” (or “Great Patriotic War,” as it is sometimes translated in the West) there and everywhere. (The bloody Russian war against Napoleon had gone down in history as the “Fatherland War” and, ironically, likewise opened in late June—on June 21, in fact, 130 years earlier. Stalin added Great to the war fought against the Germans.)

To many Russians, it appeared that the war was fought not for Stalin, communism, or the Nomenklatura. Its purpose was to defend Mother Russia and to avenge the Nazi atrocities committed against soldiers and civilians and the physical destruction caused by the invaders. As former Politburo member A. N. Yakovlev has said: “My life at the front [in World War II] was over. We had believed in what we were fighting for. We had shouted out, ‘For the Motherland! For Stalin!’ But we didn’t ponder, why ‘for Stalin’? ‘For the Motherland’ made sense. But why ‘for Stalin’?”<sup>8</sup> So, fifty-five years after the end of the 1941–45 war, to claim that the war had not been one waged purely in defense of the country in repulsing an aggressor but, rather, as Molotov suggests in his later interviews, a war of an expansionistic type that led to the “extension the frontiers of socialism” would seem intolerable, a gross insult to the memory of the millions of Soviet victims in that war.

## **OFFENSIST WAR PLANS**

Yet no less an ex-Soviet official than the Soviet officer in charge of indoctrination in the Soviet armed forces in the 1970s, Dmitri Volkogonov, erstwhile widely read, Soviet-period indoctrinator-author of Marxist-Leninist-slanted tracts on the army and war, himself began the process of “revision” in the history of that war. Two other former Red Army senior officers, General Oleg Sarin and Colonel Lev Dvoretzky describe the Nazi–Soviet pact and Stalin’s machinations as follows:

The Molotov-Ribbentrop pact set up a vicious partnership between Stalin and Hitler. It gave the two dictators a free hand in determining the destinies of other peoples, allowing them to occupy other countries’ territories.... The Soviet mass media in those days not only persuaded our people that the occupation of foreign territories by the Soviet Union was

necessary and just, but excused the combat actions of Hitler's Germany against democratic nations, depicting [these actions] as defending the German people against aggression. Thus is the nature of propaganda. At the same time, the USSR was supplying Germany with many things necessary for aggression against her neighbors.... Hypocritically smiling at each other and keeping up false pretenses, each had diabolical ideas relative to each other. Hitler was preparing for "Operation Barbarossa," the invasion of the Soviet Union, and Stalin was preparing a preventive strike at Germany.

In his 1992 biography of Stalin, *Triumph and Tragedy*, Volkogonov writes explicitly in book 2, chapter 1, that Stalin's war plans by no means were exclusively "defensist" (*oboronitel'niye*). On the contrary, Volkogonov writes, operation plans for waging that war, already developed in May 1941, point in offensist (*nastupatel'niye*) directions vis-à-vis the Germans. The sources he used were recently disclosed military archive materials to which he had readier access, as an ex-Soviet general, than others at that time.<sup>9</sup> (Soviet physicist Andrei D. Sakharov had made the same accusation back in the 1960s.) Whether it can be concluded that by "offensive war" Stalin and the military or a Russian historian like Volkogonov possibly meant *preemptive* or *preventive* war will be assessed later (see chapter 8).

In the year 2000, a stunning article appeared in the main Russian military historical journal. In a sense it is the climax if not bottom-line, to date at any rate, summation of several articles appearing in Russian historical journals, civilian and military, during the past five years. Yet the discussion, as the author of this article himself commends, should and will continue.

Running over 15,000 words and written by Pavel N. Bobylev, candidate in historical science in the Russian Federation's Ministry Defense Institute of Military History, the long, well-sourced article is unusual in the way it assumes a generally pro-offensivist line on Stalin's war plans as revealed from new documents unearthed by Bobylev and other, fellow Russian researchers such as Mikhail I. Mel'tyukhov of the All-Russian Scientific Research Institute of Document and Archive Affairs (VNIIDAD). Some of these documents had just been published in 1998 in the big, two-volume set of primary sources titled *The Year 1941. Dokumenty*, under the editorship of A. N. Yakovlev.<sup>10</sup> Other documents have come from the Presidential Archive as well as from secret police and army archives accessed by Bobylev, Mel'tyukhov, and others.

After Bobylev's introductory apologia that more evidence needs to be forthcoming to reach an absolutely definitive conclusion on the nature—whether essentially offensivist or defensivist (*nastupatel'nyi* or *oboronitel'nyi*)—of Stalin's war plans, Bobylev strikes off these following points.

The “*preemption*” option: In the General Staff document of May 15, signed by People's Commissar of Defense “S. Timoshenko” and Chief of the General Staff “G. Zhukov,” titled “Considerations on a Plan for Strategic Deployment of the Armed Forces in the Event of War with Germany and Its Allies,” found in Historical Archive and Military-Memorial Center of the General Staff, this statement appears: “*Preempt [upredit'] the enemy by deploying against and attacking the German Army at the very moment when it has reached the deployment stage but is still not able to organize its forces into a front or coordinate all his forces.*”<sup>11</sup> In the section of the May 15 strategic “Considerations” where Timoshenko and Zhukov recommended concrete measures to Stalin to realize their preemptive strike, the plan reads: “*In order to carry out the above-proposed plan, it is necessary*

*to carry out in timely fashion the following measures without which it is impossible to deliver a sudden strike against the enemy whether from the air or on the ground.*” Thence follows exhaustive details for concealed mobilization and concentration of troops.

On this and other similar offensist notes discovered in Stalin’s prewar strategy, according to the unearthed documents, Bobylev makes a number of startling observations, considering his position within the official Ministry of Defense institute. He notes that when the “Considerations” document was first disclosed—after some Russian military historians had denied its very existence—it unleashed a volley of overdue discussion among Russian historians.

Bobylev starts his own discussion by noting that the “Russian-defector” historian, the former Soviet military intelligence (GRU) senior officer, Viktor Suvorov (i.e., Viktor Bogdanovich Rezun), now living and writing in London, managed to distort and exaggerate whatever official, as opposed to the more recent archival documents, he employed in writing his 1992 book, first published in Russian and titled *Ice-Breaker*. (Actually, Suvorov uses no recently disclosed archival documents.) This is a book that strongly indicts Stalin for “starting” World War II. In one of his books, *Den’ M (M-Day)*, Suvorov goes so far as to claim that Soviet mobilization—hence, the “M” in his title—began on the very day after the Nazi–Soviet pact was signed, August 23–24, 1939.

Yet, as Bobylev observes, Suvorov-Rezun, whom he characterizes as a “hostile, unsavory person resorting to betraying his own country by making it responsible for causing the German aggression against it,” is not the first Russian researcher to suggest that Stalin’s war plans were offensist. That author, Bobylev notes, was ex-General Volkogonov, in charge of military indoctrination under the Soviets. In 1989, three years before the appearance of *Ice-Breaker*, he developed that very insight from the above document that he had examined. Volkogonov describes

the document, “Considerations,” as a “shrewd and politically extraordinary, crucial proposal.”

Bobylev thereupon canvasses the distortions that he alleges have been made concerning the General Staff document. He criticizes the well-known military historian Yu. A. Gor’kov for having in earlier discussions abridged or otherwise contorted the May 15 “Considerations.” Its offensist edge is not clearly conveyed by Gor’kov, Bobylev alleges. He further rebukes those authors who have claimed that Stalin did not formally approve of the General Staff’s offensist plan because there is no proof that he even saw it. To this Bobylev replies that the extreme secrecy of the plan, and the notoriousness of its offensist nature, precluded any outward recognition of Stalin’s approval of the plan. Besides, he adds, Stalin was in the habit of receiving and reading documents while refusing to show formal recognition of that fact—again, for reasons of secrecy or perhaps from Stalin’s own way of keeping his “fingerprints” off sensitive documents. (This habit shows up in the many “unsigned” death warrants issued by Stalin to his enemies during the purges of the 1930s.) He also notes that Marshal Zhukov, in one of his interviews, admitted the existence of the document, though he shied away from making any further comments about it—as one Russian researcher suggests, because Zhukov knew, of course, that that reconstruction of Soviet war plans was forbidden by the Communist Party.

## **TWO STALIN SPEECHES, MAY 5, 1941**

As to Stalin’s secret speech to graduates of the military schools and his remarks at a reception thereafter, on May 5, 1941, the stenographic text of this significant speech was for the first time published very recently in its entirety (I have translated it in appendix 1). It is found in book 2 of the Yakovlev collection of documents, *1941 God. Dokumenty (The Year 1941: Documents)*. A partial text had been discussed in academician Yuri N. Afanas’iev’s edited 1996 volume, *Drugaya voina*

1939–1945 (*The Other War 1939–1945*), a collection of articles written by Russian military historians.

In his secret address followed by his pithy remarks at the reception for the graduates in the Grand Kremlin Palace just weeks before the German invasion, Stalin had reversed his and Molotov's allegations of 1939–40 that England and France were the principal "instigators of a new war." Germany was now Potential Enemy No. 1, Stalin declared. It had become the main "warmonger." *Podzhigatelyi voyny*—warmongers—was the epithet that had been reserved at that time by Soviet propaganda for France and England, not Nazi Germany.

Stalin declared that an end must be put to the perception of "German invincibility" that, he complained, resonated throughout the Soviet Union and abroad. Above all, he announced, the time had come to organize matters in troop preparation, indoctrination, and procurement of modern arms and deployment of troops along the western frontier in order to prepare the Red Army to wage "*offensive war*"—Stalin's words. (I will consider later the meaning of *offensive war*.)

The Stalin speech was immediately followed by a reception for the Red Army graduates. Here Stalin elaborated on his earlier speech. The full document, reproduced in the Yakovlev collection, shows Stalin making these telling remarks (for the translation into English, see appendix 2; emphases added):

I wish to make a correction [in what a general-major of tank troops has said during his toast].

Our policy of peace keeps the peace for our own country. A policy of peace is a good thing. Up to now, up to this time, we have pursued a line of defense [*oborona*] until such the time as our army was rearmed and was supplied with the modern means of waging war.



But now, when our army has been reconstructed and has in its hands the technology for contemporary battle, now that we have become strong—*now is the time to go from defense to offense.*

While securing defense [*oborona*] of our country, *we must act in an offensive way* [*deistvovat' nastupatel'nyy obrazom*]. *We must switch over in our defense policy to offensist* [*nastupatel'nykh*] *actions. We need to instill in our indoctrination, our propaganda and agitation, and in our media an offensist spirit* [*nastupatel'nom dukhe*]. *The Red Army is a modern army. It is an army that is offensist.*

Follow-up commentaries on Stalin's speech and remarks at the reception were included in various speeches or reports, some of them secret, delivered in succeeding days and weeks by such top officials as Molotov, Zhdanov, Malenkov, and Shcherbakov (secretary in charge of propaganda) and by Generals Alexander Vasilievsky and Nikolai Vatutin. In their glosses on the May 5 Stalin speech and the Leader's remarks, these subordinate party officials and senior military officers, always referring to *Khozain* (The Boss), Stalin, by name, touted the Stalin-dictated "military policy of conducting offensive actions." Among other offensist phrases, they repeated the aggressive declaration of Lenin's: Any war fought against capitalist powers by the USSR "is a just war, *no matter which side starts the war*" (emphasis added). Such observations as these were made publicly during the one-month run-up period just prior to the German invasion. Historian V. A. Nevezhin, of the Russian Academy of Sciences, who specializes in ideology, has devoted his latest book—*The Syndrome of Offensive War*—to exploring the offensist indoctrination of Red Army soldiers in this period.<sup>12</sup>

Bobylev further notes that at the end of 1938, Chief of the General

Staff Shaposhnikov at that time had addressed the People's Commissariat of Defense as follows: "The whole system of our preparations for war in 1939 must not be basically defensist [*oboronitel'niye*] but must contain the concept of offensive operations. Only a certain amount [*postol'ko-poskol' 'ko*] of attention should be paid to defense [*oborone*]." Yet Shaposhnikov later recommended that only covering forces be deployed in the new western territories acquired after 1939. Instead, offensive forces were deployed there—fortunately for the Germans. For if, in the two years preceding Barbarossa, strong defenses had been built along the new frontier—perhaps including a fortified line resembling the old "Stalin Line" constructed along the 1938 border to the east—the Wehrmacht likely would have been stopped in its tracks. Former Red Army Major-General Petr Grigorenko, who commanded troops in initial battles following June 22, 1941, complained in his memoirs that "there could be only one reason for [the heavy deployment of Red Army offensive troops in the west], namely, that these troops were intended for a surprise offensive. In the event of an enemy attack, these troops would already be half encircled. The enemy would only need to deal a few, short blows at the base of our wedge and then encirclement would be complete."<sup>13</sup> Encirclement became the hellish fate for many units of the Red Army in the opening weeks and months of the war.

Bobylev comments that up until these recent archival document disclosures were made concerning Stalin et al.'s emphasis on taking the offensive, "ideological blinders" in the Soviet as well as in the post-Soviet period distorted any discussion or speculation in Russia concerning Stalin's war plans. Such discussion fell into the "propaganda trap," as he puts it, of emphasizing the putatively defensist rather than the authentic offensist thrust of Soviet military planning on the eve of the German invasion. (The same accusation is directed at certain Western writers as well, who had become suspicious

of the claims of the “ringer,” the émigré Viktor Suvorov, who had not had access to the new documents.)

“Thus, it is not surprising,” Bobylev concludes, that nothing substantive was written about the May 15 “Considerations” or Stalin’s May 5 speech and his remarks at the graduates’ reception “either in the academic journals or in memoir literature.” Neither have Western scholars objectively discussed these disclosures, assuming the documents were at their disposal. But since these revelations, he hastens to say, the matter is being “deeply researched.”

## **RED ARMY CONCENTRATIONS ON THE EVE OF JUNE 22**

As to recent disclosures about the details of Red Army deployments on the eve of June 22, 1941, Bobylev provides, as some Russian military historians did before him, a number of technical details buttressing the idea that Stalin harbored preemptive war plans against the Germans. He dismisses the contention made by certain “apologists” that the absence of documentation at the grassroots level in the Red Army (i.e., among ordinary Soviet junior officers, noncoms, and enlisted personnel) substantiating such offensive Soviet Red Army war planning means that no such plans existed. As he points out, the plans were too secret to reveal to the ranks. In the same manner on the German side, Bobylev notes, Operation Barbarossa likewise was kept from line officers in the Wehrmacht for the same reason: to protect the absolute secrecy of the planned surprise attack, the knowledge of which was confined to a mere handful of officials.

As some Russian historians (including some in the West) had already noted, the author discusses how Stalin and his General Staff officers made crucial mistakes in the way Red Army forces were ordered by Headquarters in spring 1941 to be deployed in such great numbers so near the front lines without sufficient defensive measures having been

taken—because essentially the Red Army’s tactics were offensivist, not defensive. Moreover, the dangerous gambit of deploying so near German lines in order to be able to jump off to wage offensive war, or a “preemptive strike,” was designed before what Stalin had called in his reception speech “modern weaponry” was actually in the hands of the deployed Red Army and Red Air Force. Another factor in bringing about the catastrophe of June 22, notes the Russian military historian, is that it appeared that Stalin and Red Army staff officers did not expect a German move at least until mid-July. (There is some evidence that Stalin projected the date even further into the future.)

## NEGLECT OF RETREAT

The anathema of retreat afflicting Red Army war planning was the other side of the offensivist coin. In spring 1941 no concerted preparations were made for tactical, let alone strategic, withdrawal (retreat) if the Red Army were taken by surprise or at some point were overwhelmed by the enemy. To Stalin’s way of thinking, inherited from Lenin, “retreating”—*otstupleniye*—was virtually a crime. The professional military thought twice about even using the words *otstupleniye* or *otkhod* (meaning “withdrawal,” a slightly more acceptable term).

The very wording of the definitions of *offense and defense* in the post–World War II *Military Encyclopedic Dictionary* differs significantly. Offense is defined as the “basic [*osnovyi*] form of [Soviet] military actions.” *Defense* is defined simply as a “form of military activities.”<sup>14</sup> The extreme opprobrium attached by the Stalin regime to the idea of “retreating” was proved when some of the Soviet armies were forced to withdraw during the opening days and weeks of the German onslaughts of Barbarossa. Stalin had senior officers of such retreating units in some cases executed for ordering tactical withdrawals. Rank-and-file soldiers, or *vanki* (GIs), would themselves be shot as well (according to soldier eyewitnesses, in the back of the

head) if and when political commissars or NKVD officers, both of whom were distributed within the ranks, caught them retreating, let alone defecting to the enemy. Hundreds of thousands of soldiers and civilians actually did defect in the opening days and weeks of hostilities when they regarded the invading Germans as “liberators.” The estimated number of Red Army deserters at that time has been put at 630,000.<sup>15</sup>

## **EXPECTED TIME AND PLACE OF THE GERMAN ASSAULT**

A profound error furthermore was made by the General Staff, and evidently by Stalin personally, in anticipating where the main German onslaught would be made. It was assumed it would be centered in the *southwest against Ukraine* from German positions in Rumania. The Soviet military calculated, with Stalin’s concurrence, that a German blitzkrieg against the most likely prime target, the oil- and industry-rich region, was to be expected. “Without these most important, vital resources fascist Germany will not be able to wage a lengthy war, large-scale war,” Stalin told his General Staff, whereupon he ordered the deployment of no less than twenty-five Red Army divisions to the area.

Yet, though it possessed reasonably good roads and railroad lines, the southwestern sector has an abundance of rivers. Their crossing would slow down the German advance. For these and other reasons, Hitler adhered to the “northern” option for attack. In addition, he regarded his Rumanian and Hungarian allies to the south as undependable. In reality, on and after June 22, the blows—in three main thrusts—fell simultaneously all along the 2,500-mile north–south line, including even at the least expected (by the Soviets) places, for example, just north and south of the obstacle-ridden Pripet Marshes located between Poland and the USSR.

*As to the time of attack*, as perceived by the Soviets, in past wars or battles a preparatory period of time—ten days to two weeks, depending on circumstances—had preceded the actual opening of hostilities, Bobylev notes. This was true in particular of the eves of German- and Soviet-fought wars or battles up to then. There was always a “revving-up” time of detectable first-echelon or covering-troop deployment plus other signs of mobilization extending to the rear that signaled immediate war while giving the defending side time to prepare. So the Soviets in effect were caught by surprise because they did not realize that there would be no such “gift” of an obvious revving-up period indicated by the German side.

Even a declaration of war or an ultimatum can provide some extra time to prepare. Of course, it was disingenuous of Molotov to have complained to German Ambassador Schulenburg in the foreign minister’s office in Moscow on the morning of the fateful German invasion that the German High Command had violated “commonly accepted” military principles by failing to issue a formal declaration of war before opening hostilities. The Soviets themselves, after all, never made any such declarations in starting their own wars—usually begun on Sunday rest days, as the Germans had started their own June 22 invasion. The irrelevancy of declarations of war, moreover, is recognized in Soviet military literature. Writings state that modern, twentieth-century conflicts do not begin with declarations of war. Reference works such as the *Soviet Military Encyclopedia* cite this truism, in fact, to demonstrate the importance of concealment and surprise. Exploiting the element of surprise has always been a Red Army standby going back to the earliest phase of Soviet military thought. Declarations of war emasculate such plans.

## **SECRECY, CONCEALMENT, AND SURPRISE**

Both elements—concealment and surprise—in achieving mastery in the very opening phase of hostilities were, in any case, recognized and

appreciated by both German and Soviet military planners and theoreticians long before the war started in 1941 or in the first phase in 1939. This was basic to both armies' operational art, especially as both anticipated waging mainly offensive actions.

The Soviet leadership kept abreast of—and misled by—the Wehrmacht's ceaseless output of misleading disinformation and dissimulation in the weeks just before Barbarossa. In this period the Germans tried to fool the Soviets into thinking that the large deployments of German troops along Russia's western borders were merely in preparation for their later deployment to the north against the British. Some of the input of Soviet intelligence to Moscow, in reporting this farfetched German disinformation, was described by Soviet agents *as* disinformation when they conveyed it through secret channels. But the warning that it might be *dez* (i.e., *dezinformatsiya*, disinformation) fell on deaf ears when it reached the highest Soviet officials.

On the Red Army side Soviet commanders likewise practiced tight concealment of their offensive operational plans. They sent sealed brown envelopes containing the top-secret orders to front commanders to initiate the attacks at some future time under the rubric "*Groza*" ("Storm"). The commanders were to unseal the envelopes and open hostilities only when so directed from Headquarters (*Stavka*) in Moscow or from an army command post.

A documentary film, produced in 1999 under the auspices of Films for the Humanities and Sciences (titled *Stalin and Hitler: Dangerous Liaisons*), researched and written by a team of French and Russian historians, provides eyewitness interviews with ex-Red Army soldiers who were on the Western Front in June 1941. They provide evidence of secret Red Army preparations for waging offensive war.

Marshal Ivan Kh. Bagramyan admitted after the war that before June

22, 1941, “we had learned mostly to attack. We had not paid enough attention to such an important matter as retreat. Now we had to pay for that failing.” It is not true to suggest, moreover, as some observers might, that no army’s field manual or instructions to commanders and the rank and file are about to speak of “retreat.” No army likes to admit of such a thing, someone might claim. However, the fact is that they do speak of the necessity of retreat—and that includes army field manuals of most countries then and now, including those of the U.S. Army. The word they use may be *withdrawal*. But it nevertheless amounts to retreat. Here and there Soviet military literature of the 1920s and 1930s contained references to planned withdrawals. One of the outstanding writers about the mixture of withdrawal and attack is G. S. Isserson. (Pre-June 1941 Soviet military writings and post-World War II Soviet military reference books neglect discussion of Isserson’s principles. The Brezhnev period *Voyennyi Entsiklopedicheskyi Slovar’* [*Military Encyclopedic Dictionary*] omits even a short biographical note on Isserson.)

Such secrecy about offensive war planning was a most sensitive point with Stalin. The dictator went out of his way to conceal any Soviet plans or preparations for launching an attack. He would sternly warn and reprimand, if not severely punish, any commander who gave the slightest indication to the enemy of Soviet intentions to launch preemptive attacks lest it provide an excuse to the Germans to attack first. All mobilizations and deployments were to be concealed and carried out at night. No anti-aircraft fire was to be directed at any overflying German spotter planes or other German aircraft. Such violations of Soviet airspace, of which there were many in the weeks before the invasion, were to be ignored and were ignored lest the Germans be “instigated” into attacking because of such “incidents.” On the German side, concealment of the opening blitzkrieg invasion against the Red Army, as previously noted, was hidden even from Wehrmacht line commanders as well as from close aides to Hitler



(exceptions were Goebbels, Goering, Ribbentrop, and a few others plus some in the General Staff).

On the German side the secrecy surrounding Barbarossa was strictly observed right up to the early dawn hours just after midnight on June 22. The Germans planned their attack relatively early after midnight—in other words, in near semidarkness. In the extreme northern latitudes of Russia in summer the dawn light begins to show by 2 or 3 A.M. One tends to forget that almost all of former Soviet Russia lies *north* of the latitude of Minneapolis–St. Paul. A German code signal called “Dortmund” was flashed to the front instructing Wehrmacht front commanders to jump off and open hostilities against the exposed Red Army forces.

## **BLAME STALIN OR THE MILITARY?**

The writer Bobylev observes that by placing so much blame solely on Stalin in traditional, official accounts of the opening of the war for mistakes made at the very beginning of hostilities, the crucial miscalculations meanwhile made by the professional Army staff officers, such as Zhukov, Timoshenko, Vasilievsky, et al., have been covered up. As he notes, the cover-up had an obvious motivation: What living, postwar staff officer, he asks, would ever admit to such misjudgments, given the tragedy of June 22 and its catastrophic aftermath? He alleges that Zhukov himself engaged in such distortions in interviews, for example, with veteran Soviet-period Russian military writer Viktor A. Anfilov.

In this context the Russian military writer in the RF Ministry of Defense Institute mounts a strong criticism of Marshal Zhukov. In his latter-day memoirs (in the 1960s and 1970s), the marshal, contends Bobylev, had concocted a mainly self-serving, self-exonerating version of what actually occurred in mid-1941 on the eve of the war. Zhukov’s heavily edited if not strongly slanted memoirs simply overlook the

numerous miscalculations made by the Soviet military personnel themselves and the way the military had evidently misled Stalin, who, of course, was not guiltless either. An important reason for their miscalculations, he insists, stemmed from Red Army emphasis on offensiveness to the detriment of taking defensive measures.

Meanwhile, by contrast, some Western specialists on the period have adopted the “Khrushchev line.” They allege that Stalin was solely to blame for the tragedy of the opening months of the war. A consensus of sorts has formed that Stalin was even “paralyzed” by the news of the German invasion and so on (see chapter 6). Later, throughout the Brezhnev period of the 1970s, when Gensek Brezhnev himself was being extravagantly extolled as a “brilliant commander” in the Great Fatherland War, becoming a laureate of the prized Marshal’s Star, Marshal Zhukov himself was depicted as a latter-day Kutuzov or Suvorov of historic Russian military fame. Military heroism was a standby of the Brezhnev period. In the 1960s and 1970s bronze statues of Zhukov, such as the famous one in Moscow, were erected showing the marshal mounted heroically on a steed. The Zhukov memoirs became bestsellers as they went through several editions, some more or less candid than others. Yet all of Zhukov’s memoirs place most of the blame for the midsummer 1941 miscalculations on Stalin alone.

On his part, writing without apparent qualms from his academic position within the post-communist Ministry of Defense institute in Moscow, Bobylev insists that Soviet military memoirists in many cases simply mislead their readers—among whom, one may presume, are a number of Western writers who have relied in their books, perhaps too heavily, on official Soviet materials or officers’ boilerplated memoirs. Many of these memoirists convey the idea that the soldiers were largely blameless for any mistakes made in the war, especially for the way it began so tragically.

## RUSSIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCE HISTORIAN'S FINDINGS

Examination of Stalin's actions in the period 1939–41 is not confined to military historians. At the Institute of Russian History of the Russian Academy of Science a number of scholars have been investigating the matters discussed in this chapter. One such historian is Dr. Vladimir Nevezhin, a specialist on the history of Soviet diplomacy as well as Soviet propaganda.

In his latest book, *Sindrom Nastupatel'noi Voyny (The Syndrome of Offensive War)*, Nevezhin makes the following inferences from his research into archive material and other sources:

- By the end of the 1930s, the Bolshevik leadership recognized the “il-lusoriness,” as he puts it, of the Soviet pursuit of world revolution as a means of liquidating the “capitalist encirclement.” Stalin began to think in more pragmatic terms. He began to view offensive actions by the Red Army against certain countries as a military, “world-revolutionary cause.” The several invasions of neighboring countries in the period 1939–40 thus were characterized in Soviet propaganda as “revolutionary crusades.”

The Soviet armed expansion against Poland in September 1939 was treated as a “just, offensive war for the liberation of blood-brotherly White Russians (Byelorussians) and Ukrainians, who were among the population of Carpathian Ruthenia seized by the Soviets in 1940.” The same expansionist spirit, he writes, lay behind the war of December 1939–March 1940 against Finland, a country, he says, that Stalin sought to “pulverize.” Such expansionism represented an updating of the old Leninist tactic of “defending the homeland on foreign soil.”

- There was a general awareness that the “Big War” lay in the near future. It was surmised by Stalin that Germany would be the

Soviet enemy in that war despite the Nazi–Soviet agreements of 1939 and the subsequent toning down of mutually hostile propaganda on both sides. At the same time Soviet propaganda singled out for attack the English and French “imperialists,” “warmongers,” “Polish subjugators,” “Rumanian barons,” and so on. By fall 1940, when Soviet-German relations began to show strains, anti-Nazi motifs began to creep into Soviet propaganda, although the basic line on “friendship” continued. However, by the end of that year the propaganda accent shifted to one of military preparedness—in fact, writes Nevezhin, to a “transition in the propaganda to military themes.”

- By spring 1941 the propaganda line was based on new directives issued by the former chief of Red Army indoctrination until late 1940, and after that the deputy commissar of defense, Lev Mekhlis, who began to switch to offensivism. This was in line with Stalin’s speech and remarks to the military school graduates on May 5. “Stalin let it be known,” notes Nevezhin, “that from now on Germany was to be regarded as the potential enemy in war. As a consequence, Stalin said, it was necessary to change from a peace policy to one of a ‘defense policy based on offensive actions.’ Therefore, propaganda should adopt the same offensivist spirit.”

Thus followed, Nevezhin writes, a complete turnabout in the propaganda line. The message now was that it was necessary to make all-round preparations for war, that the Red Army should be ready wage offensive war and, when necessary, take the initiative in attacking the enemy first. Given all this, he concludes that there is absolutely no evidence that the Soviet leader blocked in any way Soviet anti-Hitler propaganda or the offensivist (*nastupatel’nyy*) tenor of the propaganda and indoctrination of that juncture in time. As he writes: “As a result a degree of opprobrium became associated with the defensist [*oboronitel’nyy*] positions held by

some of the military while the ‘offensivist’ spirit penetrating the propaganda became embarrassing to them.”

- Meantime, as the research conducted by latter-day historians has begun to discover these offensivist themes, Nevezhin continues, historians are turning their attention to such sources from those times as local party committees, military districts, army newspapers, and documents issued at the grassroots by other state or party institutions. At same time historians are frustrated, Nevezhin complains, by the fact that documents relating directly to Stalin, Politburo minutes, and the documents of his closest associates are kept in presidential, military, and other state archives and are not accessible to most researchers. One may presume that any latter-day Russian president would be reluctant to “advertise” past Soviet offensivism lest it negatively reflect on present Russian defense policy.
- In a postscript to Nevezhin’s book, a scholar named B. Bonvetsch of the University of Ruhr in Germany discusses the works of both Nevezhin and Viktor Suvorov. He describes the latter as a “dilettante” who has employed no new sources for his theories. Moreover, Suvorov’s use of published materials is distinctly “unprofessional and his findings doubtful.” For his part, Nevezhin, Bonvetsch complains, relies too heavily on Stalin’s May 5 speech, “which as yet has not been authenticated.” Until and unless it is authenticated, he concludes, speculation as to Stalin’s personal motives and plans will remain . . . speculative.” The German professor, however, made this observation before the Stalin texts of May 5 were reproduced in the collection of documents edited by A. N. Yakovlev as cited here.

## **CRITICS OF SUVOROV AND OTHERS**

The Russian émigré writer Viktor Suvorov has been the target of

considerable criticism ever since his book, *Ice-Breaker*, was read by Russian and foreign specialists in the early 1990s. Although some respected Western or Russian specialists—among them, Robert C. Tucker, Edvard Radzinsky, Pavel Bobylev, and M. I. Mel'tyukhov—generally hew to the “offensist” interpretation of Stalin’s and the Red Army’s prewar military planning (while criticizing Suvorov for some of his interpretations and conclusions), the great majority of Western and, at least until recently, Russian specialists had rejected this interpretation.

One of the more articulate if not vehement of the “defensists” is Gabriel Gorodetsky, Russian émigré scholar in Tel Aviv and author of several volumes on Soviet foreign policy. In his books, *The Myth of the “Ice-Breaker” on the Eve of War* and *Grand Delusion: Stalin and the German Invasion of Russia*, Gorodetsky scores the offensist line, and Suvorov in particular, along a number of vectors as follows.

*The meaning of defensive/offensive:* Gorodetsky maintains, oddly, that Stalin showed “little interest in military affairs.”<sup>16</sup> He references the March 1, 1941, Red Army “strategic deployment plan” as “remarkably defensive,” noting that it stresses the possibility of war on two fronts—in the Far East and in the West. Signed by Marshal Timoshenko, defense commissar, General Zhukov, chief of the General Staff, and staff member General-Major Vasilievsky, this plan does not mention offensive operations.

The author then turns to the crucial post-May 5 period of Soviet war planning, taking into account Stalin’s address to the graduates of May 5 and the May 15 “Considerations” signed by the same Red Army staff officers. First, for some reason, Gorodetsky makes no mention of Stalin’s speech and remarks of May 5. Moreover, he denies that Stalin had ever seen, let alone endorsed, the offensist positions taken in “Considerations,” the report to Stalin submitted by Timoshenko and Zhukov (alluded to above). He opines that

[given] sufficient time to deploy the army effectively on the [western] border, Zhukov would have organized the defence in the only fashion which Soviet doctrine recognized: a combination of defensive and offensive measures.... Zhukov attempted to persuade Stalin to seize the initiative [from the Germans]. Since he was not privy to the intricate diplomatic game, Zhukov was becoming increasingly restless about the cautious mobilization plan imposed on him. On 15 May, he and Timoshenko prepared yet another directive [in which] Zhukov wished to seize the initiative in executing a preemptive strike. His point of departure was in no way ideologically motivated or expansionist.

That is all the author has to say about the May 15, fifteen-page-long (in Russian) “Considerations”!

Gorodetsky hobbles his defensist-leaning argument in two ways. By ignoring Stalin’s May 5 speech and remarks, he not only overlooks the dictator’s well-known direct involvement in military affairs—which, in any case, other authors, including military officers in their memoirs, have noted in contrast to Gorodetsky’s assertion to the opposite. He thereby neglects to refer to Stalin’s insistence on Red Army offensive war or to such references by high Stalin aides, whether military men or civilians.

Too, his reference to a “combination” of defense and offense in traditional Soviet military doctrine is puzzling. As noted in the introduction, even a high-ranking contemporary official such as former President Yeltsin’s military adviser and former Russian first deputy minister of defense, Andrei A. Kokoshin, describes Soviet military thought from 1917 to 1991 as follows: “The offensive character of Soviet military strategy was quite obvious. [As the 1939 Red Army

Field Manual states] the Red Army will be the most offensivist army of all armies that have ever been offensively oriented. We will wage an offensive war, carrying the conflict into the territory of the adversary . . . with the aim of the total defeat of the enemy.”<sup>17</sup> Kokoshin further complains in his 1995 book that the traditional emphasis put on Red Army offensivism led to neglect of defense in military strategy, which showed up so critically, he says, in the debacle of June 22 and thereafter.

Moreover, Gorodetsky faults Zhukov for drawing the wrong conclusions from the second set of war games (of winter 1941, following the first games of late 1940) fought partly under his guidance. In these games, “Reds” were opposed by “Blues,” the latter being the attackers (see discussion of the games below). The “Reds,” under Zhukov’s command in the games, counterattacked with “deep-operations” tactics of the offensivist type advocated in the past by Tukhachevsky and Triandafillov and applied by Zhukov against the Japanese at Khalkin-Gol in Outer Mongolia in 1939. This early 1941 war game proved the “relative” success, writes Gorodetsky, of that kind of strategy. (It perhaps emboldened Zhukov to assume an offensivist line in the way he did together with Stalin by mid-May 1941. This is not pursued by Gorodetsky.) The writer continues: “Zhukov probably hoped to repeat the relative success [of the January games and envisaged] that the Red Army would be able to confront the estimated 100 German divisions . . . with the 152 of [Red Army divisions]. The execution of vast encirclement battles through tactical maneuverings was expected to cause havoc among the German concentrations.” Yet that this was a plan for launching preemptive or preventive war is denied by Gorodetsky.

The writer then refers to a defense plan—a “defensive policy,” as he calls it, possibly meaning “defensivist”—drawn up by Timoshenko, Zhukov, and Zhdanov on May 17, two days following the more



offensivist-sounding May 15 “Considerations.” Referring to a document cited by Volkogonov, Gorodetsky maintains that it appears that the May 17 Red Army General Staff report took the defensivist line that it did because there was doubt that a “preemptive strike was *possible* at this stage” (emphasis added). The report, he continues, “reflects a desperate attempt to put the house in order.... Consequently, a new set of orders [of May 17] clearly displays a defensive disposition and the ineptitude of the armed forces,” which, as the report states, was seen from a survey conducted by the military over winter 1940–41.

There is no solid support for Gorodetsky’s assumption. Indeed, some of the documents of late May 1941 that are reproduced in the Yakovlev compilation, *The Year 1941*, do implicitly reflect a defensivist “disposition,” including those of May 17 and May 2, the latter of which even mentions “withdrawal” (*otkhod*). But these documents consist of directives issued by Timoshenko and Zhukov to various commands along the Western Front to adopt the usual defensive measures *during the process of deploying and concentrating troops prior to any attack they might make*, as the orders to the military districts along the western frontier specifically state. These orders neither contradict nor replace any of the overall strategic planning as outlined in the basic document of May 15. The directive of May 20 signed by Timoshenko and Zhukov strongly emphasizes building defensive fortifications to “prevent any enemy breakthroughs.” Yet this must be interpreted as meaning unexpected, premature enemy breakthroughs that might disrupt Soviet plans for attack as the units were getting into position. Significantly, a point overlooked by Gorodetsky, the same order mentions the need to ready the troops “*under favorable conditions to launch sudden strikes*”: “... launch sudden strikes”—as Stalin used to say, “Clear, one would think.”

Meanwhile, it is interesting to note that among the documents for the immediate pre-June 22 period the number of intelligence “warning”

reports to Stalin et al. increase. So the presumption might be that as these reports poured in, the military—and perhaps even Stalin—then became more conscious of the need for defensive preparations after having earlier put the stress on offensism. Or perhaps a combination of offense and defense, as Gorodetsky seems to suggest, is what was reflected in the various directives of late May or early June.

At same time, Gorodetsky ignores documents, which perhaps were not in his possession, such as that of early June 1941—for example, Shcherbakov’s directive respecting Red Army indoctrination. Sovietologists regard Shcherbakov as one of the closest aides of Stalin. The gist of this directive may be found in Shcherbakov’s own wording of June 1941 (no exact date in June is attached to the document): “In all of their propaganda and agitation, party organizations must indoctrinate soldiers and the public in a militant, offensist spirit subordinating [all books, air, print media, etc.] to this most important task.”<sup>18</sup> The party secretary then quotes Lenin:

They tell us that war must be conducted only in a defensist [*oboronitel’nyu*] way when over us hangs a Sword of Damocles. [But] in saying this means to repeat the long-lost idea of petty-bourgeois pacifism. If we were to be disposed that defensist way in the face of constantly-ready enemy forces, they would in effect have to make us vow never to resort to actions in the *strategic-military* sense that would be offensist and, therefore, for us to act stupidly if not criminally.

Shcherbakov then concludes: “Thus, Leninism teaches that the country of socialism, exploiting a favorable international situation, must and cannot avoid seizing the initiative in launching offensive actions

against the capitalist encirclement with the aim of extending the front of socialism.”

Gorodetsky has pointed out, so far as is known now rightly, that the Red Army’s various *military* directives did not make such militant, offensist “ideological” statements. One might ask, however, Can we conclude that that was because there were no such motivations behind the planned Soviet military actions? Or was it because a certain “division of labor,” or departmentalism, precluded military references to ideological perspectives in strictly military Red Army directives, since they would be encroaching on party territory? Gorodetsky himself indicates that, as he puts it, “separation of various governmental bodies [within] a totalitarian regime” could lead to contrasting contents and emphases in the various reports, messages, and directives emanating from different governmental and party institutions, civilian and military.

*Last-minute actions:* In chapter 13 of *Grand Delusion*, Gorodetsky canvasses Stalin’s and the army’s actions just before the German attack. He mentions Zhukov’s June 10 message that parallels and reflects Stalin’s fear lest Red Army preparations “provoke” a German response. This in turn was in response to Red Army General Mikhail Kirponos’s signal of alarm over extensive German troop movements observed by scouts in his sector of the Western Front, the Kiev Military District (KVO). Zhukov in effect warned Kirponos not to “drive the Germans into an armed confrontation.” <sup>19</sup> Finally, on June 11, Zhukov ordered the KVO to be put on war footing by July 1—a date apparently reflecting Stalin’s belief that the Germans would not be ready to attack until sometime in July. This was perhaps a reflection of Zhukov’s earlier statement in his Red Army Day article in *Pravda*, on February 23, 1941, that Soviet military preparations had a long way to go before they would meet their goals.

In Gorodetsky’s reconstruction of what happened next through the

fateful Saturday night and Sunday morning of June 21–22, the “Khrushchev version” is largely followed (see chapter 6). In contrast to Gorodetsky, Russian researcher and author Edvard Radzinsky proposes this version in his 1996 biography of Stalin: “Stalin, meanwhile, still did not believe that Hitler would make such a mad move. Convinced that time was on his side, he went on calmly making ready for his turnaround—the sudden blow of which his generals had written in ‘Considerations.’ But for all his certainty, he grew nervous as the fateful day approached. There were too many reports of German troop movements near the frontier.”<sup>20</sup>

Respected Russian historian Aleksandr Nekrich references a letter from one V. P. Zolotov, posted in summer 1939, that was found recently in the archive of a Soviet party secretary and close Stalin aide, Andrei A. Zhdanov. The writer addresses the issue of whether the Soviet Union should adopt a policy of collective security with the Western Allies against Hitler. He then goes on to draw certain inferences from this as affects the Soviet posture in June 1941. The letter reads in part as follows:

We must always keep in mind precisely and clearly that our main fundamental enemy in Europe and in the whole world is not Germany, but England.... We must finally understand that the most acute differences in government ideologies by no means preordain a similarly acute antagonism of political and economic interests.... Entering into an agreement with England and France against Germany, even concluding a military alliance with them, we should not forget for one moment that in this alliance, England and France will conduct a policy insincerity, provocation, and betrayal with respect to us.

Nekrich makes this comment on the letter:

Zolotov's letter came astonishingly close to predicting the course Stalin eventually chose. His idea that the capitalist powers would exhaust themselves in war, enabling the USSR to "throw the sword of the Red Army into the scales of history," is a concise formulation of the "Stalin doctrine." Stalin had adumbrated this notion as early as 1925, but did not include it in any published works until after the close of World War II. Only when the seventh volume of his "Works" appeared in 1949 did the general public have access to a speech he delivered at a plenary session of the Central Committee on January 10, 1925: "*Our banner remains as before, the banner of peace. But if war begins, then we will not sit with our hands folded—we shall have to act, but act last. And we shall act in order to throw the decisive weight on the scales, a weight which could tip the balance.*"<sup>21</sup>

Stalin would use this tactic with considerable success.

## NOTES

The first epigraph is in J. V. Stalin, *Sochineniya*, vol. 10 (Moscow: Ogiz, 1947), p. 28.

The second is in A. N. Yakovlev, ed., *1941 god. Dokumenty*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Mezhdunarodniy Fond "Demokratiya," 1998), p. 162.

Regarding the third, ex-KGB Major-General Oleg Kalugin is an author and former deputy chief and then head of foreign intelligence (First Directorate) of the KGB serving in the 1970s and 1980s at the

time of Brezhnev, Andropov, Chernenko, and Gorbachev. He wrote this interpretation, and more on the topic, to me in an e-mail message in 1998. Kalugin appears to be correct in asserting (see below) that no document exists that indicates Stalin was preparing to attack Germany precisely in mid-1941 or 1942. Author Ernst Topitsch errs in stating that Stalin's May 5, 1941, address to the graduating cadets included a reference to a date of attack (*Stalin's War: A Radical New Theory on the Origins of the Second World War* [New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987], p. 8).

The fourth is from P. I. Bobylev, "Tochku v diskussii stavit' rano. K voprosu o planirovanii v general'nom shtabe RKKA vozmozhnoi voyny s Germaniyei v 1940–1941 godakh," *Otechestvennaya Istoriya*, no. 1 (2000), pp. 59–60.

1 Yakovlev, *1941 god. Dokumenty*, p. 510; J. V. Stalin, *Otchetnyi Doklad na XVIII S"ezda Partii o Rabote Ts.K. VKP(b), Mar. 10, 1939* (Moscow: Ogiz, 1948), p. 10. In the same speech, Stalin referred to England, France, and the United States as "nonaggressive states" as of March 1939.

2 Mikhail Narinsky, "Soviet Foreign Policy and the Origins of the Cold War," in *Soviet Foreign Policy 1917–1991: A Retrospective*, ed. Gabriel Gorodetsky (London: Frank Cass, 1994), chapter 10, p. 108. Soviet economist Yevgeny Varga's memorandum to Molotov, dated June 24, 1947, suggests that an economic collapse in Western Europe was imminent and that the Marshall Plan attempted to forestall it, so why support it?

3 Quoted from Comintern records as reproduced in Yu. N. Afanas'iev, ed., *Drugaya voina 1939–1945 (The Other War 1939–1945)* (Moscow: Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennii Universitet, 1996), p. 43. (For the full text, see appendix 3.)

4 V. I. Lenin, “The Proletarian Revolution and Renegade Kautsky” (1917), in Albert L. Weeks, *Soviet and Communist Quotations* (New York: Pergamon-Brassey’s Publishers, 1987), p. 318, where other such statements may be found on successive pages. The following Lenin and Stalin quotations are in Weeks, *Soviet and Communist Quotations*, pp. 310–21; and in P. J. Vigor, *The Soviet View of War, Peace and Neutrality* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), chapter 2.

5 Weeks, *Soviet and Communist Quotations*, p. 316.

6 Timo Vikhavainen, *Stalin i Finni* (St. Petersburg: Zhurnal Neva, 2000), p. 136.

7 Vikhavainen, *Stalin i Finni*, pp. 340–42.

8 A. N. Yakovlev, *Omut Pamyati* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2000), p. 46.

9 Volkogonov quoted in Russian military historian Bobylev’s pregnant article, “Tochku v diskussii stavit’ rano,” p. 43. Most Russian military historians claim that Stalin took a very deep interest in military affairs; archive documents prove this, as does the daily log of visitors to Stalin’s Kremlin office. Yet author Gabriel Gorodetsky alleges that Stalin had no wish “to take control of the military” (*Grand Delusion: Stalin and the German Invasion of Russia* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999], p. 211).

10 See Yakovlev, *1941 god. Dokumenty*. In reproducing the two important Stalin speeches on May 5, 1941, the volume’s editor gives this background for the Stalin texts published: “No stenographic copy of Stalin’s speech [to the graduates] was made and no text was found among his personal papers. In May 1948 the Central Party Archive (Ts.PA of the Central Committee) received a typed copy of the speech that was recorded by K. V. Semyonov (presumably an employee in the

Ministry of Defense . . . ). It was planned to include the speech in the 14th volume of Stalin's Works. But this volume never appeared. The accuracy of the Semyonov text is testified by the fact of its similarity to the paraphrasing found in the diary of G. M. Dimitrov [head of the Comintern], who was present at the May 5 gathering in the Kremlin and who copied the text into his diary." Yakovlev then reproduces the whole Dimitrov text. Interestingly, as the editor notes, *Pravda* (May 6, 1941) printed a terse notice that the ceremony had been held and that Stalin had addressed the graduates. Then the Soviet authorities proceeded to leak but falsify the contents and tenor of the speech and Stalin's remarks during the reception. These leaks were targeted on London, Berlin, and elsewhere amid speculation that the Red Army was said by Stalin to be not yet prepared for war, that the Soviets were trying to ward off any hostilities until autumn 1941. German Ambassador Schulenburg was led to believe, by well-aimed leaks to him, what Stalin purportedly had said on May 5—namely, that “new Soviet compromises with Germany” were in the offing! On his part, author Alexander Werth, based in London, also was misled to report in his book, for British consumption, *Russia at War 1941–1945*, according to Yakovlev, that Stalin had indicated in his remarks on May 5 that “talks with England were still not concluded” and that Stalin “was attempting to delay a conflict until autumn.” Such false leakage amounted to Soviet disinformation in which even experienced journalists could be taken in.

[11](#) Yakovlev, *1941 god. Dokumenty*, book 2, pp. 215–20, emphasis added.

[12](#) V. A. Nevezhin, *Sindrom Nastupatel'noi Voyny* (Moscow: Airo-XX, 1997). The author cites archives at the secret police, the office the Russian president, the Russian Ministry of Defense, and others. Another historian who relies on the latest documentary evidence is



Mikhail I. Mel'tyukhov. His findings are discussed in the conclusions in chapter 8.

13 Quoted in Topitsch, *Stalin's War*, p. 106.

14 *Voyennyi entsiklopedicheskyi slovar'* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1986), pp. 476, 496. The same stress on offense (*nastupleniye*) is found in all editions of the larger *Sovetskaya Voyennaya Entsiklopediya* (*Soviet Military Encyclopedia*) (Moscow: Voenizdat) going back to the 1930s twelve-volume edition and the 1978–80 eight-volume edition, edited by N. V. Ogarkov.

15 Albert L. Weeks, "Was General Andrei Vlasov, Leader of the Russian Liberation Army, a True Russian Patriot or a Traitor?" *World War II* magazine (November 1997), p. 8.

16 Gabriel Gorodetsky, *Mif "Ledokola" Nakanunye voiny* (*The Myth of the "Ice-breaker" on the Eve of War*) (Moscow: Progress-Akademii, 1995); Gorodetsky, *Grand Delusion*.

17 Andrei A. Kokoshin, *Soviet Strategic Thought, 1917–91* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995), p. 162. Chapter 3 of Kokoshin's book is entitled "Offense and Defense in Soviet Military Strategy." The book is not cited by Gorodetsky.

18 Yakovlev, *1941 god. Dokumenty*, pp. 301–03.

19 Gorodetsky, *Grand Delusion*, pp. 227, 278. General Kirponos died in battle in 1941.

20 Edvard Radzinsky, *Stalin* (New York: Doubleday Publishing Co., 1996), p. 456. Chapter 6 of the present book takes a closer look at the events as the Germans attacked.

21 Aleksandr Nekrich, *Pariahs, Partners, Predators: German-Soviet Relations 1922–1941* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 105–06.

# 6

## *Stalin's Response to "Barbarossa"—I*

Stalin said, "Everything Lenin created we have lost." After this for a long time Stalin actually did not direct military operations and ceased doing anything at all. He resumed active leadership only after some members of the Politburo visited him and told him that it was necessary to take certain steps immediately in order to improve the situation at the front. Therefore, the threatening danger which hung over our Fatherland in the first period of the war was largely due to the faulty methods of directing the nation and the party by Stalin himself.... Even after the war began, the nervousness and hysteria which Stalin demonstrated, while interfering with actual military operations, caused our Army serious damage. Stalin was very far from understanding the real situation developing at the front.

—Nikita Khrushchev

No, Stalin saw through it all. Stalin trusted Hitler?? He didn't trust his own people! . . . Hitler fooled Stalin? As a result of such deception Hitler had to poison himself, and Stalin became the head of half the world! . . . No one could have been ready for the hour of the attack, even God

himself! ... In essence, we were largely ready for war.

—V. M. Molotov

June 22, 1941—Russia’s “December 7”—is a day that for Russians will forever live in infamy. Sixty years ago the Nazi armies, following Generals Mannstein’s and Guderian’s battle-tested blitzkrieg tactics and strategy applied so successfully against Poland in autumn 1939 and the Western Allies in 1940, juggernauted into the Soviet Union in massive strength before the first light of dawn. Within hours they had advanced 30, 40, and 50 miles in various sectors along Russia’s western frontier. How could it have happened that over 160 Soviet divisions—infantry, cavalry, tank, and motorized infantry divisions deployed for weeks along the USSR’s over 2,000-mile western border—could be caught totally unaware by a huge invasion force of ten Wehrmacht armies embracing over 150 divisions?

On June 13, 1941, just nine days before the invasion, Soviet agent Richard Sorge, who was having an intimate affair with the wife of a top Japanese official through whom he gleaned top-secret information, informed the Kremlin that a German attack would be launched on June 22. Sorge said to the NKVD in Moscow: “I repeat, 10 armies combined in 150 divisions will launch an offensive across a broad front.” Yet Stalin chose not to believe these and other such reports, some of which also reached him from official circles in London and Washington. The Soviets were even getting information virtually from inside the German General Staff. In it they had a spy codenamed “Starshina,” who dispatched highly sensitive information about German war plans. Moreover, with the Enigma Machine and Ultra deciphering messages from the German High Command, the British at Bletchley Hall were able to read Wehrmacht General Staff communications traffic. They knew all about Operation Barbarossa. Yet Stalin reputedly thought that

the British and Americans were only trying to embroil the Soviets in a war with Nazi Germany. His own agents, he wished to believe, were being duped or were simply imagining things. On one occasion when a highly placed Soviet spy in Germany reported on preparations for Operation Barbarossa, Stalin uttered, “Tell him to go \*\*\*\* his mother.”

## **OBVIOUS SIGNS**

Under Stalin’s very nose some obvious things indeed were happening. For instance, through June 1941 crates of German diplomatic staff members’ personal belongings, including their pet hounds, were observed being readied for air shipment out of the Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup> This, too, was mentioned in Soviet intelligence reports passed to the top Soviet leadership.<sup>2</sup>

Stalin apparently contented himself with what appeared to him to be the general Soviet military advantage over any prospective enemy, in the west or the east—that mighty Soviet “deterrent” as it existed, at any rate, on paper. Above all, the Soviet leader continued to nurse the idea that Germany would not and could not prepare such an attack any time before 1942. And even then, was Hitler so “mad” that he thought he could take on a laterally extended country of eleven time zones, a military potentially capable of mobilizing upward of 10,000,000 soldiers, and an economy capable of converting rapidly to a war footing? Here Stalin had obviously exaggerated the effectiveness of German military intelligence, which in retrospect appears to have been grossly delinquent. (So in many respects was Soviet military intelligence.)

Indeed, on the eve of the Nazi attack in mid-1941, Soviet Russia’s military might did look impressive. According to statistics published in Russia in 1995, the Soviets had six million soldiers under arms (not including a backup reserve of millions of conscripts of all ages), with an estimated actual or potential 300 divisions of armed men with

120,000 artillery pieces and mines, 23,300 tanks, and 22,400 aircraft. Its planes outnumbered the Germans' two to one—that is, 10,000–11,000 Soviet military aircraft to 5,000 total of the Luftwaffe, about half of which were deployed on the Eastern Front on the eve of the war.

True, some but by no means all this equipment was obsolete. In particular Red Army tanks were in some cases world class. However, the new weapons actually deployed in the units—the heavy KV and medium T-34 tanks, for instance—were in insufficient numbers. There seems to have been a total of only 500 of these impressive tanks to spread among the many divisions deployed along the western frontier in summer 1941. Where the Germans were unlucky enough to confront the T-34, they found that their main anti-tank gun, the 37-milimeter model, was so ineffective against the Russian monsters that disgusted German infantrymen referred to it as an “army-door knocker.”<sup>3</sup>

Other new equipment likewise was spread thinly and in some cases illogically, so that many units were left with arms of at least decade-old vintage.<sup>4</sup> There were late versions and upgrades of tanks and planes—all part of Stalin's long-term plans for waging war—that had not yet been deployed to the forces at the front or were sparsely deployed where they were available. In spring, these forces had been augmented by an additional deployment of 800,000 Red Army troops brought up from rear positions. About two-thirds of this imposing force were positioned in several military districts (Kiev, Carpathian, etc.) directly abutting—dangerously, that is—the western frontier directly opposite the Wehrmacht formations.

On their part, for Operation Barbarossa the Germans had assembled on their Eastern Front an order of battle that included nineteen German Panzer and fifteen motorized infantry divisions and some 3,350 tanks, 7,230 artillery pieces, and 2,770 combat aircraft. On the first day alone of the invasion, with such forces the Germans had destroyed 1,200 Soviet aircraft, 800 of which were destroyed on the ground.

By the end of the first month of the war, of the 170 Soviet divisions by then deployed on the Western Front, twenty-eight were destroyed, and seventy more had lost half of their complement of soldiers and equipment. Considerable damage, nonetheless, was done to the Wehrmacht by the outclassed, yet brave Red Army soldiers—but not enough to blunt the attack overall. The war did not begin gradually to turn decisively in the Soviet favor until after the successful defeat of the German assault on Moscow in December 1941–January 1942. Some observers in the West single out, indeed, the Battle of Stalingrad in early 1943 as *the* turning point in the war. But the earlier date is more accurate, a fact acknowledged, for instance, in the diary of German Army Chief of the General Staff General Franz Halder. He expresses such pessimism even as the Wehrmacht’s attack on Moscow was under way in autumn 1941.

In the following four months since June 1941, the Germans had occupied more than 500,000 square miles of territory with a population of 74.5 million. By December 1941, the number of those killed or taken captive was a total of seven million Soviet soldiers, of which four million were POWs; desertions on the Soviet side numbered upward of one million men. Total losses in equipment on the Soviet side during the six-month period were staggering: 22,000 tanks and upward of 25,000 aircraft were destroyed.

## **STALIN’S BEHAVIOR: CONVENTIONAL VERSION**

According to the conventional version of the catastrophic events of that early Sunday morning, the zero hour itself of Operation Barbarossa had caught Stalin asleep in his dacha just outside Moscow. Stalin had returned to his “nearby,” as it was known, weekend retreat at Kuntsevo after an unusually tense, late-night session of Politburo in the Kremlin. The discussions that took place that fateful Saturday night, June 21–22, remain secret, although impending war was surely the main item on the

agenda.

It was around 3 A.M., June 22, when Stalin, it is said, was awakened by his bodyguard, Lieutenant-General Nikolai Vlasik (Stalin's "Bormann"), to answer an urgent telephone call. On the "Vertushka" (official phone line) at the other end was his right-hand man, Aleksandr Poskrebyshv. It was he who broke to him the incredible news of extended armed conflict along the Russian western frontier.

Minutes later Zhukov, then chief of the General Staff, telephoned Stalin. According to Zhukov Stalin became nearly speechless as Zhukov related briefly what was happening—to the best of his knowledge under prevailing conditions of primitive communications—on Russia's exploding Western Front. Then Stalin, breathing heavily, continues this version of the story, immediately got on the phone to summon the Politburo to meet with him in an immediate, emergency session in the Kremlin.

Vlasik drove him at top speed to the Kremlin in Moscow in the Leader's black, Packard-like ZIL limousine with its bulletproof windows. They sped along the widened highway specially used for official vehicles (and, as planned in the 1930s, made broad enough, it was rumored, to accommodate Soviet tanks). As he raced toward Moscow, writes the late Stalin biographer, ex-Soviet General Dmitri Volkogonov, Stalin gazed out of the limousine windows "at the empty streets unaware that German aircraft were already on their way to bomb Soviet towns and aerodromes."

When he arrived at the Kremlin and was driven through the Borovitsky Gate, General Volkogonov relates, Stalin went up to his office by the entrance reserved for him alone. Silent and somewhat cautiously, the members of the Politburo filed into Stalin's tall-ceilinged, wood-paneled office. They were followed by Timoshenko and Zhukov. Without a word of greeting, Stalin said to no one in



particular, “Get the German consul on the phone.”

Molotov left the room. A tense silence descended. When the taciturn commissar of foreign affairs returned, Molotov felt all eyes were fixed on him. He went to his place at the table. With his speech impediment, he stammered out: “The Ambassador [Schulenburg] reported that the German government has declared war on us.” He glanced at the piece of paper in his hand: “The formal reason is a standard one: [reading] ‘Nationalist Germany had decided to forestall an attack by the Russians.’” (Ironically, this was the same pretext used by the Soviets when they attacked Finland, also on a Sunday, in December 1939.)

“Stalin sat down and looked at Molotov with angry eyes,” Volkogonov continues, “as if he were remembering his [Stalin’s] confident prediction six months earlier that Hitler would ‘never wage war on two fronts’” and that the USSR had plenty of time to strengthen its western defenses. Then some of the general officers were asked to report what they knew about the invasion. They did not have much to report; communications were inadequate, to say the least. But what they did report stunned everyone, above all Stalin. Volkogonov continues:

Stalin had never had so great a shock in his life. His confusion was obvious, as was his anger at having been so misled, and his fear before the unknown. The Politburo members remained with him in his office all day [on June 22], waiting for news from the border. They left the room only to make a phone call, have a cup of tea, or stretch their legs. They said little, hoping that the failures were only temporary. No one doubted that Hitler would receive a resounding rebuff.

Eventually, as more grim news poured in, Stalin certainly did begin to “understand.” The first, cautious order sent to the commanders along the western border and to the Baltic fleet already engaging the enemy—Directive No. 1—was itself tragically flawed. Still laboring under the idea that the Germans were not truly unleashing a war in the full, strategic sense along the whole western frontier, Stalin directed: “Undertake no actions that could cause political complications [with Germany].” Moreover, Stalin apparently thought that the conflict, already under way, could be settled peacefully. It was in any case, he thought, a limited one allowing Germany only to gain some momentary advantage.<sup>5</sup>

In spring 2000, on the fifty-fifth anniversary of the Soviet capture of Berlin, Generals Kvashnin and Gareyev commented on these events as follows in an article published in the *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*’s weekly supplement, *Independent Military Review*: “[This directive (of June 22, 1941)] disoriented the troops. If in actual fact the Supreme Commander himself did not know whether the country was in war or not, how would a regiment commander be able to conduct operations if he did not know what political consequences would follow?” This is a valid point. Then began a period in which, for almost two weeks, Stalin kept himself out of view, or so the story goes. Yet, as we will see, the visitors’ log to Stalin’s office, which was recently released from the archives, shows the leader at work there day after day following June 22. He gave no radio addresses; he submitted to no newsreel appearances; he did not rally his people, although the Politburo, some claim, timidly suggested that he do so. There were no authoritative declarations to the people from the “Leader and Genius of All the Peoples” as to what had happened or what the Soviet leadership was going to do to stem the tide of invasion.

On its part, the Politburo, it is said, hoped Stalin would immediately address the population. Instead, according to the conventional version,

Stalin was “too stunned”—or was he protecting his exalted image?—to go before the public himself. Instead, he gave Vice Premier Vyacheslav Molotov the thankless task of publicly explaining the disaster and of spurring the people into retaliation.

Only on July 3 did Stalin emerge to give a radio address about the ongoing war. In this speech, the Soviet dictator addressed the whole Soviet people with an opening that unprecedentedly contained the phrase “brothers and sisters.” Apparently, during the days of being out of the public eye, Stalin pondered as to the best way to rally the people. Addressing them simply as “citizens” or “comrades” was not the way, although “comrades” did remain in part of the opening. Adding the religious sounding *brat’ya i sestry*—“brothers and sisters”—was a harbinger of further concessions to the citizens’ religiosity that was to come (among them, the ringing of church bells, the refurbishing of the Orthodox Patriarchate, the reopening of some churches, and so on).

Indeed, here the Soviet leader showed that he was not lacking in flexibility and political acumen. In a sense, his partly nonideological form of address to his people at this crucial time provides a microcosmic sample of Stalin’s overall “tactical” elasticity of a type in which he could put aside ideology in favor of higher priorities. Stalin was capable of such “ideological suspensions” when the dire need to do so arose—as it indeed did on several occasions during his quarter-century reign.

By November 1941 Stalin was ready to give a newsreel appearance—reviewing a military parade, as was his custom, from atop the Lenin Mausoleum. The occasion was the celebration of the twenty-fourth anniversary of the October Revolution, accompanied by a military parade in Red Square, November 7, 1941. On that same day the Red Army was battling the German Army less than 50 miles to the west and south of the Soviet capital. Under such dangerous circumstances, would the heavily protected Stalin take such a risk? What if a German Heinkel

bomber... ?

As disclosed only recently, the ultra-security-conscious Stalin did not actually speak in Red Square as broadcast by radio and depicted in a newsreel at the time of the parade. His speech was later dubbed onto the footage shot of the parade in Red Square on that bitter-cold day. The security-conscious Stalin had ordered the cameras to be set up later inside the Kremlin in order to stage the speech. Audiences watching the newsreel presumably did not notice that on that cold day the Leader's breath did not show up on the screen as he stood reading his address—as it turned out, indoors....

Thus, on the preceding day, June 23, the stuttering (ironically, England's World War II monarch, King George VI, had the same speech defect) Molotov had done what he could in his brittle, tenor voice to broadcast the address. Nearly everyone heard his shocking words. In those days, the Communist authorities had rigged up at almost every main intersection or meeting place in towns and villages across the USSR ubiquitous indoor and outdoor loudspeakers attached to telephone or power-line poles. The address was aired several times.

As for Stalin himself, so the traditional story goes, he continued to remain “secluded” for weeks. He would venture only haphazardly to the Kremlin, or he would stay in a house on Kirov Street in the capital, or sometimes he would stop over at General Staff Headquarters a few blocks away from Red Square. Although there were as yet no air-raid shelters in Moscow—except, of course, for the intentionally deeply dug subways—all official buildings were very closely guarded.

However, as exploding shells near the outskirts of the capital began to be audible (some exploding in Moscow itself—scars from them are still visible here and there in the capital city) later in summer 1941, extensive protective measures were adopted. A special shelter was built for Stalin near his dacha. Also, evacuation measures were ready, if the

need arose, to move Stalin and his entourage to safely distant Kuibyshev, some 600 miles to the southeast of Moscow on a large loop of the Volga River. This is how the standard version of Stalin's behavior and actions reads during those first hours, days, and weeks of the German invasion.

## **NEW VERSION OF STALIN'S BEHAVIOR**

Today, however, that version is being challenged in several ways as new facts have come in. As they reexamine the documents of newly opened archives, some Russian historians now are recasting their investigations in terms of answering several big questions:

- If Stalin was totally unaware of a German military threat and therefore was “caught utterly by surprise” by the German attack—as official Soviet histories of the period claim—why had he started actively mobilizing for war the way he did and as documents show that he did in the opening months of 1941? Why would he plan to preempt a German attack, as some Russian military writers today insist that he was (see chapter 5), if he did not expect a sudden attack from the other side? The same documents, some of them new, show that he was fully aware of the ongoing German buildup opposite Russia's Western Front.
- On the other hand, assuming that Stalin was preparing his own preemptive attack for a later secret date (e.g., July or autumn 1941 or possibly in 1942) and, at any rate, was actively preparing for war of whatever type against the Wehrmacht to be launched by either side at some proximate date, it seems possible that Stalin was simply misled as to the exact day and time of Hitler's attack (as Molotov said). And as a result, he was preempted by Hitler instead of the other way around (see discussion in chapter 8).

I will attempt to answer these questions in the light of what some authors presume were Stalin's putatively offensive war plans. At the

same time the defensist argument will be canvassed keeping in mind whatever old or new information points to a credible inference. The overarching questions can be put as follows:

- Had Stalin poorly prepared Soviet Russia for a German invasion?
- Was he, in fact, taken totally unaware when the Germans crossed Soviet borders in force in the early morning hours of June 22, 1941, or did the catastrophe ensue because of other reasons?
- As a result of the surprise attack, did Stalin virtually collapse, secluding himself for weeks in his dacha outside Moscow, leaving others, the military and his closest aides in the Politburo, to cope on their own with Hitler's "double cross"?

Until recently, the answer to each of the above was a nearly unqualified yes. But new evidence has been uncovered in Russian archives and from memoirs by witnesses to the events and Stalin's behavior on June 22 and during the days immediately following the debacle on that fateful Sunday morning (see chapter 8). These testimonies cast doubt on some of the assumptions of the conventional view—namely, that Stalin was "paralyzed," hysterical, and so on; that he removed himself from the scene in total confusion, wallowing in alcohol, as it is claimed, for several weeks; and so forth.

The conventional view has reigned unchallenged up to now ever since First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev gave his secret speech to the Twentieth Party Congress in February 1956. Much of its contents were repeated in Khrushchev's post-1964 taped interviews when he became a pensioner and were then assimilated by historians—Russian and Western—as the gospel truth. But the veracity, not to mention the motives, of some of Khrushchev's contentions concerning Stalin and his aides, who had since 1953 in many cases become Khrushchev's rivals, has since been questioned.

One of the most telling recent pieces of evidence that this version

may not be true is Stalin's—that is, The Boss's—very busy Kremlin office log during those trying days and weeks from the end of June to the first week of July. Recently disclosed documents show that instead of the Leader's seclusion, Stalin was constantly present in his office *on all the days following the German attack, working, as usual, past midnight*.<sup>6</sup> Without evidently missing a single day, Stalin was holding important meetings in his office in Moscow with all of his top military, party, and government officials. Documents found in newly opened archives disclose that the Soviet leader engaged in daily, many-hour sessions with his top military and civilian officials. Among the most frequent regular visitors of the dozen or so such top officials in Stalin's office on a *daily* basis in late June were party and government officials Molotov, Beria, and Kaganovich and military staff officers Zhukov, Shaposhnikov, Timoshenko, and Vatutin.

Khrushchev and others could invent freely. Stalin always tried to keep his vilest deeds—and mistakes—off the record. He ordered almost all top-secret documents and stenographic transcripts (that is, when they were kept) to be destroyed. What he did not destroy, his closest aides destroyed, to protect either the Leader or themselves. Yet the ultrasecretive dictator could not erase all the evidence. Some formerly hidden facts have been discovered in civilian and military archives in Russia in recent months and years. Since the demise of communism in Russia, certain memoirists have begun to speak out in ways that clash with the formerly accepted versions of events.

## **DEFENSE PREPARATIONS**

One of the bigger “white spots” in the Soviet history of World War II concerns, as we have seen, Stalin's defense preparations for a German invasion of the USSR. Obscured, too, are what his actions really were immediately after it. As to war preparations, we saw in the preceding chapter that in his address and remarks at the reception for the graduating military cadets in the Grand Kremlin Palace on May 5,

Stalin had said outright that the principal, near-term enemy was Germany. For which threat, he said, stepped-up military offensive (his word) preparations should be made, including, it seemed, planning of a Soviet preemptive attack. From documents released in recent years, it has been learned that Stalin was already sending out feelers to a number of states in search of future wartime allies—allies in a common war against Germany. Among those governments approached were France, the United States, England, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, and Poland—the latter three being approached through their governments-in-exile.<sup>7</sup>

Before Khrushchev's secret speech to the Twentieth Communist Party Congress in Moscow in February 1956, Stalin's war preparations were officially described as having been "fully adequate" and to have been "exclusively defensive" (*sugubo oboronitel'niye*), not offensist. Soviet declaratory military doctrine and strategy, it was averred, was one merely of "active defense" (*aktivnaya oborona*). The party line was that Stalin had wanted peace as long as possible. At the same time he built up the country's industries and defense capability for a war that he "wisely knew" would eventually—as he said, "inevitably"—come. It would be a war that would be foisted on the USSR, certainly not an aggressive one launched on Soviet initiative.

In similar fashion, immediately after World War II, Stalin was to order his civilian and military propagandists to describe what he called the long-standing Soviet defense policy's recognition of "*permanently operating factors*" in war. These boiled down to a Soviet policy of overt defensism based on the USSR's eleven-time-zone-wide territory and its "peaceful aims" and intentions. Was this mere disingenuous hindsight?

Likewise, in this earlier, pre-1956 version it was claimed in retrospect that by the time of the Nazi–Soviet agreements of August–September 1939, Stalin and the military had wanted merely to "delay"



the inevitable “big war” for as long as possible so as to be fully prepared when it finally did come. As it turned out, it *was* “postponed”—by a year and ten months, as Stalin boasted in his first war speech on July 3, 1941. By the Germans’ “perfidious” attack on June 22, Hitler had torn up these agreements, double-crossing Stalin by unexpectedly putting into action Operation Barbarossa—which had been first conceived by Hitler back in June 1940 if not foreshadowed in Hitler’s 1920s “bible,” *Mein Kampf*.

However, three years after Stalin’s death in 1953, much of this boilerplated version of the events of 1941 began to be scrapped in part by the Communist Party and its corps of historians. With this came Khrushchev’s secret “de-Stalinization” speech at the Twentieth Communist Party Congress in February 1956. He brought to light many alleged new facts (including, it should be noted, a number of Khrushchev distortions) about Stalin.

The late dictator was depicted by Khrushchev—one of whose aims was to tar some of his rival comrades with Stalinism, thus exonerating his own deep involvement in Stalin’s crimes (especially in the purges in Ukraine of 1937—39)—as not only genocidal and paranoiac. Stalin was depicted as a self-glorifier who covered up his many costly policy mistakes before and during the war that had cost the lives of millions of soldiers and civilians. Many of the dictator’s military decisions were fatally flawed, Khrushchev alleged. They were the product of a disordered mind. For instance, according to Khrushchev, to the horror of his top military commanders Stalin used a large globe instead of large-scale military maps to plot Red Army counteroffensives. (The suggestion here was that Stalin acted like Ivan the Terrible, as in Sergei Eisenstein’s famous film of the late 1930s of the same name, in which the half-mad, bearded tsar is seen running his acquisitive fingers over an outsized globe as he planned his next conquests.)

However, by contrast, more credible information, based on later

memoirs by retired soldiers and others, proposes that although Stalin interfered in battlefield decisions made in the first months of the war, by the later war years he began gradually to defer more to the professional military—Zhukov, Shaposhnikov, Timoshenko, Vasilievsky, Rokossovsky, Vatutin, Yeremenko, et al. Their input was crucial when the commander-in-chief, Stalin, approved the soldiers' detailed combat decisions. However, in the earlier period of the war, many of the reckless, offensive operations, like many of Hitler's after 1941, were ill-conceived and needlessly costly in casualties. Stalin was largely responsible for approving, if not initiating, these ill-conceived, early offensive operations.<sup>8</sup>

According to Khrushchev, one of the Stalin-fostered fantasies about fateful 1941 grossly covered up the late dictator's utter lack of military acumen as well as his "actual" behavior on the eve of and after the German invasion on the fateful morning. In his narrative delivered at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 and in his taped memoirs after 1964, Khrushchev ridiculed the notion that Stalin had been a "genius-strategist," that after the Wehrmacht's surprise attack, he had risen bravely to the Nazi challenge, firmly taking the helm, ably leading the Soviet armed forces and people to ultimate victory.

The truth, claimed Khrushchev, was just the opposite. There was no surprise at all—that is to say, not to Khrushchev and a few others—about an imminent German invasion. Only Stalin was duped, by himself. As Khrushchev put it, "Sparrows were chirping about it at every crossroad." Yet, he complained, Stalin had stubbornly refused to believe the many of his own intelligence agents' reports that had crossed his Kremlin office desk prior to the attack. These reports, dozens of them, had warned of an approaching, full-scale Nazi invasion. Some warnings had come from Stalin's best foreign agents. Other reports came from official sources in the West, including a personal, secret message from Prime Minister Winston Churchill (who

did not reveal his source of information, namely, the Enigma Machine that by means of the Ultra operation at Bletchley Park decoded messages of the German High Command).

Stalin's highest military intelligence (GRU) officer, Lieutenant-General Filipp I. Golikov, helped water down or otherwise discredit the most ominous reports before they reached Stalin. (Stalin, who centralized all sensitive functions within himself, had set up no "intelligence assessment" department—a department that was later instituted within the Soviet Ministry of Defense only after his death.) Lavrenti Beria, head of the NKVD, also participated, it is said, in the discrediting of such reports. Most of this behavior by Golikov and Beria was motivated by sycophancy. On June 21, the day before the German invasion, Beria personally assured Stalin: "I and my people [in the NKVD], Iosif Vissarionovich, firmly remember your wise instruction: Hitler will not attack us in 1941!"<sup>9</sup>

## **SO, DID STALIN "FALL TO PIECES"?**

Like most tyrants, Stalin surrounded himself with toadies. The character "Shuisky" in *Boris Godunov* is the perennial Russian stereotype of a sycophantic official who has the ear of the tsar. The Kremlin was full of Shuiskys during the reigns of Lenin, Stalin, and their successors. When the attack occurred, Khrushchev had snarled, Stalin "fell to pieces." He was paralyzed by "nervousness and hysteria." He retreated in confusion to his dacha at Kuntsevo, where, as some others have claimed, he began drinking heavily. Hours after the invasion, he cowered when some Politburo members came to visit him at his suburban retreat. Stalin thought they were going to "arrest him," Khrushchev claimed. But Molotov, Malenkov, Beria, et al. had come to visit the dictator in order merely to plead with him to rise to leadership.

But Stalin was inconsolable. "We f\*\*\*\*\* up, all is lost," Stalin reportedly growled sullenly to the astonished Politburo squad.

Moreover, in these first days and weeks, Stalin immediately started wheels turning, according to ex-General Dmitri Volkogonov, the post-Soviet biographer of Stalin, to work out a cowardly compromise with Hitler. In the proposed deal, according to this story, which has never been fully confirmed, the German invasion would be halted. In return in his suit for peace, Stalin would agree to hand over to the Germans all three Baltic Soviet republics, plus Moldavia as well as a large share of Ukrainian and Byelorussian territory already occupied by the invading Wehrmacht. Recent Russian sources deny the authenticity of the “cave-in” story.

A similar version of Stalin’s “collapse” was put out in the officially cleansed (under Brezhnev in the 1960s and 1970s) memoirs of Marshal Georgi Zhukov. So too have various post-1956 Communist historians put out like similar stories—at least up to 1992. Noted post-Soviet military historian Volkogonov himself hews to this version in his 1991 biography of Stalin. Present-day Communist and pro-Communist newspapers in Russia still claim that Stalin’s domestic policies in “building socialism” were mostly justifiable. Yet, they say, his behavior before, during, and immediately after June 22, 1941, was inexcusably “abnormal.” So was his penchant for brutally purging coworkers and committing genocide against whole peoples and classes, they admit. But the latter-day Communists aside, the old version of Stalin’s behavior on the fateful days in late June 1941, inundated as it is by new documents, is losing its grip on credibility.

## NOTES

The first epigraph is from Nikita Khrushchev, “Special Report to the Twentieth Party Congress, February 24–25, 1956,” in *The Crimes of the Stalin Era: Special Report to the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, ed. Boris I. Nicolaevsky (New York: New Leader Magazine, 1962), p. 40.

The second is from *Molotov Remembers: Inside Kremlin Politics. Conversations with Felix Chuev* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993), pp. 23, 29.

1 This was told to me by Dr. Ellsworth Raymond, who was on duty in the U.S. Embassy in Moscow in the weeks and months before, during, and after the Wehrmacht attack.

2 Dennis Showalter, "Operation Barbarossa: Hitler's Greatest Gambit," *World War II Magazine* (May 2001), p. 45.

3 Anatoly Kvashnin and Makhmut Gareyev, "Sem' Urokov Velikoi Otech-estevnnoi" ("Seven Lessons from the Great Fatherland War"), *Nezavisimoe Voyennoye Obozreniye* (April 28-May 11, 2000), p. 2. Kvashnin is present chief of the General Staff; Gareyev is a well-known ex-Soviet military strategist and author, now president of the Academy of Military Science, Moscow.

4 Andrei A. Kokoshin, *Soviet Strategic Thought, 1917-91* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995), p. 109.

5 Compare corresponding documents containing agents' reports in A. N. Yakovlev, ed., *1941 god. Dokumenty* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi Fond "Demokratiya," 1998). Interestingly, Soviet Ambassador to Berlin Dekanozov's and agents' reports from various sources on Rudolf Hess's flight to Scotland provide a somewhat ambivalent picture as to the true circumstances and motivations allegedly surrounding the flight of the "deputy *fürher*" who parachuted from an Me-110 onto a Scottish estate on May 10, 1941. Gabriel Gorodetsky's view, paralleling that of reports filed to Moscow by such agents in Britain as Kim Philby, proffers the belief that Hess was put up to the mission by Hitler in order to conclude a *modus vivendi* with Britain in opposing the USSR. However, later information reaching Stalin suggested that Hess, a

“romantic” and “peace lover,” had made the flight strictly on his own initiative. This theory was borne out by the vehemently angry reaction in Germany, including that of Hitler himself, to Hess’s flight, as one Soviet agent duly reported. It is by no means clear from the available evidence whether Stalin went along with the conspiracy theory, least of all that England was about to mend bridges with Nazi Germany. The notion that Stalin bought the conspiracy theory, however, despite what Churchill or others claimed to the contrary, became frozen as the Soviet party line on the incident. However, some contemporary Russian historians suggest that Stalin’s reaction may not have been so “paranoid,” especially as clarification of the incident reached him from various sources. Such information indicated distinct German displeasure with Hess’s action, further confirming that Hess had acted alone. Incidentally, many of Philby’s reports seemed designed to cater to what he and some of the other operatives regarded as Stalin’s basically suspicious nature. Some Western historians display a suspiciousness toward England’s policy at that time that is at least as virile as Stalin’s reputedly was.

6 Yu. A. Gor’kov, ed., *Kreml’, Stavka, Genshtab* (Tver’: RIF Ltd., 1999), pp. 255–56. Stalin and his visitors on the following dates are so logged: June 22—Molotov, Beria, Timoshenko, Mekhlis, Zhukov, Malenkov, Mikoyan, Molotov, Shaposhnikov, et al.; June 23—Molotov, Voroshilov, Beria, Timoshenko, Vatutin, et al.; and June 24—most of the same party, government, and military officials were in conference with Stalin, usually in the middle of the night, when Stalin preferred to work. All the rest of the days up to Stalin’s first radio address to the country, on July 3, show the same picture of Stalin, the alleged “workaholic,” evidently very much in control of himself and others, thus putting into question opposite interpretations.

7 Mikhail Mel’tyukhov, *Upushchennyi shans Stalina Sovetskyi Soyuz i*

*bor'ba za Yevropu 1939–1941 (Stalin's Lost Opportunity: The Soviet Union and the Battle for Europe 1939–1941)* (Moscow: Veche, 2000), pp. 495–96.

8 A number of post-Soviet Russian military writers note that Stalin, in contrast to Hitler, butted in less and less on a regular basis as the war went on. Hitler, on the other hand, increasingly defied any contrary advice from his generals, especially his line commanders on the Eastern Front, in setting tactics and strategy. The latest interpretations by some Russian military writers of Stalin's decision making at later phases of the war depict the dictator in a relatively favorable light as being quite up to the job as commander-in-chief. Yet this is still being roundly debated among Russian historians. That he took no interest in military matters, as alleged by historian Gorodetsky, is, of course, untrue.

9 Aleksandr M. Nekrich, *Pariahs, Partners, Predators: German-Soviet Relations, 1922–1941* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 244.

## ***Stalin's Response to "Barbarossa"—II***

An updated recounting of the events surrounding June 22 and its aftermath is based in some cases on new evidence. Still later, as-yet forthcoming documentary evidence could, of course, refute or on the other hand support the current "revisionist" consensus. Yet in their books and articles the newer version is taking hold among Russian historians in ways that profoundly embarrass some previous histories and Stalin biographies in Russia as well as in the West by making them look inaccurate and outdated.

Stalin's war preparations for the country and his own actions in mid-1941 during the first days of the German penetration into the USSR have been reanalyzed from approximately 1997 to the present in such Russian publications as *Voprosy Istorii* (*Problems of History*), *Vtoraya Mirovaya Voina* (*The Second World War*), *Istoriya Sovetskogo Obshchestva v Novom Osveshchenii* (*The History of Soviet Society in a New Light*), *Voenno-Istoricheskyi Zhurnal* (*Military-Historical Journal*), *Prepodavaniye Istorii v Shkolye* (*The Teaching of History in the Schools*), and other journals. Together with these a number of new books published in Russia likewise elucidate the controversy, among them in particular the volume edited by Russian academician Yuri N. Afanas'iev, *Drugaya Voina 1939–1945* (*The Other War 1939–1945*), published in 1996, as well as Edvard Radzinsky's biography of Stalin that came out in the same year. Added to these titles is the 600-page study of the period 1939–41 written by military historian Mikhail I.



Mel'tyukhov, published in late 2000, and Pavel Sudoplatov's 1994 work, *Special Tasks*, based on Sudoplatov's work as deputy chief of Soviet foreign intelligence in this period.

Fresh insights can also be pieced together from reading recently available memoirs by, in some cases, informed, putatively reliable participants and on-the-scene observers at that time. These include Vyacheslav Molotov, No. 2 to Stalin; Pavel Sudoplatov, deputy chief of foreign intelligence in the 1930s and early 1940s; the elder son of Stalin's security police chief Lavrenti Beria (1899–1953), Sergo; Georgi Malenkov's (1902–88) son, Andrei; Radzinsky's eyewitness informant, Yu. E. Chadayev, who was Council of People's Commissars official stenographer at Stalin's dacha; and others whose testimonies may be found in other archival documents. Furthermore, an informative documentary film, under the title *Stalin and Hitler: Dangerous Liaisons*, prepared by Russian and French scholars, was issued in 1999 under the auspices of Films for the Humanities and Sciences. (Incidentally, this film's French and Russian historian-consultants hew to an “offensist” line on Stalin military strategy of that time.)

That Molotov, for one, may be apologetic toward Stalin in certain respects is undoubtedly true. Yet in all cases these writers show considerable well-roundedness. They are otherwise extremely critical of Stalin—for example, as in the memoirs of Beria's and Malenkov's sons, Sudoplatov, and so forth. Nor is Molotov totally uncritical of the *Khozain*.

## **LATEST VERSION**

The latest picture that emerges of Stalin's behavior and actions in the immediate aftermath of June 22 differs in significant respects from Khrushchev's and other traditional treatments found in Soviet and Western histories. The new version is revealing and instructive. In their memoirs published after the demise of communism, Molotov, Sergo

Beria, Sudoplatov, and Andrei Malenkov make the following points, as do some authors in the historical journals mentioned above (in particular, in *The Teaching of History in the Schools*, no. 1 [1998]):

- Stalin did not “collapse” upon hearing from his aides and military commanders of the German invasion on the morning of June 22. Though he was angry and cursing, he retained his composure. Molotov puts it this way in his 1993 memoirs, *Molotov Remembers: Inside Kremlin Politics*, edited by Felix Chuev:

Stalin seldom lost his temper . . . I wouldn't say he “lost his head” [in the days following the invasion]. He suffered, but he didn't show any signs of that. He is not portrayed as he really was. They depict him as a repentant sinner! Well, that is plainly absurd. [In that period] he worked as usual, day and night, never losing his head or his “gift of speech.” Molotov further noted that Stalin had edited the speech that he, Molotov, delivered the day of the invasion.

Molotov's version sounds believable if for no other reason than this close aide of Stalin nevertheless is critical of Stalin here and there in his brutally frank conversations with the interviewer, Chuev. (Molotov dissembles occasionally in claiming, for instance, that there were no secret protocols to the 1939 Nazi–Soviet agreements.)

- Sudoplatov, in his book *Special Tasks*, states:

In his memoirs, Khrushchev portrays Stalin's “panic” and “confusion” in the first days of the war and later. I

saw no such behavior. Stalin did not isolate himself in his dacha until June 30, 1941. The Kremlin diary [office log] shows that he was regularly receiving visitors and monitoring the deteriorating situation. From the very beginning of the war, Stalin received Beria and [his deputy] Merkulov in the Kremlin two or three times a day.... It appeared to me that the administrative mechanism of command and control was functioning without interruption. In fact . . . I maintained a deep belief in our ultimate victory namely because of the calm, clear businesslike issuance of these orders.<sup>1</sup>

- For his part, Sergo Beria notes in his book that Khrushchev was a notoriously poor witness (Georgi Malenkov's son, Andrei, says the same) as to Stalin's behavior in Moscow in late June 1941.<sup>2</sup> Khrushchev, Sergo Beria insists, was a habitual liar and loved to flatter himself while embarrassing and overpowering his Politburo rivals and enemies with tales of their own "Stalin taint" (meanwhile overlooking his own deep involvement in the bloody purges in Ukraine in the late 1930s).

In any case, on June 22, as well as on the following days, Beria's son points out, Khrushchev was posted in far-off Kiev, Ukraine. Indeed, his name does not appear on Stalin's late June office log, mentioned above. His last appearance in Stalin's office is recorded as taking place on June 16! So how could he have possibly known how Stalin was acting?

For his part, Sergo Beria claims that he himself was near Stalin during those days and that he held private conversations about the fateful events with his father, Lavrenti Pavlovich, top member of Stalin's inner circle in charge of the secret police and other sensitive affairs of state. He witnessed everything in those days.

As Sergo Beria writes:

Not a single book [including Zhukov's memoirs] does justice to the facts.... What Khrushchev and Zhukov had to say [about Stalin's behavior and actions at that time] has no relation to historical accuracy. A fact is a fact, after all. [The facts are that] on the [Saturday] night of the invasion it is not true that military commanders were sleeping peacefully or were partying. On the contrary. [As to Stalin] he was, to be sure, upset about how things were going at the front. When it is suggested that Stalin never expected Hitler to strike, that he had faith in Hitler, or that the latter had deceived him is just another myth. . . . Stalin was not so much upset by the so-called "surprise attack" as he was by the fact that the Army was incapable of holding back the first onslaught of the attacking forces.

[Various] commanders, including Commissar of Defense Timoshenko and Chief of the General Staff Zhukov before and during the first hours and days of the attack . . . had many times assured Stalin and the Politburo that the Red Army could withstand an attack. [Earlier] they had always said, "The Army possesses all that is needed." But when Stalin heard that the army was retreating toward the east, he was quite naturally shaken.... It is true that our Army was not yet sufficiently prepared to fight against mechanized forces such as the Wehrmacht. [Sergo Beria, like some post-Soviet Russian historians, blames the military for this lack of preparation.] Stalin knew about the invasion plan "Barbarossa" before June 22nd from intelligence

officers. ... In his first speech of July 3rd Stalin himself spoke about how Hitler, by his “perfidious attack,” had violated the Nazi-Soviet Pact, “ignoring the fact that the whole world would regard her as the aggressor.”

Then Stalin added significantly as though implicitly to answer the question, Why didn’t the Soviets strike first? “Naturally,” argued Stalin, “our peace-loving country, not wishing to take the initiative in breaking a pact, could not itself resort to perfidy.”

- Leaving aside here the question of whether Stalin and the Soviets actually may have been developing a military strategy for waging their own preventive war against Germany (see discussion in chapter 5 and in the conclusions in chapter 8), the political-declaratory side of this doctrine, as opposed to the unpublished, operational part of doctrine and strategy, did not and possibly could not say this in so many words. If it had, such aggressive statements—made, at least, to a broad domestic and foreign audience rather than to a close circle of military or party officials—would damage the Soviets’ global reputation. *It would also preclude any possible aid that might eventually come to the USSR from the as-yet noncombatants and potential anti-Axis, “coalition” partners, such as the United States.*

As it was, the USSR was able to win the support of the Western Allies and the invaluable Lend-Lease aid mainly because the USSR was seen as the hapless victim, not the initiator of an aggressive attack. There is even some evidence that Stalin was prepared to fall back on Allied aid in case other scenarios failed. In other words, he did not entirely burn his bridges with the West despite the Nazi-Soviet agreements of 1939–40. Note the fact that he kept the “Westerner” Litvinov in limbo rather than in

purgatory. He was later to be exploited toward the West once again as deputy commissar of foreign affairs and Soviet ambassador to the United States (during World War II). Anastas Mikoyan, the Armenian “Teflon” perennial in the Stalin Politburo, is another example of a useful emissary. He flaunted the air of a debonair, flexible negotiator. Yet his own political loyalties and affinities were rigidly Stalinist—at least while Stalin was alive. In the post-Stalin period, a similarly accommodationist role was played by another hardy perennial in the Politburo, Premier Alexei Kosygin. Like Mikoyan, he, too, was an orthodox party-liner on foreign affairs though seemingly less rigid than other top Soviet officials on domestic policy.

- One of the Russian historical journals points out that the problem with Stalin’s assessment of the intelligence reports that warned of the invasion (coming from such agents as Richard Sorge in Tokyo) was their often contradictory nature. One author points out that the contradictions even extended to inside the Nazi leadership itself, where invasion dates were repeatedly shuffled and changed, and that Soviet partial knowledge of this also confused the picture.

Hitler’s decisions, as we have seen, were kept secret even from top Wehrmacht commanders, not to mention from the amicable German ambassador to Moscow, Count von Schulenburg. The latter strongly opposed a German war against Russia. Schulenburg was later executed in Germany because of his alleged involvement in the 1944 plot to kill Hitler, and possibly also for his earlier pessimism about Barbarossa and evident friendliness toward the Soviets.

Nor, as it is alleged in both new and old Russian literature on the subject, did Stalin trust what Churchill had told him. Stalin was convinced, not without some basis, that the Western powers kept hoping that Germany would attack the USSR, not only because it was a Communist dictatorship but because the Germans

would thereby become bogged down in a self-destructive two-front war. The new “generation” of Russian historians also nearly unanimously adheres to this point of view. In some instances Soviet agents also made this point—as they said, based on secret information—in their messages to the top Kremlin leadership. Meanwhile, English officials, particularly within the military, it is true, erred profoundly, as Hitler himself had, in thinking that the Soviets could not withstand a German onslaught whether it were made in the short or long run.

Half joking at a postwar Big Three summit, Winston Churchill brought up this sensitive subject personally to Stalin—namely, the latter’s show of incredulity toward the prime minister’s warnings. Stalin punned back that, after all, it was hard for him to believe “everything” that he was told, even by his own agents.

- One Russian journal author points out that the well-known story of Sorge’s pinpointing of the date of the Nazi invasion is itself suspect (see Yu. P. Bokarev in *The Teaching of History in the Schools*, no. 1 [1998]). Bokarev notes that Sorge reputedly made his prediction *even before Hitler and the German High Command had themselves fixed the date!* In any case, Stalin, it is revealed in new documents, had a copy of Wehrmacht planning embodied in part in Operation Barbarossa. This is also claimed by Sergo Beria. However, the actual top-secret date of Barbarossa, as noted, was withheld from the German documents.
- In the matter of Stalin’s preparations for meeting what he and everyone had expected would be a German attack sooner or later, there is, as we saw in chapter 5, evidence that, indeed, defensive and possibly also offensive war preparations were speeded up in the Red Army and Air Force, on Stalin’s orders, during spring 1941 right up until the invasion. One-half of all the Soviet armed forces was deployed on the front facing the Germans after massive mobilization and redeployments were under way in late spring.

Many emergency preventive measures, it turns out, had been taken—though not completed—to meet the invasion threat—or to prepare to wage a preemptive attack from the Soviet side.<sup>3</sup>

## **SOVIET UNREADINESS: THE SMOKESCREEN**

Meanwhile, Stalin realized that the Soviets possibly would not be ready for full-scale war of whatever type, defensive or offensive. Some analysts say that he thought the Red Army would be prepared, however, by July 1941. Yet in his interview with Chuev, Molotov claimed that the USSR would be ready for battle only “by 1943.” In any case, the Soviet leader evidently calculated that on their part the Germans would not likely attack much before 1942.

As a result of these surmises, Stalin relied on the diplomatic ploy of stalling and misleading Hitler by means of several ruses that he thought would work. For example, as we saw, he ordered the news agency Tass and the party newspaper *Pravda* in mid-June to publish vehement denials that the Soviets were building up forces along their western frontier. They were, the item suggests, doing nothing extraordinary there, nor was German–Soviet friendship weakening in any way. Nor were Red Army scouts—ground or airborne—positioned along the frontier permitted to shoot at straying German planes or in any way create a rumpus that would “provoke” the Germans. The Boss himself explicitly conveyed such warnings to the Red Army leadership. He once remarked to Zhukov (according to Zhukov), “You must be out of your mind” in thinking the Red Army was prepared (in late spring 1941) to wage a preemptive strike. This was Zhukov’s denial that Stalin had ever accepted the thinking contained, for example, in the notorious, offensivist Timoshenko–Zhukov memorandum of May 15 (see discussion in chapter 5 and the conclusions in chapter 8).

Besides making these verbal assurances through his controlled press



—that he knew would be read and duly assimilated to Soviet advantage in Berlin—Stalin made sure that the deliveries of raw materials by rail to Hitler continued on schedule, which they did right up until June 22 (see chapter 4). Yet whether this diplomatic gambit reflects gross negligence and inattention on Stalin’s part or whether, on the contrary, it was a last-ditch effort to “postpone the inevitable” remains a matter of contention among Russian historians. The latter have said they are looking into this question thoroughly as more documents possibly are released from the several archives—namely, those in the Ministry of Defense, in the president’s office, in secret police possession under the supervision of the Documents Department of the Federal Security Service, in the old Central Committee archives of the CPSU, or as collected in the All-Russian Scientific Research Institute for Documents and Archive Affairs in Moscow.

## **STALIN MISLED AND MISLEADS HIMSELF**

In early 1941, it seems to be true that Stalin was resentful as he made his vehement denials of the veracity of some of the reports he was receiving from his intelligence agents. On one occasion, he told the messenger of such information to tell the agent to go “f\*\*\* his mother.” Others he accused outright of being agents of Germany. A psychologist might proffer the opinion that Stalin deep down simply did not want to believe what he was being told. It upset his plans to delay war or, for that matter, possibly one day to wage his own offensive war at his, not Hitler’s, time of choosing. Reflecting on Stalin’s behavior with such speculation in mind is perhaps instructive.

At any rate, according to Molotov, all that Stalin really cared about was preserving and strengthening the Soviet Union. Yet the Russian historian Bokarev suggests that it was more complicated than that. He writes that Stalin was confused by the conflicting mixed signals he was receiving from his agents as well as by what he thought he himself knew of Hitler’s plans and actions as of early 1941. Stalin acted as

though he had a direct line to the *Führer*. There have even been rumors, as yet unverified, that Stalin secretly conferred one-on-one with Hitler in Poland in autumn 1939.

Stalin misled himself, it seems, prior to the invasion. For instance, the German buildup on Russia's Western Front in spring 1941 looked a good deal less threatening to Stalin and perhaps to some of the military than to those very governments or governments-in-exile into whose countries Hitler was pouring additional troops—states such as Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Rumania. At times, on the other hand, it appeared that German military moves in Eastern Europe were aimed at establishing airbases at a safe distance from the West European arena. Such bases were to be used, allegedly, in the German air and rocket war against Britain, not in a war against the USSR. Perhaps Stalin adopted this rationalization as well. Perhaps concerted German disinformation had misled him in this way.

Moreover, as some recent documentation shows, Stalin could not really believe that Hitler would bring on himself a two-front war—as had happened so disastrously for Germany in World War I—without, at least, first finishing off Britain with the ongoing air war and erstwhile German plans for an invasion of England. Apparently, Stalin was not impressed by Hitler calling off Operation Sea Lion, the intended invasion of England. To Stalin's mind, Hitler remained tied down in the West. The Soviet leader was well aware that the German capital city was being bombed—actually, during one of Molotov's sojourns there in 1940. Furthermore, what about America? That formidable state sooner or later was bound to be another “imperialist” country warring against Germany. Already it was steadily shipping Lend-Lease supplies to Britain.

Another important factor affecting if not misleading Stalin was the flight of the top Nazi aide to Hitler, “deputy *fürher*” Rudolf Hess, to England in May 1941. From the Cambridge, et al. spies in England—

Burgess, Maclean, Philby, Blunt—Stalin was led to believe that England might well one day close a deal with Germany. Only then would Germany turn on the USSR. Similar information—or was it misinformation? —reached Stalin from his ambassador in London, Ivan Maisky. British Ambassador Stafford Cripps occasionally also used such “information” in order to pressure Stalin to come to terms with the British before it was too late.

All this, runs one version of these events, must in turn have influenced the “paranoid” Soviet dictator into thinking that Britain (and the United States) were involved in a plot to deceive him—namely, that British warnings of an imminent German attack were intended merely to provoke a Soviet–German war. Some of these informers seemed to be motivated as much by sycophancy toward (or fear of) Stalin as by any hard information in their possession. Pleasing or placating the Boss was often uppermost. One’s very life could depend on it, after all.

Another factor was the reluctance of Stalin’s sycophantic chief of GRU, General Golikov, to relay to Stalin the grim truth about the imminent execution of Operation Barbarossa. Given Stalin’s firm, self-deluding conviction about Hitler’s intentions and Stalin’s overconfidence in his own powers to anticipate Hitler’s moves, to do so could well have threatened Golikov’s life, as, indeed, it actually had the lives of other informants.

Although Sergo Beria denies it, other historians believe that NKVD Chief Lavrenti Beria himself was among those who misled Stalin. He is said to have assured Stalin with the prediction that Hitler would not attack if it meant a two-front war for Germany. All of this input may have contributed to Stalin’s shock at the time of the invasion.

New evidence shows something else: Intensive preparations for meeting an imminent German invasion, perhaps for preempting an attack, were actually under way intensively in late spring and in June.

The problem was that these preparations—movements of troops from the interior, even as far away as Siberia, to the front, securing means of signals and communications along the front, getting arms and fortifications in place, securing airbases with anti-aircraft batteries, building new defenses of the forward “Molotov Line” type, and much else—*had not been completed in time*. And this was amid evident assurances to Stalin from the Red Army High Command that the army was on the ready and invincible. Such reassurance may or may not have convinced Stalin.

Above all, it was fully expected by the military and civilian leadership that a forewarning of up to two weeks would precede any actual invasion as the Wehrmacht actually concentrated forces for such a vast undertaking. There would be time enough for both Red Army echelons—the first on the frontier and the “covering,” second echelon—to deploy and rally to the defense of the country. In other words, if this was a purely military miscalculation, the blame for the surprise may not rest solely on Stalin’s shoulders. Stalin had been largely assured by his military commanders, after all, that there was no worry. The Red Army was ready to respond to “any contingency.”

There were exceptions. At the very last minute, Admiral Nikolai G. Kuznetsov, on duty in the Baltic, was one of the few commanding officers to be quite thoroughly aware of the immanency of the German danger. One or two frontline army commanders risked their lives by likewise trying to alert the political and military authorities in Moscow to the immediate danger of an attack in late June.

Even after Soviet planes were being destroyed on the ground and Soviet ground troops were attacked in the eerie predawn light, the top command in Moscow, including Stalin, was incredulous as to the extent or seriousness of the hostilities initiated by the Germans. At least twenty-four hours into the invasion, Stalin is alleged to have believed only that border skirmishing had merely gotten out of control. He

insisted that Soviet troops should do nothing to instigate further hostilities. One of his earliest orders of June 22, as we saw, was based on this assumption.

## **THE MILITARY SITUATION ON JUNE 22**

All of these factors, say the new crop of Russian historians, are what led to the debacle that followed the June 22 invasion, together with German occupation of so much of European Russia in the first months of the war. It was not entirely a case of Stalin's personal miscalculations or of his cowardice after the German juggernaut started rolling. More likely, it was the suddenness and sheer boldness of the Wehrmacht blitzkrieg—the unexpected, successful application to Russia of blitzkrieg tactics that had worked so well against an entirely different type of nation-state enemy in the West in 1940.<sup>4</sup> These were tactics that were not supposed to be applicable against Russia, given its ultimate preponderance of troops and territorial space in which to retreat before counterattacking. This perception lulled the Russians into complacency concerning a German attack.<sup>5</sup>

In mid-June 1941 Soviet Russia had “on paper” 303 infantry, tank, motorized, and cavalry divisions, of which one-quarter, however, was still in the process of being formed.<sup>6</sup> Nor was the Red Navy unimpressive with, for example, 212 submarines and many surface ships. Equipped forces deployed along the western frontier numbered 163 infantry, cavalry, tank, and motorized divisions consisting of 2,743,000 men with 57,000 guns and mortars, 12,762 tanks, 8,696 military aircraft in good condition, and 545 naval ships. All these composed the first strategic echelon of the Soviet military forces in the west. To cover them the Red Army had deployed along the frontier thirteen general forces armies.

On June 21, an urgent message was sent to Georgi Dimitrov, Comintern general secretary, from close friends, the Chinese

Communists based in northwest China.<sup>7</sup> Signed by Chou En-lai and Mao Tse-tung, the message warned Moscow of an imminent German attack. It drew this reply from Molotov: “The situation is not clear. A big game is in progress. Not everything depends on us. I will talk this over with J. V. [Stalin]. If something special comes out of it, I will telephone you!” The call was never made.

One still wonders what Stalin meant when, in his victory speech at a Kremlin reception in honor of Red Army commanders on May 24, 1945, he seemingly “repented” as follows as he heaped praise above all on one of the combatants on the multinational Soviet side, the “Russian people”:

[Before the war] our government committed no few mistakes; at times our situation was desperate, as in 1941–42, when our army was retreating, abandoning our native villages and towns.... Another people might have said to the government: You have not come up to our expectations. Get out. We shall appoint another government, which will conclude peace with Germany and ensure tranquility for us. But the Russian people did not do that, for they were confident that the policy their government was pursuing was correct.... I thank the Russian people for this confidence! To the health of the Russian people!

## **ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS**

Adolf Hitler’s decision to invade the Soviet Union in June 1941 was motivated, some historians believe, by the *Führer*’s fear of an eventual two-front war that would likely be fought in the future on the European continent. He imagined that the war would widen, that, for example,

America, a crucial, prospective combatant, sooner or later would enter the fray. Thus, by waging and winning a “preventive war” against the USSR already in 1941—even before he had defeated England throughout 1940—the German dictator sought to preclude a repeat of that crucial German predicament of World War I: that is, augmented forces of the Western Allies fighting Germany on one side and their Russian ally fighting Germany and the Central Powers in the east.

*America’s Expected Role in the War:* Hitler had America on his mind, as did apparently Stalin. They both reasoned that sooner or later this large, crucial country with its impressive economy and defense-producing potential would surely enter the global war. Hitler sought to preempt this likelihood by defeating Russia ahead of time, thereby dominating the Eurasian continent as proposed by his “official geographer,” General Karl Haushofer.

Stalin, by contrast, appears to have relished U.S. entry into the war even before the USSR was attacked. Whether Stalin looked forward to the likelihood of American involvement in hostilities with a diabolical aim in mind (namely, seeing America weakened and revolutionized by global war that was to include Japan) or with a more realistic expectation that America might thence become a future Soviet ally remains a subject for future investigation. At present no documents support one or the other view.

Still, by early July 1941, he immediately sought Western aid against the “common foe,” Germany. Much earlier, in his speech to the Eighteenth Party Congress in March 1939, Stalin had referred to the United States as a “nonaggressive” capitalist country. Later, he had sent friendly feelers in the direction of Washington.

*Did Stalin Anticipate the United States as an Ally?:* The second volume of Yakovlev’s edited *The Year 1941: Documents* reproduces a revealing conversation that was held in Moscow on June 5, 1941,

seventeen days before the German attack. The talks were between U.S. Ambassador Lawrence Steinhardt and Deputy Commissar of Foreign Affairs S. A. Lozovsky.<sup>8</sup> Both made significant concessions on trade and various other issues. It was obvious that Lozovsky had been given orders from above in the Kremlin to be forthcoming to the American. The new Soviet attitude was quite perceptible.

*The Unwise Decision to Attack Soviet Russia:* The decision to attack the USSR ran absolutely counter to Hitler's earlier, explicitly expressed tactic of seriously courting that state on a long-term basis. Indeed, both dictators had described their emerging interstate friendship as "long lasting." Hitler and Stalin's joint initiatives in 1939–40 in signing various sweeping agreements, including the Nazi–Soviet pact of August 1939 (see chapter 4), was, to Hitler's mind, a safe way of avoiding—short of war—the pincers of a two-front vice.

Still, it might be asked, if forestalling a two-front war by diplomatic means was indeed Hitler's principal motive in establishing "lasting friendship" with Soviet Russia, thus waiving Nazism's condemnation of "Jewish Bolshevism," why did the *Führer* decide to turn against his newfound Soviet ally in June 1941? Was, in fact, such an invasion nested in Hitler's plans all along? Likewise, Stalin is known to have confided to intimates that sooner or later Germany and the USSR would be at each other's throats. As far as Germany was concerned, in his diary Propaganda Minister Josef Goebbels indicated the same prediction. So it would appear that stated sentiments on both sides of long-lasting friendship were disingenuous.

*Was Hitler "Forced" into the Invasion?:* Was Hitler forced or, on the contrary, did Stalin's own new show of westward aggressiveness, his large-scale territorial annexations in 1939–40 against German interests in Central and Balkan Europe, and his various demands proffered in late 1940 so profoundly alarm the Germans that Hitler was "forced" to preempt Soviet Russia's own aggressive plans vis-à-vis



Germany? Although historians—especially those in Germany and Russia today—do not agree on the answers to these questions, on one thing they unanimously concur: Germany's invasion of Soviet Russia in mid-1941 turned out to be Hitler's fatal mistake, dooming him to defeat against the Allies in World War II. His rout in Russia, like Napoleon's 125 years before, paved the way to the Allied victory, not only over the European Axis but also over Japan, the newly become Asian ally of Hitler and Mussolini.

Significantly, too, Operation Barbarossa had precluded Soviet Russia's own joining, as seriously anticipated in Moscow and Berlin, a projected Four-Power Alliance, an expanded Axis, that was to include the USSR, Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and militarist Japan. This monumental scheme was seriously discussed in secrecy between the Germans and Soviets in 1940 and is now part of the public record. However, because of Operation Barbarossa, this potential grand alliance, embracing three continents (Europe, Asia, and Africa), obviously could never see the light of day. However, had it materialized, without doubt the outcome of World War II would have been vastly different.

*The Controversy Continues:* Today two groups of historians—some Russian, some German, others Americans or British—take opposing views on the question of the Nazi–Soviet alliance and the German attack together with its consequences. One school insists that Hitler, as early as mid-1940, defying doubts in the minds of trusted aides (among them, it appears, Air Marshal Hermann Goering, Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop, Propaganda Minister Goebbels, and Nazi philosopher Alfred Rosenberg), had decided to invade Russia and terminate Nazi–Soviet friendship and collaboration—a scheme that he had in general long nurtured. The timing of the attack was not a badly calculated one. Having failed to subdue England in the air blitz of 1940–41 and fearing eventual U.S. participation in the war, possibly

alongside Soviet Russia, Hitler decided to act decisively before it was too late. He would settle scores with Bolshevik Russia once and for all and return, in a sense, to what he had preached so vehemently in *Mein Kampf*. Whatever Stalin was up to at that time by way of aggression or pure defense was irrelevant. So runs one conventional interpretation.

On its part, a second group of historians—among whom are some contemporary Russian authors and scholars together with some Russian, German, and British ex-officials, memoirists, and other writers who in part rely in their research in newly opened Russian archives—insists that by their aggressive actions, Stalin and Molotov by mid-1940 had profoundly alarmed and infuriated Hitler.<sup>9</sup> At that time Moscow had begun making brazen demands on the Germans, such as insisting on giving the USSR a unilateral free hand in the oil-rich Middle East, the Balkans, Finland, and the Turkish Straits while threatening to seize the Rumanian oil fields. In starting to gobble up large swatches of territory in the Baltic and East European regions, the Soviets did not bother to inform Berlin, Moscow's putatively sworn ally, of the dates and details as warranted by their agreements of 1939.

According to Ribbentrop, Hitler's pro-Russian, anti-British foreign minister, Hitler thus was "forced" into making a decision to stop Stalin, a conclusion he had reached, Ribbentrop and others claimed after World War II, only in late 1940. Hitler had not made the Operation Barbarossa decision, as alleged by some, Ribbentrop has claimed, as early on as June or July 1940.

As indicated above, one of the most intriguing, controversial questions haunting historians of World War II concerns Soviet—or rather, Stalin's—behavior in the aftermath of the signing of the several Nazi–Soviet agreements in Moscow beginning in August 1939. As we have seen, in the conventional interpretation of the run-up to the German invasion of June 21, 1941, the Stalin regime was and still is depicted in a number of histories as being terrified at the prospect of

any ensuing deterioration of Nazi-Soviet relations, let alone all-out war. After all, since autumn 1939, the Soviet leader had ordered his government-controlled media not to criticize Hitler and Nazism. Not even the word *fascism* was allowed to appear in print in Soviet media. Moreover, besides shipping him vital raw materials used in the war against the Western democracies, Stalin did all he could in other ways to help or even placate Hitler. For example, he ordered, communist fifth-column agents to sabotage Western defense plants (i.e., until mid-1941) while sending congratulations to Hitler when the Wehrmacht took Paris in May 1940.

On several occasions and via various memoranda, Stalin and Molotov indicated fulsomely to Berlin that Moscow was on Germany's side in fighting the so-called bourgeois, plutocratic, and colonialist regimes of Western Europe. Both dictators relished the prospect of an utterly destroyed British Empire that together they would help bring about.

To this hypothesis, other authors respond: Yes, Stalin did all these things to placate but also eventually to *mislead* Hitler. The Soviet dictator, it is alleged, greatly feared Hitler. He did all he could to demonstrate his friendship with his totalitarian German counterpart as well as showing loyalty to the Nazi-Soviet agreements. Stalin had drunk toasts to Hitler, whom, he said, he knew the German people admired and whose "iron rule" in Germany he sincerely respected no less than Hitler appreciated Stalin's new order. Stalin had made sure that the billions of dollars worth of deliveries of war-related raw materials—rubber, oil, food, textiles, rolled steel, and other goods under the economic aid terms of the Nazi-Soviet agreements—were made punctually. They were, in fact, kept strictly on schedule, reaching Brest-Litovsk in former Poland and then downloaded from the wide-gauge Soviet railroad cars onto the narrow-gauge tracks to ship them on to Germany. Stalin also said that Soviet-Nazi friendship was "sealed in

blood.”

## **LATEST OFFENSIST ARGUMENTS**

Meanwhile, as some Russian historians allege today, Stalin, who was stalling for time during this “breathing space,” was secretly planning his own offensive war against Germany and, in fact, the rest of Europe (see chapters 5 and 7). Historians who think this way find themselves in agreement with, for example, the British ambassador to Berlin in the late 1930s, Sir Neville Henderson. According to Henderson, Stalin’s true motive in joining forces with the Nazis and helping them defeat the West was so that the USSR could stay out of the fray while watching the Allies and Axis destroy one another. The Soviets would help along this process of self-destruction by aiding Germany and by sharing the spoils of aggression with them, as described above. Perhaps the ambassador had been reading Stalin’s *Works*. At the conclusion of this collaboration and ultimate German defeat or the mutual exhaustion of the belligerents, Henderson insisted, the Soviets would thereupon march west for the kill, sovietizing all of Europe as openly stated by their own ideologists as well as by the Communist International (Comintern). Henderson, it seems, had taken seriously Stalin’s statements along these very lines in 1925.

However, once Hitler perceived that this was Stalin’s game, some argue, Hitler decided to act. Operation Barbarossa was formally approved by Hitler for active preparation and implementation by December 18, 1940. As some historians note, this decision was made precisely at the time German disagreements with their Soviet “partner” over Rumania, Bulgaria, Finland, the straits, and so on were reaching a climax. When they were informed of Hitler’s final decision to go ahead with Barbarossa, Mussolini and many Nazi aides were left in a nervous state. In his diaries Goebbels made fun of such “cowards.”

As we now know, the British got wind of Barbarossa through their

reading of German signals traffic via their captured (in Poland) Enigma Machine and Ultra deciphering program at Bletchley Park. Not wishing in any way to reveal that they had this machine as well as the remarkable breaking of the code that allowed the reading of top-secret General Staff orders, the British nevertheless discreetly “leaked” to Soviet intelligence only bits of what they carefully chose from the closely guarded information, lest it be known that the British had such a system. (Not even the ubiquitous Soviet agents in Britain, it seems, were able to penetrate the premises where Enigma and Ultra were secretly ensconced.) Among these pieces of information, as we saw, were details of German planning for the invasion of the USSR.

Yet Stalin apparently remained unpersuaded by the British information, the secret source of which he did not, of course, know. He calculated that London was merely trying to break up the Soviet–German romance and get the USSR embroiled in war, which, among other things, would have corresponded to the long-held, anti-Soviet sentiments of Prime Minister Churchill. Nor did some informed warnings by certain Red Army commanders in spring and summer 1941 impress Stalin, for in these early times he tended to mistrust his generals. He had brutally purged many of them in previous years, from 1937 onward; he continued to badger and threaten them. As we saw, even the warnings of his top spy posted in Tokyo, Richard Sorge, who predicted within days the exact date of the German attack, did not convince Stalin that a Nazi double cross was in the making.

At his post in Japan, Sorge, in fact, was abandoned and left defenseless by Stalin when the Japanese government learned of his espionage activities, for which he was executed in Tokyo in late 1941 when no attempt was made by the Soviets to get him out of Japan. (Sorge had also tipped off Stalin on Japanese planning for the Pearl Harbor attack—a bit of information that Stalin did not share with Washington.) Shortly before this, Sorge had informed Moscow that

Ribbentrop was trying to get the Japanese to break their neutrality treaty with the USSR that had been signed in spring 1941. (His yeoman service to the Boss was left mainly to the annals of history, although he was given posthumous recognition in the Brezhnev period of the 1970s.)

In articles appearing in the States-side Russian weekly *Panorama* in the late 1990s, Russian military historian Vladimir Lyulechnik demonstrates by references to archival documents how Stalin considered without reservation an eventual war with Germany to be “inevitable.” Stalin perceived that a short period of collaboration with Germany would delay the inevitable conflict while permitting Soviet Russia to further build up its own offensive and defensive military forces, a process that dramatically accelerated at this time. So Lyulechnik claims.

Meanwhile, the allegation in old-style Soviet propaganda (still encountered today in Russia and in many Western history texts) that Stalin had seized the Baltic states and made other territorial annexations in 1939–40 to create a “buffer” against a near-term German invasion of Russia is not borne out by the facts, Lyulechnik continues. His view is shared by a few Western-based historians (Raack, Tolstoy, Topitsch, and Suvorov, among others) and a number of contemporary Russian historians (such as Bobylev, Nevezhin, and Radzinsky).

Lyulechnik, like some other latter-day authors, notes that Stalin ordered no systematic, thoroughgoing defense measures to be undertaken in those territories that he had seized in 1940 bordering German-held territory to the west. If defense rather than offense was on Stalin’s mind, wouldn’t he have ordered defensive preparations along this new line 300 miles west of the former Soviet frontier? these authors ask.

Moreover, the notion of delaying a German invasion as the motive for these annexations is canceled out by the fact that Stalin, by virtue of his seizures of the western lands, succeeded in further endangering the USSR by moving Soviet borders nearer to those of German-occupied Europe. The Germans could then proceed, as they did, to mobilize along that extended, largely unprotected front. Still, the “buffer” argument, accepted uncritically, continues to be dominant in standard American world history textbooks and many books on World War II (for further discussion of this point, see chapter 5).

Like Lyulechnik, former Soviet artillery and GRU officer Viktor Suvorov (nom-de-plume of Vladimir Bogdanovich Rezun), as mentioned earlier, author of a half dozen insider books on the Soviet intelligence and the military, maintains in his 1992 book, *Ice-Breaker*, that Stalin in effect forced Hitler’s hand in making war against the USSR in 1941. The Germans, he says, concurring with a few other observers, adopted a policy of preventive war simply to defend themselves against an eventual, perhaps even imminent Soviet attack on them. They apparently had foreknowledge of this Soviet plan. In any case, this was the official pretext proffered by the Germans, and Hitler personally, just after the June 22 invasion in the declaration from Berlin that followed the opening of hostilities. At one point Stalin in late 1941 cursed in retrospect Nazi Foreign Minister Ribbentrop, co-signer with Molotov of the Nazi–Soviet agreements in August 1939, calling him a “scoundrel” (*podlets*).

According to Suvorov, German worries about a Russian attack were borne out by the fact not only of Stalin’s several threatening territorial acquisitions on the German eastern flank. This may be ascertained as well from other information that Suvorov gleaned from Soviet published sources. Moreover, Suvorov reasoned that by 1941 Stalin had perceived that the German position of strength gained in Nazi-occupied Central, Eastern, and Western Europe and the possible, even likely

German acquisition of the British Isles constituted a dire threat to Soviet security. German expansion in Africa and the Middle East not to mention Norway likewise was threatening to Moscow because it could be seen as an undisguised attempt to outflank the Soviets' own ambitions to secure warm-water egress to the south (Iran, Persian Gulf, India, etc.).

As alleged by Suvorov, Lyulechnik, and a few other authors, by summer 1941 Stalin began actively to plan an offensive war against Germany. He calculated that to sit and wait for a German attack and, therefore, to wage only defensive war would mean, among other things, losing hundreds of thousands of Red Army soldiers as POWs, for many could be expected to defect to the Germans if the Soviets fought merely defensively. (As a matter of fact, over a million did defect in any case.) Another Russian military historian (see chapters 5 and 8), Pavel Bobylev of the Institute for Military History attached to the RF Ministry of Defense, criticizes Stalin in a 2000 article for not taking the allegedly planned offensive indicated as being his long-term option in the relevant documents.

Two French authors, I. A. Dugas and F. Y. Cheron, cited by Lyulechnik in the weekly Russian paper *Panorama*, likewise insist that Stalin calculated that an offensive strike against Germany would be the most feasible option for Soviet Russia for military as well as sociopolitical reasons. It would jive with the long-standing Marxist-Leninist-Comintern formula of exporting "proletarian revolution" on the tips of bayonets. In its plan Germany was to be a principal target as the bridge to the rest of Europe.

In November 1940, these several authors point out, Moscow, via Stalin's right-hand emissary to Berlin, Molotov, was backing Berlin into a corner by making extravagant territorial demands—as, for example, against Rumania, a mutually recognized German satellite—and by making seizures of Lithuanian territory in violation of Soviet—



German agreements while continuing to complain about German ties to Finland. Together with Soviet pretensions of control over the Black and Baltic Seas, Berlin perceived the emergence of “Soviet provocation.” This was bound sooner or later to escalate into an armed confrontation between the two states as they jockeyed for position in the Balkans. In *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, William L. Shirer quotes Hitler as saying at that time: “Stalin is clever and cunning. He demands more and more. He’s a cold-blooded blackmailer.” As for Hitler, Lyulechnik writes (*Panorama*, June 21–27, 1995): “Stalin was convinced that the German leader would not risk waging war on two fronts. Therefore, Stalin decided to act aggressively against his former ally, Germany.”

Lyulechnik, like Suvorov, finds the proof for his offensist interpretation in the altered Soviet military doctrine worked out in 1939–40. In the new doctrine are several revisions of the former, largely defensist doctrine; the new amendments, he claims, all point in the direction of waging offensive war. Above all, the new doctrine detailed secret plans for rapid deployment of offensive Soviet air, ground, and naval forces to be hurled against Germany as well as plans for “carrying out military exercises to prepare Soviet forces to wage such offensives.” Suvorov, claims Lyulechnik, is essentially correct in setting the date for the opening of the Soviet offensive on July 6, 1941. And according to Joachim Hoffmann, the German historian cited by Lyulechnik whose articles appear occasionally today in Russian historical journals, Stalin, with offensist designs in mind, began deploying on the Soviets’ Western Front 24,000 tanks, including the new, long-barreled T-34 amphibious “Stalin tank”; 23,245 aircraft; and 148,000 vehicles and mine layers, 3,710 of which were of late design.

In agreement with other researchers of the “revisionist” school, Lyulechnik concludes that the facts show that Stalin made his pact with Hitler on August 23, 1939, in order to unleash war in Europe. In fact, in Poland on September 17, 1939, he had in essence taken part in the war

as a “full-fledged aggressor.” By November 1940 via Molotov in Berlin he let it be known that he had no fear of Hitler. Confidentially, Stalin considered a Soviet–German war to be an inevitability. He indicated that he would take the initiative for starting the war into his own hands, as stated in the military writings of the period. Moreover, he stressed that under no conditions should war be allowed to be waged on Soviet territory itself. This, in any case, would be precluded by the Soviets taking the offensive via a surprise invasion, or “first strike” (*pervyi udar*, or *uprezhdayushchyi udar*), against the enemy.

Disputing this view to an extent in his writings in the mid-1990s was Yeltsin military adviser retired General Dmitri Volkogonov. He insisted that no document had yet been found that definitively proved Stalin planned such an offensive. To this Lyulechnik, like Suvorov, has answered that on the contrary “such documentation *does* exist. It was recently published, in fact,” he continues, “and is known under the rubric, ‘On the Plan to Deploy the Strategic Forces of the Soviet in a War Against Germany and Its Allies,’ found in reproduction in an article by Yu. A. Gor’kov, published in the [Russian] journal *Novaya i Noveishaya Istoriya* (*New and Latest History*), No. 4, 1993.”<sup>10</sup> The author writes that “in making his attack upon the Soviet Union, Hitler had merely outsmarted Stalin by anticipating the latter’s near-term plans.”

Lyulechnik contends that Stalin, in any case, was not entirely taken by surprise by the Nazi invasion:

He expected Soviet forces to be thrown back in the initial phase, if such an attack were first made by the Wehrmacht. It seems that Stalin himself was prepared to give up territory under such circumstances—at least, for several weeks. When the Germans actually did attack and Soviet forces were

driven back so disastrously far, Soviet military planners were stunned. Stalin, however, did not panic [as alleged by Khrushchev and others].

Stalin quickly rallied and began over time to rely on his professional military so that Soviet Russia eventually could apply that same offensive strategy against the Germans. This they did by 1942–43 in the Battles of Moscow, Stalingrad, Kursk, and beyond.

By 1944–45, all parts of the Soviet offensive military doctrine and strategy were being fully applied against Hitler and his allies. Together with this, the global messianism of Marxist-Leninist doctrine was beginning to manifest itself. Former Soviet Foreign Intelligence Deputy Chief Sudoplatov notes, significantly, in his book *Special Tasks*, how Stalin sought nothing less than

world domination. Although originally this concept was ideological in nature, it acquired the dimensions of Realpolitik. This possibility arose for the Soviet Union only after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed. In the Secret protocols the Soviet Union's geopolitical interests and natural desires for the enlargement of its frontiers were for the first time formally accepted by one of the leading powers of the world.<sup>11</sup>

By 1941, Lyulechnik contends, Soviet Russia possessed overwhelming military superiority. The Red Army had seized forward positions in Eastern Europe from which it could jump off in waging an offensive war against Germany. By spring, political and military preparations of the Red Army were nearing completion. Yet in June the Soviets still were not ready to see through their offensivist plans, the

writer alleges. Hitler had gotten the jump on them.

## **TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS**

How had Stalin managed to be caught off-guard so ignominiously by Operation Barbarossa? From what has so far come to light from the partially opened archives in Moscow, it is clear that it was a case of Stalin's own offensive strategy blinding him to the Germans' corresponding offensive plans. Ironically, the Soviet-German offensive strategy had been jointly developed in the proto-blitzkrieg war games played out on the Russian steppe in the presence of Red Army and German officers from the Weimar Republic in the 1920s up to 1933. This was when the German General Staff sent representatives—Guderian, Manstein, Keitel, Brauchitsch, Model, Horn, et al.—to Soviet Russia in the years and months preceding Barbarossa for waging offensive war (see chapter 3). The offensive strategy, ironically, had been the brainchild of Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky and his associates, whom Stalin had purged in 1937–38 and who had previously been participants in the Soviet–German military collaboration of the 1920s.

There is, incidentally, documentation for the possibility that Tukhachevsky actually was involved in a germinating plot to do away with Stalin. At the same time there were many, utterly ridiculous trumped-up charges made against the marshal at the purge trial in 1937. One of these was that he was “Trotskyite”; another, that he was collaborating with the Germans. Some researchers question the veracity of the claim made by certain authors that Stalin had been swayed by outright disinformation concocted about the “officers’ plot” and handed over to the Soviet dictator by the Germans. Their purpose, it is said, was to mislead Stalin into decapitating the Red Army. But Stalin, new evidence indicates, had his own dossier for incriminating the professional soldiers, whom he considered plotters or at the very least dangerous rivals.

Indeed, the German generals' familiarity with and appreciation of the talents of their Soviet counterparts of the 1920s indirectly contributed to Hitler's perception of an enfeebled, "decapitated" Red Army due to the bloody repressions of those top Soviet officers that had taken place ten years later in 1937–39. Three out of fifty-four marshals were bloodily purged. Similarly liquidated were thirteen of fifteen Red Army commanders, eight out of eight fleet admirals, fifty of the fifty-seven corps commanders, and so on. Some of the best Red Army military brains were purged, including all eleven vice commissars of defense. A total of 43,000 officers were liquidated. This left inexperienced "lieutenants" in charge. Two years later the Soviets' debacle in the early, disastrous phase of their 'Winter War' against Finland merely confirmed Hitler's impressions of a paper-tiger Red Army. British intelligence got the same impression, which dovetailed with London's apparent disinterest in collective-security arrangements with such a weakened power as Soviet Russia.

In Moscow in spring 1941, Zhukov and Timoshenko, respectively chief of the General Staff and commissar of defense, urged Stalin to sharply boost preparedness on the Western Front and to take other measures *kak vozmozhno skoreye*, or "as soon as . . . ." Zhukov, as Lyulechnik has noted, even called for a preemptive strike against the Wehrmacht (see chapter 7). He continued to urge a counteroffensive or all-out offensive strategy that became the theme of Stalin's secret speech to the graduating cadets in May 1941.

In the opening weeks of the "Great Fatherland War," Stalin would issue urgent orders to commanders to wage counteroffensives or at very least "partial counteroffensives." And he called for the arrests of a number of frontline commanders, many of whom were in due course tried and shot on Stalin's orders. These included such officers as his commander of the entire Western Front, General Dmitri G. Pavlov, and his chief of staff, General Vladimir E. Klimovskikh, together with his

signals and artillery commanders. The commander-in-chief of the Fourth Army, Andrei A. Korobskov, likewise was shot, as were the commanders of an aviation division on the Western Front and of the Kiev Military District Air Force.

In addition to ordering the immediate execution of officers or men who did not follow orders, retreated, or worst of all indicated that they wished to defect to the enemy, Stalin was brutal about Red Army men who became POWs. A special order was issued that read: "All service personnel taken prisoner are declared outside the law while their families are subject to punishment." Lieutenant Yakov Djughashvili, Stalin's eldest son, became one such POW in the war. This infuriated his father, who disowned him. The son finally committed suicide, it is said, in a German POW camp by electrocuting himself on a wired fence in the compound. "I don't know if I could face my father," he said to his captors during a recorded interrogation in 1941: "I'm ashamed to be alive."

Stalin's occasional erratic behavior in this period anticipated Hitler's in the concluding phase of the war in Europe. At that time the German dictator sometimes gave frantic orders that were unrealistic to the frontline commanders ordered to carry them out. During this initial period in Moscow, Stalin did not assume the post of supreme commander-in-chief, although he quickly ordered the formation of a combat High Command Headquarters, or "*Stavka*." Stalin's self-appointment to the post of CINC came later in the year 1941.

As to his later, vainglorious rank of "generalissimus," Stalin did not appropriate that supreme title for himself until the end of the war in 1945. General Alexei V. Suvorov (1730–1800) was the latest previous holder of this highest rank, awarded to him in 1799, the year before his death. Besides Suvorov there were only three other holders of this title in Russia.

In conclusion to this chapter concerning June 1941, mention should be made of a most ironic order jointly issued by the Council of People's Commissars and the Communist Party Central Committee to the Red Air Force on June 19, 1941, just three days prior to the German attack. Signed by Chairman (Premier) and General Secretary Josef Stalin and classified top secret, it commanded that all military aircraft and hangars were to be painted in summer camouflage. The deadline given for completion of this task was July 30. A month too late....

## NOTES

- 1 Pavel Sudoplatov and Anatoli Sudoplatov, *Special Tasks: The Memoirs of an Unwanted Witness—A Soviet Spymaster* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1994), pp. 134–35. Sudoplatov notes that “we were in a state of alert [vis-à-vis Germany] from November 1940.” Other documented information from other researchers confirms this statement. Cf. M. I. Mel'tyukhov, *Upushchennyi Shans Stalina Sovetskyi Soyuz i Bor'ba za Yevropu 1939–1941* (Moscow: Veche, 2000), p. 495.
- 2 Sergo Beriia, *Moi Otets Lavrentii Beriia* (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1994), p. 167ff.
- 3 One of the most recent offensist arguments concerning Stalin's and the Red Army's pre-June 22, 1941, military policies and actions may be found in Mel'tyukhov, *Upushchennyi Shans Stalina*, pp. 370–414. The Russian historian's arguments are summarized here in the conclusions in chapter 8.
- 4 Viktor Suvorov, in *Samoubiistvo Zachem Gitler Napal na Sovetskyi Soyuz? (Suicide: Why Did Hitler Attack the Soviet Union?)* (Moscow: Act, 2000), analyzes Hitler's “suicidally” faulty reasoning in taking on such a formidable foe as the Soviet Union. He and his General Staff underestimated the fact of the Soviets' huge army, increasingly modern

equipment, and space to withdraw and to take up new defense positions against an advancing Wehrmacht, whose lines of supply were overstretched, whose depth of manpower was far less than that of the Soviets, whose soldiers were ill-clothed for the Russian winter, and so on. Moreover, German military intelligence on the Soviets was obviously faulty. Chief of the German General Staff Halder wrote pessimistically in his diary only two months following the German invasion that the German cause seemed lost: “Russia, a colossus that deliberately prepared for war, was underestimated by us.... When the war started, we had 200 divisions against us.... Now, on August 11, 1941, after the bloody losses they have suffered, we estimate the number of [Red Army] divisions is 360. Even if we smash a dozen of these, the Russians will organize another dozen” (quoted in Edvard Radzinsky, *Stalin* [New York: Doubleday Publishing Co., 1996], p. 479).

5 The unlikelihood of Hitler erring so profoundly in attacking a country of Russia’s exceptional size and military strength, strength at the very least in depth of reserves and its military-industrial complex, new weapons coming on line, and so forth, seems also to have impressed Stalin. This point is made in a new review of Soviet military strategy—General—Major V. A. Zolotarev, ed., *Istoriya Voennoi Strategii Rossii* (Moscow: Institute of Military History, Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, 2000), p. 286, on which page, too, the statistics in the sentences to follow may be found.

6 See Mel’tyukhov, *Upushchennyi Shans Stalina*, whose appendixes provide exhaustive tables of the data for Red Army weapons deployments by years—models of tanks, infantry vehicles, planes, and so on—per military districts on the Western Front for the years 1940–41. It is a picture of steady, sharply increasing Red Army preparations for fighting a war. It appears that the leadership in Moscow was assured



by the military that these preparations would be completed by mid-July 1941.

7 A. N. Yakovlev, ed., *1941 god. Dokumenty*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Mezhdunarodniy Fond “Demokratiya,” 1998), p. 416.

8 Yakovlev, *1941 god. Dokumenty*, vol. 2, pp. 315–22. Senator Harry Truman was quoted in *The New York Times* in mid-1941 (*The Topeka Daily Capital* published his remarks on June 23, 1941) with the statement that he hoped both the German and the Russian armies would kill as many of each other as possible. If one side is winning, he said, we should help the other side, and vice versa. In a personal letter to me, the retired ex-president in Independence, Mo., denied ever having seen such a quotation let alone having said any such things himself. See Albert L. Weeks, *The Other Side of Coexistence: An Analysis of Russian Foreign Policy* (New York: Pitman, 1970), p. 94. The quotation was often reproduced in the Soviet Union during and after the war. It still appears occasionally today (e.g., in Mel’tyukhov, *Upushchennyi Shans Stalina*, p. 509; and in Robert Ivanov, *Stalin i Soyuzniki 1941–1945* [Smolensk: Rusich, 2000], p. 143).

9 Such contemporary writers more or less of this persuasion include Joachim Hoffmann, R. C. Raack, Ernst Topitsch, Pavel Bobylev, Viktor Suvorov (Rezun), Aleksandr Nekrich, Robert Conquest, and Robert C. Tucker, among several others. The late Dr. Andrei D. Sakharov was also of this persuasion.

10 This is evidently a reference to Doc. 473 reproduced in Yakovlev, *1941 god. Dokumenty*, pp. 215–20, under the title “Memorandum of the USSR People’s Commissar of Defense and Chief of the General Staff to Chairman of the Council of Ministers J. V. Stalin on Considerations of the Plan for Strategic Deployment of the Armed Forces of the Soviet Union in Case of War with Germany and Its Allies,” May 15, 1941.

Among other things, the memorandum, signed by Timoshenko and Zhukov, proposes that the Soviet side attack the “deeply mobilized” German Army first before it is able to initiate an attack against the Red Army, which the memorandum adds, is the obvious German plan. For discussion of “Considerations,” see chapter 5.

See also Yakovlev, *1941 god. Dokumenty*, vol. 2, pp. 389–90.

11 Sudoplatov and Sudoplatov, *Special Tasks*, p. 102. “Once again,” Sudoplatov, former deputy director (after March 1939) of the NKVD First (Foreign Intelligence) Directorate, observes, “only military strength and domination of the countries on our borders could ensure us a *superpower role*” (emphasis added). Note that the NKVD officer does not cite “buffer” security as a motivation for the enlargement of Soviet borders in 1940.

# 8

## *Conclusions*

The tragic start of the war [on June 22, 1941] for the Red Army is one of the most “encrypted” pages in our history.

—Pavel N. Bobylev, military historian

The [Red Army] term “active defense” [*aktivnaya oborona*] need not cause any confusion. It signifies a combination of both defensive and offensive operations.... Since [in archive documents] it is clear the Red Army would be the initiator of military actions, this term, above all, conceals the fact of the Red Army’s plans to conduct offensive operations aimed at pinning down [*skovyvat’*] the enemy.

—M. I. Mel’tyukhov, military historian

In examining the controversy revolving about Stalin’s plans for war in the months, weeks, and days before the German attack on June 22, 1941, it was necessary in the above chapters to sketch in the ideological, diplomatic, and military background before the momentous and tragic events of that summer. Stalin’s behavior and other relevant events on and just after the day of the invasion also shed

light on the dictator's attitude toward the coming, "inevitable" war.

In chapter 5, I canvassed the various lines of the controversy over Stalin's war plans as they are argued in current Russian military literature. For this purpose I focused on two of the latest, most comprehensive as well as recent of such writings, that of military historians Pavel N. Bobylev and Mikhail I. Mel'tyukhov. I included in this discussion documentary evidence as reproduced in another relatively new work, the two-volume *The Year 1941. Documents (1941 god. Dokumenty)*, a compilation of documents edited by Aleksandr N. Yakovlev. Defensist arguments likewise are presented in the preceding chapters. Here I will review and critique this research and analysis based on the most recent findings of Russian historians. These include new writings by Russian historians that Western scholars to date have not discussed.

## **THE MAY 15 MEMORANDUM AND OTHER WAR-PLANNING DOCUMENTS**

At the nub of the offensist–defensist issue is Stalin's acceptance or nonacceptance of the Timoshenko–Zhukov memorandum of May 15, "Considerations on the Plan for Strategic Deployment of the Armed Forces of the Soviet Union in Case of War with Germany and Its Allies." This is the strategic plan that was overtly offensist. The generals even recommend a preemptive attack against the German Army poised along Russia's western frontier. Given the extreme paucity of such crucial documents and because of the high source of this document, much attention is legitimately focused on the May 15 memorandum as well as Stalin's remarks on May 5. (Of course, other documents, canvassed in the preceding chapters, need to be considered as well.)

In his controversial interview with a historian, who at that time followed the official Soviet line on military history, Marshal Zhukov

stated flatly that Stalin had “categorically” rejected the outright offensist “Considerations” submitted to him on May 15, 1941. Yet, in writing about his talks with two senior military officers in 1991, the same interviewer, N. A. Svetlishin, notes that neither Zhukov nor Marshal M. Vasilievsky had made any reference to the idea of a preemptive attack. Yet this was embodied in the May 15 memorandum. As a result of what they call a “subterfuge,” some Russian historians today attribute the silence about Red Army offensism to an intentional cover up by these officers. Any notion that the Red Army had plans for waging preemptive war would run up against the Kremlin Wall that banned all such speculation or evidence along these lines. Too, the Zhukov/Vasilievsky memoirs were surfacing at the time of Brezhnev—a period in which the positive memory of Stalin enjoyed a comeback compared with earlier years and, importantly, in which defensism was touted during Brezhnev’s detente as the hallmark of declaratory Soviet military policy.

“Forgetfulness” on the part of Zhukov and Vasilievsky concerning the crucial May 15 memorandum, according to historian Bobylev, can be explained by the fact, as he writes, that “any discussion of Red Army plans for making preemptive attacks was a theme forbidden by Soviet authorities” —forbidden then and in the later postwar period. Furthermore, discussion of such secret planning obviously was crucial in the military-security sense of guarding secrecy at the time of the documents. Disclosure at that time and later likewise would be politically damaging to a regime whose propaganda—at the time of Stalin and under his successors—insisted that it had only peaceful intentions toward any country and especially toward Germany as of 1939–40 and early 1941.

For this reason, Bobylev continues, the military writer Viktor A. Anfilov, who followed the official line and who knew of the May 15 memorandum, obviously “wrote nothing about it in 1965 [when he first

learned of its existence] but only referred to it later when perforce it arose in discussion [i.e., after 1991].” That was the year another researcher, Yu. A. Gor’kov, discovered the document in the archives and disclosed its contents, for which a number of Russian historians now express their gratitude to him. They express thanks despite the fact, as they have noted, that Gor’kov did not draw the conclusions from his discovery that other, latter-day historians thought he should have.

The same “oversight” concerning the document is true of Svetlishin, insists Bobylev: “[Svetlishin] only referred to the May 15 Memorandum by 1992,” although he was informed of it by Zhukov back in 1965.<sup>1</sup> Zhukov had thus tacitly revealed to Svetlishin that Stalin had actually read the two staff officers’ preemptive attack memorandum! That Stalin did not read the memorandum has been the assumption of some Western historians (Gorodetsky, Glantz, et al.). Thus, if Stalin “rejected it,” he must have known of it. But, alas, there is no proof that he rejected it.<sup>2</sup> The notion that Stalin rejected the views contained in the memorandum, as one Russian historian puts it, is “premature.” Some Russian historians question whether, indeed, Zhukov is to be believed in his allegation that Stalin did not approve the plan.

Given the absence of any Stalin document following up the “Considerations” that clearly indicates either approval or rejection by Stalin, some historians now take the view that, nevertheless, several documented clues, both preceding and following the offense-oriented “Considerations,” indicate what Stalin’s intentions were. They claim that there is hard evidence Stalin had given his approval to the thinking embodied in the offensivist memorandum. They further cite this passage from the memorandum: “In order to fulfill the demands [of the thrust of this memorandum], it is necessary at a favorable time to carry out the following measures without which it would be impossible to make a

surprise strike against the foe either from the air or on the ground.”<sup>3</sup> Likewise, hadn’t Stalin, on May 5, touted offensive war against Germany (see chapter 5)? Moreover, the Russian historians allege the following:

- After Stalin’s May 5, 1941, speech and remarks to the military school graduates containing an offensivist thrust, the military gave indications of preparing the forces to take the offensive on Red Army initiative. They were emboldened, in fact, to make such proposals from Stalin’s own verbal leads in his May 5 statements.
- They point, moreover, to several documents, among which are not only the May 15 memorandum but various Red Army General Staff orders and local orders issued at the military district level along the Western Front aimed at readying the troops for eventual war. The thrust of these orders, including those to district commanders, is, they allege, offensivist. The pertinent sentence from the May 15 memorandum reads:

In order to prevent [an initial attack by the Wehrmacht] while also destroying the German Army, [we] consider it necessary that under no conditions should the initiative for starting hostilities be given to the German Army. It is necessary to preempt the enemy in deploying for attack and to attack the German Army at the moment when it is at the stage of deploying for attack and is as yet unable to organize its front and coordinate all of its force.<sup>4</sup>

- Too, they cite, for example, the General Staff’s March 11, 1941, “Refined [*Utochennyi*] Plan,” first published in *Voyennyi Istoricheskiy Zhurnal*, no. 2 (1992). In this plan are laid out

undeniably offensivist, preemptive tactics. Historian Gor'kov gives evidence for the fact that the offensivist thrust of the contents of the May 15 plan *was circulated via operational orders sent out to all military district commands in the period May 5—14*—that is, even before the political leadership had officially endorsed the plan on May 15.<sup>5</sup> The distribution of these orders further confirms, as Bobylev asserts, the existence of the May 15 document and of its instrumentation throughout the western military districts. In any case, few if any Russian historians now deny its authenticity. Any lingering doubts are found largely in works published abroad.

- They note, moreover, that the phrase “active defense,” frequently used in such orders, contains the hidden meaning of waging offensive war and seizing the initiative from the enemy (specifically named in the documents as Germany and its European/Axis allies) at or before the very opening of hostilities. At the very least, it suggests applying a combination of offensivist and defensivist tactics, and especially the former, in the initial stage of war.
- Moreover, as indicated, such researchers point to the thrust of the indoctrination of soldiers, especially after Stalin's May 5 statements. This indoctrination was of a strongly worded offensivist nature. Some researchers, like historian V A. Nevezhin, allege that such a thrust in the indoctrination would have been impossible to assert if Stalin, in fact, did not approve of offensivism in the way soldiers were being prepared “morally” for combat.
- They further point out that soon after hearing and digesting the news of the Wehrmacht's attacks against the Red Army along the Western Front on June 22, 1941, Stalin, significantly, immediately ordered his commanders to take offensive rather than defensive actions. Any commander who took defensive actions could be, and was in many cases, shot. This, they say, is one more clue to Stalin's pre-June 22 thinking about the coming war with



Germany. A true combination of a defensive and offensive doctrine would have dictated, at the very least, a defensive posture in order to initially absorb an enemy's attack. Defense of second-echelon forces might soon be followed by an offensive counterattack by those forces. Instead, the Red Army's offensive-designed, frontline forces were deployed directly facing the enemy as though no defensive action would have been necessary.

- In his radio address to the nation on July 3, 1941, moreover, Stalin noted that the Wehrmacht had been “completely mobilized, that it had thrust 170 divisions into combat against the USSR.” The latter's Red Army, he said, “were in complete readiness for war and were merely awaiting the signal to act *since its armies were still in the process of mobilizing and deploying forces to the western front.*”<sup>6</sup> Bobylev notes that in this speech Stalin declared significantly that “Fascist Germany had unexpectedly and treacherously broken the [Nazi–Soviet] nonaggression pact.... It is understandable that our peace-loving country, not wishing to take upon itself the initiative of destroying the pact, *was not able itself to resort to such treachery.*” To which Bobylev comments: “This remark by Stalin amounted to a reaction to the Hitlerite politicians' excuse that their attack on the USSR was a preventive one. Yet there could have been other reasons for Stalin's remark. In any case, [the German attack] obviously had nothing to do with any defensive [or offensive] measures undertaken by the USSR and its armies. *Its meaning was to explain why the USSR itself had not preempted Germany's attack*” (emphasis added).<sup>7</sup>
- In March 1938, over three years before June 22, as he examined the opening phase of war, then Chief of the General Staff General Boris M. Shaposhnikov anticipated a prolonged warning period. It would last anywhere from sixteen to thirty days, depending on local circumstances in a given sector, whether south, center, or north, before the enemy could launch an attack. During this

rewing-up period the Soviets presumably would be alerted to an impending attack. In addition the Red Army would have ten days in order to shift its forces depending on the direction (sector) of the enemy attack along the Western Front. It could then concentrate the troops at the appropriate place along the front. If the attack came in the southwest sector in Ukraine facing Rumania, he said, the warning period could extend from twenty-two to twenty-six days or even from thirty-two to thirty-seven days. This would provide time enough for the Soviet side not only to prepare for an attack “but to launch an offensive and destroy the enemy.”<sup>8</sup>

- Before June 22, it was staunchly maintained by leading staff officers (namely, Timoshenko, Meretskov, and Vatutin, among others) that the southern sector would constitute the principal direction of the German attack out of the three main, possible axes in the west—north, central, or south. The generals added that this was the direction, too, best suited to the Red Army for launching offensive war. Such was the professional military’s view, says Bobylev, that was all but “foisted” on Stalin. The latter, he insists, cannot be entirely blamed for the disaster as Stalin has been in Russian and foreign accounts up to now. Yet it is also clear Stalin had convinced himself that Hitler had given the highest priority to attacking the Ukraine, the Soviet breadbasket and location of many of the USSR’s most crucial resources and military-industrial assets. Bobylev further notes that, significantly, absolutely no defensive measures were undertaken in this sector. This strongly suggests that the Red Army leadership harbored only offensive-oriented plans against the Germans.
- When in February 1941 Zhukov assumed leadership of the General Staff, the above plans were reaffirmed. Zhukov displayed no reservations about them. In February–March 1941, according to Svetlishin’s book on Zhukov, the operational plans were reworked,

Zhukov claiming, disingenuously, according to Bobylev, that Stalin had seriously erred in expecting the direction of an enemy attack to the southwest. Yet, Bobylev observes, Zhukov himself had just assumed the new post of commander-in-chief of the Kiev Military District (namely, in the south). The “Refined [Utochnennyi] Plan” of March 11, 1941, drawn up on Zhukov’s orders, established the priority of the southern direction in Red Army planning. This resulted in neglect of sectors to the north. Yet it was to the north that the Wehrmacht concentrated the brunt of its attacking forces in summer 1941, thus outsmarting the Soviet military leadership.

- At the basis of this errant planning in which Zhukov participated, according to Bobylev, was the September 18, 1940, General Staff “formula,” which was to apply to the years 1940–41. It called for waging offensive war instead of setting out concerted plans for developing strategic defense (*strategicheskaya oborona*). The basic sector expected for an enemy attack was designated as the southwestern. Mel’-tyukhov in general agrees with the above analysis.<sup>9</sup>
- Historian Bobylev analyzes the significance of the actions taken by the Red Army after the respective May 5 and May 15 Stalin statements and Red Army strategic plan, especially following the latter “Considerations” memorandum. He notes that pursuant to the plan, more than 800,000 men were called into military service to fill the ranks of the divisions positioned on the western frontier. Four armies in the interior of the country (from the Caucasus and from western Siberia)—the 16th, 19th, 21st, and 22nd—were shifted to that front (to the Dnieper and Dvina Rivers), the 16th and 19th being moved precisely to a sector specified in the May plan. Three additional armies were to be so moved to the Western Front. These and other similar deployments and actions likewise related to the May 15 plan—for example, moving command points

right up to the front—were ordered to be carried out in absolute secrecy.

Bobylev notes that, moreover, there is no evidence that any such moves were made in response to warnings of German preparations for war. Thus, the post-May 15 moves by the Red Army signify the decision that was made, he writes, *to prepare the Red Army “for launching a preemptive strike, which was considered above and beyond any considerations of an offensive that might come from the enemy side.”* This thesis, he continues, “conforms to the General Staff orders sent to the front’s military districts on June 21, 1941. In these orders the troops were tasked ‘not to give in to any provocative actions that could cause huge complications.’ Obviously, by the calculations of the General Staff, Germany was not yet ready to attack the USSR, and . . . it would not be ready until much later.”

Furthermore, as Bobylev writes, the Western Front districts were given orders not to strengthen their defenses. Such preparations, reads a directive from General Zhukov, dated June 10, would only “provoke” the Germans prematurely. Yet, at the same time, the commander of the Carpathian Military District, General M. P. Kirponos, was ordered to “advance to the frontier.” Writing in his memoirs, Zhukov claimed that this was followed by a countermanding order directly from Stalin to halt such forward deployments of Red Army troops. Zhukov, who oversaw from Kiev the key sector of the Western Front at that time, added that if Stalin’s order had not been followed, he would have been “arrested” and, therefore, have “drunk tea with Beria.”

Bobylev claims that Zhukov’s testimony is totally unconvincing. “Other memoirists confirm,” he writes, “that no such telegram [of June 10] came from Stalin. On the contrary, it is more accurate to say that the forward deployment was carried out

on his [Zhukov's] own initiative, that so-called defensive measures had nothing to do with it.”<sup>10</sup>

- Bobylev refers to the conference held in Stalin's Kremlin office on May 24 within the context of the meeting's agenda that, as he argues, was the plan to preempt the Wehrmacht. Present at the secret conference besides Stalin and Molotov were the commanders of all five western military districts—Kiev, Leningrad, Carpathian, Odessa, and Baltic—plus members of the military councils, the commanding officers of the corresponding Red Air Force units attached to these districts, and General Staff and other staff officers including Timoshenko, Zhukov, Vatutin, and P. F. Zhigarev, commander-in-chief of the Red Air Force. According to historian Yu. A. Gorkov, using archive documents, the conference went over the “mission of the western districts in the light of the operational war plan [of May 15] under current strategic conditions.” Another historian, V. D. Danilov, reasons that the conference directly took up the questions “related to preparing a preemptive strike.”<sup>11</sup>

On his part Bobylev adds that “if the conference was devoted only to matters of defense, why wasn't there a single indication following it that strengthening defenses was a top priority?” Nor, the Ministry of Defense institute historian notes, are there any living witnesses to the conference and its aftermath who could throw any light on this question. “On the contrary,” he writes, “it seems that the secretive attitude [toward the conference] indicates that the subject of the meeting was the preemptive strike, that any leakage of this discussion had to be prevented lest it compromised all the preparations that were being made for it.”

## **1940–41 RED ARMY WAR GAMES CONTROVERSY**

A similar puzzle concerns contradictory interpretations of the war games fought between the “Blues” (West) and the “Reds” (East or Soviet) in late 1940 and early 1941. An analysis of the games might throw light on the question of what strategy underlay the Red Army vis-à-vis Germany. However, it is not unusual for post mortems of such exercises, conducted by whatever country’s armed forces, to provoke differences in the conclusions drawn within the military and civilian leadership after the games have been analyzed. Clouding the Soviet pre-June 22 picture is the lack of full documentation of the postmortem appraisals of and conclusions drawn from the two sets of games, played out in late winter 1940–41. Some Russian historians believe that the obfuscation, amid the absence of relevant top-secret documents, has been intentional on the part of certain postwar military memoirists.

The ongoing discussions about the outcomes and inferences drawn from the games in the USSR in early 1941, especially those based on some new archival documentation, might contribute some knowledge to the overarching controversy concerning the main lines of Soviet war planning on the eve of the German attack. What did the games prove to the civilian and military leadership in the USSR about offensive versus defensive war?

What conclusions did the top Soviet military planners draw from them? In his book *The Russian Way of War*, Richard Harrison, using new archive documents, notes that the first of two major war games before summer 1941 were played out along part of the Soviet Western Front in winter.<sup>12</sup> The organizers of the games imagined that the enemy would open hostilities to the northeast on July 15, 1941. Zhukov, in command of the “Blue” attacking forces, numbering fifty-nine infantry divisions plus 3,516 tanks and 3,336 aircraft, sought to defeat the Soviet covering armies. The attackers were to advance by mid-August to the line of Riga-Dvinsk-Baranovichi. However, as it was played out, the game did not anticipate an “enemy” attack along the Brest-

Baranovich axis, which—ironically—actually occurred in real war six months later.

Zhukov was opposed by Pavlov's "Red" defending Northwest Front armies (the 1st, 9th, 14th, 19th, and 27th plus a cavalry-mechanized group). These numbered 8,811 tanks and 5,652 aircraft. To the south of the Pripyat Marshes, Colonel-General Grigori M. Shtern commanded the Southwestern Front. Given the preponderance of force on the defending "Red," Soviet side, the outcome of this game was assured. Zhukov was forced to retreat to his fortified position by August 1. The attack on Leningrad was also defeated. Meanwhile, Zhukov was to await reinforcements to resume his offensive with the aim of achieving his objectives by September 5.

Here, as noted by Harrison, the official report of the games becomes clouded. General Matvei V. Zakharov merely stated that the attacking "Westerners" won the operation. He disclosed that the games "abounded in dramatic episodes for the eastern side," upon which he did not elaborate. As it turned out with cruel irony, this situation was true of the actual one in June 1941. Zhukov repeats the phrase about "episodes" nearly verbatim but fails to provide any details of the game's actual conduct. He does not explain how it happened that the "Red" defenders ran into difficulties.

In the second round of games also fought in late winter 1940–41, two Western ("Blue") Fronts attacked "Red" forces south of the Pripyat Marshes. The attack was opened with forces almost as large as those of the preceding game. This time Zhukov defended against the forces attacking from the west. As with the earlier game, the preponderance in tanks on the Soviet side was overwhelming compared with the number with the attacking forces, this time led by General Lieutenant Nikolai A. Kuznetsov. These disproportions perhaps meant "loading the dice" in the exercise for the "Reds."

According to the contrived scenario, the Westerners attacked on “August 2, 1941,” after completing their concentration and deployment along the frontier. As the games were played out, by August 8 the attacking “Blue” forces had been thrown back to a line running southwest from Brest along the Vistula River to the Carpathian Mountains at Grybow. Yet, significantly, they had made major advances and trapped Soviet forces around L’vov

At this point, the game’s umpires assigned the two sides their respective, new strategic tasks. By these orders, the southern salient was to renew its offensive in the direction of Ternopol’ and Proskurov. The Southeastern Front’s center would continue to defend along the Dunajec. These and other orders by the umpires, Harrison points out, assigned the Soviet side extreme, “breathtaking” tasks to rout the enemy. For instance, the attacker’s goal—surrounding Moscow—was to be attained by a fictitious October 16, 1941. This, as it turned out with cruel irony, was the very date that the German forces were actually to stand at the gates of Moscow later that year. However, the final report in the documents on the outcome of the games—and thus of the enemy’s renewed drive to the east—is disappointingly skimpy. In fact, the ultimate result of the games is left hanging in the air. Although the available literature in general on both exercises is sparse, notes Harrison, “given the scenario laid down . . . as well as the limited capacities of the two attacking ‘western’ commanders, it is unlikely that the Soviets were defeated.” But the dice were loaded....

Whatever the true outcome of the second game, Harrison writes, “there is no doubt that Stalin was highly dissatisfied with the overall results . . . for which he harshly criticized [General Dmitri G.] Pavlov,” who had commanded the defenders in the first game and who apparently had been defeated. (Yet Stalin left Pavlov at his post as commander of the Western Front in late spring 1941. But he saw to his execution following the June 22, 1941, debacle.) As a result of the



outcome of the first game, major transfers and demotions were made by Stalin. Zhukov, significantly, replaced Meretskov as chief of the General Staff. Many other shufflings took place within the High Command. These changes, Harrison claims, may have further weakened the Red Army as it approached its moment of truth in real time in summer 1941.

What the shuffling of the generals may have indicated in terms of Stalin's putative preference for an offensive war strategy is unclear. Yet the promotion of Zhukov would seem to fit Stalin's offensivist war plans. The Soviet leader may have positively evaluated Zhukov's performance in the first round of games. However, the scant information about them that is available to historians leaves this assumption moot.

In retrospect, the author concludes, Stalin had every right to be disappointed with his army's overall performance in the games. It seems that whether the "armies" were playing the role of attacker or of defender in the exercises, their performance left a good deal to be desired. How the games may have chastened Stalin in laying his own real plans for war—whether purely defensive, purely offensive, or a combination of both—can only be surmised. In any case, it seems clear that Stalin was of a mind to postpone hostilities with Germany for as long as possible—at least until mid-1941, late summer, and perhaps into 1942.

## **ANFILOV'S "SEVEN LESSONS" FROM THE WAR**

One of the most articulate, semiofficial voices among today's Russian military historians is the veteran writer Viktor A. Anfilov.<sup>13</sup> In his latest as in his earlier works, this writer has followed the traditional, pre-1995 line on Stalin's war plans. On the fifty-fifth anniversary of the Soviet capture of Berlin in 1945, Anfilov laid out what he called "Seven Lessons" learned from the Great Fatherland War. The way he

expresses his lessons is revealing.

By way of implied as well as direct criticism of policies established before June 22, 1941, Anfilov retrospectively discloses in his April–May 2000 article what the contemporary Russian military now chooses to describe as the “fundamental mistakes” made at that time. So doing, Anfilov’s lessons also communicate, indirectly, the current semiofficial view on the nature of the miscalculations made by Stalin but also by the Red Army General Staff in spring 1941.

According to the writer, these boil down to one crucial error: *the failure to adopt defensive measures because of what he terms mistaken offensist “ideological” pressures and Stalin’s penchant for making unwise decisions concerning the deployment of Red Army units along the western frontier on the eve of the German attack.* (This is a subtle way of saying that Stalin deployed his offensive-designed forces in defenseless fashion directly opposite the German forces without providing them defensive means—the very claim made by the new Russian historians.) In examining these lessons, as presented by one of Russia’s leading, conventional military historians, we can see where the semiofficial consensus rests today on the problems explored in the foregoing chapters.

Lesson number 1, according to Anfilov, concerns the lack of “coordination between the military and civilian leadership on the eve of the German attack.” The tasks, even the basic strategy, lacked substance, he writes. When the attack materialized, Stalin at first ordered that immediately to counterattack would “produce political complications.” The problem was aggravated by the fact, Anfilov continues, that only part of the forces deployed in the newly acquired western territories was sufficiently prepared for combat; nor were the forward echelons sufficiently covered (another indication of their offensive posture). Stalin reasoned that these territories had to be heavily occupied with Red Army troops lest their native populations

considered the Soviet regime and forces there to be merely temporary. They would thus readily help surrender valuable terrain there to the enemy. As a result, this calculation put large numbers of ill-prepared troops at the mercy of the invaders. In other words, institutionalized, “organic unity” and coordination between the professional soldiers and the civilian leadership, alleges Anfilov, would have prevented such miscalculations. The last word rested, unfortunately, with the civilian leadership—meaning the single autocrat, Stalin.

The second lesson concerns miscalculations by the Red Army High Command itself. Here Anfilov, a writer previously reticent in criticizing the professional military, lays out new ground, perhaps in response to the “new historiography” of the post-1991 “generation” of Russian historians. The military, he continues, had failed to make accurate predictions and thus failed to make adequate preparations for an anticipated enemy attack.

Anfilov quotes Zhukov to the effect that “in practice the particularities of waging contemporary war were not taken into account.... The error consisted in thinking that the timetables for carrying out concentrations of troops on both sides were the same.”<sup>14</sup> But this was not the case, Zhukov has alleged. In the “formal” sense the importance of making defensive preparations was not denied, Anfilov writes. Yet “the essence of the matter did not revolve about the recognition or non-recognition of the importance of defensive measures but rather in the practical conclusions to be made concerning defense.” If defense (read: defensist) considerations were uppermost, then measures should have been taken to bolster defenses with the maintenance of constant readiness (to meet an enemy surprise attack) plus a more concerted, concealed preparation and combat readiness for this. This is a revealing admission on the part of Viktor Anfilov. “The lesson seen in today’s context,” he says, “is that together with a powerful military-industrial base, it is necessary to enhance the real

combat capability of the armed forces [whose readiness in 1941 lagged behind the defense potential of the Soviet state].”

Moreover, the first-echelon forces deployed along the western frontier were not carefully prepared for waging “defensist [*oboronitel’niye*] operations” —an understatement, surely. They were prepared for this neither theoretically nor in practice, Anfilov complains. Had defensist plans been worked up (another admission that Red Army offensivism was the strategy’s salient feature), the disaster might have been avoided. The error about defense was compounded by the fact, he continues, that the assumption was made that the enemy attack could be repulsed in a short period of time. After that, it was assumed, offensives could be then waged.

Moreover, the idea that war could be rapidly carried onto the enemy’s own territory was an erroneous idea under the then-prevailing conditions. “All this,” he writes, “had a deleterious effect” on the Red Army’s ability to stop the Wehrmacht’s onslaught. So saying, Anfilov seems tacitly to admit that the Red Army’s offensivist military thought contributed to the debacle. Although he does not make this accusation *per se*—and he has been criticized by other contemporary Russian historians for shying away in his past writings from drawing such a conclusion—he does infer that more attention needed to be paid than was in 1941 to the imperatives and timeworn principles of defense. By implication, then, the first two of Anfilov’s “lessons” seem to signify that the offensivism of Soviet military doctrine and operational art contributed to the catastrophe of June 1941 and its aftermath.

## **SUMMATION**

In reviewing all the discussion, especially the most recent writings based on newly opened archives, I have drawn the following inferences—some of which are firm, others, tentative. First, it is clear that on the eve of the German attack of June 22, 1941, the Red Army was designed

more for waging offensive rather than defensive war. This strikes a contrast to the usual Soviet propaganda that stressed the seemingly defensist notion that “if attacked, the Soviet Union would repulse the aggressor.” Moreover, the ideology, as we saw, stressed offensivism within the fundamental ideological context of destroying capitalism or, as Lenin put it, “taking it by the scruff of the neck” when the Soviets were strong enough to do so. Many other ideologically tinged documents dating from the pre-June 1941 period point in the same direction.

The documents also show that the Soviets intended to carry the war as soon as possible into the territory of the enemy. Perhaps this policy could be construed as a not unusual, even conventional way of thinking about the “next war.” For what country would wish to see an enemy occupy its territory and wreak destruction upon it? Yet the offensivist thrust of such declarations cannot be ignored, especially when it is recalled, in addition to the other facts, that Red Army field manuals and its operational art strongly emphasized waging offensive war on its part. This has been recognized, as we saw, by post-Communist Russian historians, including such high officials as former Russian Federation Deputy Defense Minister Andrei A. Kokoshin.

Second, it may be objected that it is not entirely clear what was meant by offensive war, Soviet style. On one hand, the military documents available to date, as we saw, speak of waging counteroffensives or counterattacks as soon as possible after an enemy attack has been launched. Some historians claim that Red Army tactics called for a combination of offense and defense. On the other hand, the Timoshenko–Zhukov memorandum to Stalin of May 15, 1941, goes so far as to commend a surprise attack, or “strike” (*udar*), even before the enemy can launch one. This strike was to be executed at a time when the enemy would be in the early process of preparing—deploying and concentrating troops—for attack. This adds up to the Soviet tactic of

preemption.

Yet the paucity of any further elaboration of this bold offensism, smacking as it does of preventive war, plus the lack of any previous Red Army General Staff recommendations for waging outright preventive war launched from the Soviet side, suggests two possible additional hypotheses: (1) the memorandum was simply an “anomaly” or (2) such deep secrecy surrounded it, for obvious reasons, as well as the follow-up measures to be taken to prepare to preempt the Wehrmacht, that researchers have not yet been able to produce the evidence in undeniable black and white. Meanwhile, some Russian historians suspect that documents are being withheld. Perhaps (3) Stalin and the military did not have time to flesh out their offensist plans and grossly underestimated German willingness or readiness to launch full-scale war by late June 1941.

*Nevertheless, what the researchers have produced is a pattern of Red Army deployments and concentration of troops along the Soviet western frontier in spring 1941 that strongly suggests that the General Staff and Stalin were planning eventually to get the preemptive jump on the Wehrmacht.* The fact that in addition to Russian historians a number of informed ex-Red Army or security officers make this allegation cannot be ignored. As it turned out, of course, the Germans got the jump on the Soviets.

Here it needs to be said in the strongest of terms that even if such an outright Red Army offensist or preemptive war hypothesis were ever proved in absolutely certain terms, the Germans’ official pretext for Barbarossa—namely, that the Soviets were planning to attack them, which was declared by Hitler himself in his first war speech after June 22, 1941—surely would not thereby be justified. Hitler’s pretext remains a pretext, not a legitimate excuse for attacking the USSR. Hitler had planned his invasion back in mid-1940; he stuck to his plan thereafter no matter what. Furthermore, earlier Hitler writings in any

case anticipate the conquest of Soviet Russia.

After June 1940 Hitler had set at least two dates for the assault, dates that were later advanced for technical reasons. Too, there is strong evidence for the fact that no matter how the Soviet–German negotiations had gone in Berlin 1940—and they went badly, angering the German side—Hitler was going to go ahead with his large-scale war against the Soviet Union. So, searching for evidence that Hitler was somehow “driven” to attack the Soviet Union appears to be misguided. In this regard, why, it might be asked, don’t German documents from that prewar June period clearly show any concern in Berlin for Soviet offensist war planning? Or was German military intelligence so poor, as it certainly was, that it did not detect any such planning? Hence, the silence about a planned Soviet preemptive attack (that is, before Hitler used it as a pretext).

Third, it is significant and worth recognizing that a number of “new” Russian historians are opting for the offensist interpretation as to Stalin’s and the Red Army General Staff’s war planning on the eve of Barbarossa. In the meantime, it is unhelpful to assume, as some Western writers have, that these Russian historians take the positions they do, like the notions proffered so vehemently by émigré Viktor Suvorov, because they blindly hate Stalin or for some other reasons unrelated to the facts and documents that they have collected. Note that some of the historians of the offensist persuasion are connected with the Russian Ministry of Defense. Others (unlike the much despised Suvorov) show pro-Soviet tendencies in their interpretations of events. Yet they hew to the offensist thesis concerning Stalin war planning.<sup>15</sup>

It behooves Western specialists and observers to pay attention to the Russian historians’ latest findings as well as to their interpretations of their findings. The Russian historians say that they will keep on pressing the authorities for more archives to be opened because, they insist, additional top-secret information from the period of 1939–41

continues to be kept concealed. Specialists in the West should keep a closer watch than they have to date to see objectively what the Russian archivists and historians discover in the future as more documents, it is to be hoped, become accessible to them.

## NOTES

The first epigraph is from P. N. Bobylev, “Tochku v Diskussii Stavit’ Rano. K voprosu o planirovanii v general’nom shtabe RKKA vozmoznoi voiny s Germaniyei v 1940–1941 godakh” (“Calling an Early Halt to the Discussion about the Problem in the General Staff of the RKKA on Planning a Possible War with Germany from the Years 1940–1941”), *Otechesvennaya Istoriya*, no. 1 (2000), p. 59.

The second is from M. I. Mel’tyukhov, *Upushchennyi Shans Stalina Sovetskyi Soyuz i Bor’ba za Yevropu 1939–1941 (Stalin’s Lost Opportunity: The Soviet Union and the Battle for Europe 1939–1941)* (Moscow: Veche, 2000), pp. 387–88. The author is a historian and research fellow on the staff of the All-Russian Scientific-Research Institute for Documents and Archive Affairs (VNIIDAD), founded in Moscow in the Soviet period in 1966. Its foundation had been inspired by the public demand for archive materials following the Twentieth Party Congress to which the then Soviet leader, Nikita S. Khrushchev, revealed some of the crimes committed under the Stalin regime. VNIIDAD’s present director is Mikhail V. Larin.

<sup>1</sup> Bobylev, “Tochku v Diskussii Stavit’ Rano,” p. 44. Bobylev notes the irony of Marshal Zhukov’s parting words in his last series of memoirs, published in 1992, in which he says that it was still necessary for historians of the war to find the “real reasons” for the Soviet failures at the beginning of hostilities in June 1941. “Historians it seems,” observes Bobylev, “were put in difficult straits under Stalin. They were prevented from knowing the true contents of the many prewar meetings that took place between the military and Stalin, and,



as the result of such meetings, the most crucial decisions were formulated on preparing the country for a possible near-term war with Germany.”

2 Gabriel Gorodetsky, who in his writings follows a strictly defensist line on Stalin’s war planning, apparently concurs that Stalin did see the memorandum of May 15. But he insists, without evidence, that Stalin “rejected [it] outright as it jeopardized his attempts to bring about a political solution.” Yet how could such jeopardy occur, one might ask, if the contents of the memorandum were kept top secret? Also, the Soviets had intentionally leaked, selectively, parts of Stalin’s overtly offensist May 5 statements. Gorodetsky adds that, in any case, the Timoshenko-Zhukov memorandum had no expansionist motivations, that its aim was strictly “limited” to preempting a German blow. Yet Soviet military orders rarely if ever carried “ideological” baggage, being confined to strictly military operations. Bobylev notes that the same military officers who drafted the May 15 document conferred with the Leader in Stalin’s office *the day before*. No stenographic record of the contents of these discussions has yet turned up. But Bobylev believes that it is highly unlikely that the contents of the memorandum, which was issued the very next day, were not discussed or that the memorandum would have been issued if it did not conform to Stalin’s own thinking. Gorodetsky claims that Red Army military deployments and other actions taken after May 1941 displayed a purely “defensive disposition” (*Grand Delusion: Stalin and the German Invasion of Russia* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999], p. 241). However, most latter-day Russian military historians with access to the latest archive documents strongly disagree with this notion. They criticize that author for his defensist reconstruction of the actual measures taken by Stalin and the Red Army prior to June 22, which they describe as being of an offensist nature.

3 A. N. Yakovlev, ed., *1941 god. Dokumenty*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi Fond “Demokratiya,” 1998), p. 219.

4 Yakovlev, *1941 god. Dokumenty*, vol. 2, p. 216.

5 See *Voyenno-Istoricheskyi Zhurnal*, no. 2 (1996), p. 2.

6 Bobylev, “Tochku v Diskussii Stavit’ Rano,” pp. 45, 53. Bobylev adds that Stalin was correct in placing the blame on the military for failing to carry out in time the assigned deployments to the western districts. Yet, in reading the issued orders, when dates are given for completion of mobilizations and deployments, the assigned dates fall *after* June 22. By implication, it seems Stalin resorted to diplomatic stalling tactics vis-à-vis the Germans for this reason. He evidently surmised that his armies were not yet ready to wage war against Germany. Bobylev further notes that on four previous occasions the Wehrmacht was able to preempt its enemies strategically in the field of battle but that this fact seems to have made no impression on the Red Army General Staff: “The absence of such awareness of a foreign state’s past war experience led to the tragedy of 1941” (“Tochku v Diskussii Stavit’ Rano,” p. 46). Mel’tyukhov notes that Western scholar Gorodetsky errs in describing the March 11 plan as reflecting a “defensist strategy” (*Mif “Ledokola” Nakanunye voiny* [Moscow: Progress Akademii, 1995], p. 284). The plan reflected just the opposite, Mel’tyukhov insists (*Upushchennyi Shans Stalina*, p. 386).

7 Russian historians V. K. Volkov and L. Ya. Gibianskyi note in their new edited book, *Eastern Europe between Hitler and Stalin*, that no German sources ever mentioned putative Soviet military offensist indications before June 22, 1941 (*Vostochnaya Yevropa mezhdu Gitlerom I Staliny 1939–1941 gg* [Moscow: Izdatel’stvo “Indrik,” 1999], pp. 262–63). In his diary, Goebbels indicated that Stalin remained “firm” in his commitment of solidarity with Berlin stemming

from the Nazi-Soviet agreements of 1939–40.

8 Bobylev, “Tochku v Diskussii Stavit’ Rano,” p. 46.

9 Mel’tyukhov, *Upushchennyi Shans Stalina*, pp. 370–414, in the section entitled “Soviet Military Planning 1940–1941.”

10 Bobylev, “Tochku v Diskussii Stavit’ Rano,” pp. 51–52.

11 *Segodnya* (September 28, 1993), quoted in Bobylev, “Tochku v Diskussii Stavit’ Rano,” p. 53.

12 Richard W. Harrison, *The Russian Way of War: Operational Art, 1904–1940* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas Press, 2001), pp. 265–69. German research indicated that Stalin was testing newfound theories of offensist operations by means of these games. See Ernst Topitsch, *Stalin’s War: A Radical New Theory on the Origins of the Second World War* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987), p. 71.

13 See *Voyennoye Obozreniye* (April 28–May 11, 2000), p. 2. Similar “lessons” are drawn in an article, titled “Uroki Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voini i voyennaya doktrina Rossiiskoi Federatsii,” in *Voyennaya Mysl’* (*Military Thought*), no. 3 (May–June 2000), pp. 34–41. The authors, General Ye. A. Karpov and Colonels G. A. Mokhorov and V. A. Rodin, maintain that neglect of defense and defensive preparations because of the accent on an offensive strategy that bore a “propagandistic character” led to the disaster on and after June 22, 1941. A second article (Makhmut A. Gareyev, “Voyennaya nauka i voyennoye iskusstvo v Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voine,” *Voyennaya Mysl’*, no. 3 [May–June 2000], pp. 42–49), in the same number of the General Staff journal, makes similar points. This writer complains that the “idealized cult of an offensive war doctrine” underlay the necessity of making ill-prepared, disastrous retreats. For these errors, the author, a former

member of the General Staff after the late 1970s, specifically blames both the Supreme Commander and the General Staff.

14 A former Red Army colonel, Grigori A. Tokaev, who headed the Aerodynamics Laboratory of the Moscow Military Air Academy before the war, a senior officer in Soviet military administration in Germany, discloses in his book, *Stalin Means War* (London: George Weidenfeld and Nicolson Ltd., 1951), that it was commonly known among top Red Army officers that Stalin and the General Staff harbored offensivist war plans against Germany. However, he says, Stalin had not expected a German attack before “early August,” though German and Soviet schedules were similar in expecting war in 1941. The colonel also claims that Stalin’s urging to Churchill in 1942 of a premature opening of a second front in Europe was a ploy aimed at weakening the Western Allies—Stalin still holding to his long-held notion of fratricidal war between the capitalist powers. If true, one wonders how Stalin could have put such a low price on Lend-Lease aid, which obviously would not have been forthcoming, as it had been since late 1941, with any such severe weakening of the “antifascist coalition” of the USSR and the Western Allies that was formed soon after the German attack on the Soviet Union.

15 One such historian, M. I. Mel’tyukhov, goes so far as to maintain that if all of Europe had been sovietized, it would have provided much-needed “stability” to the region. Mel’tyukhov, as we saw, documents Stalin’s offensive plans in his book *Stalin’s Lost Opportunity*, published in 2000. He is a historian connected with one of Russia’s oldest archive/research institutes, VNIIDAD, on Cherkasskyi Square in Moscow.

# APPENDIX 1

## *Stalin's Third Speech, May 5, 1941*

“Permit me to make a correction. A peace policy keeps our nation at peace. A peace policy is a good thing. At one time or another we have followed a line based on defense. Up to now we have not re-equipped our army nor supplied it with modern weapons.

“But now that our army is undergoing reconstruction and we have become strong, it is necessary to shift from defense to offense.

“In providing the defense of our country, we must act in an offensist [*nastupatel'ny*] way. Our military policy must change from defense to waging offensive actions. We must endow our indoctrination, our propaganda and agitation, and our press with an offensist spirit. The Red Army is a modern army—a modern army that is an offensist army [*nastupatel'-naya armiya*].”

### NOTE

This is from A. N. Yakovlev, ed., *1941 god. Dokumenty* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodniy Fond “Demokratiya,” 1998), p. 162, my translation. The document’s editor notes that pursuant to Stalin’s speech before the graduates the Main Administration for Political Propaganda in the Red Army was ordered in the light of Stalin’s remarks to reconstruct its indoctrination along the lines of Stalin’s speeches. The new orders reproduced quotes from Lenin in which he emphasized the need for waging offensives. The editor further notes, following Stalin’s speeches to the graduates, there were changes in administrators throughout the

whole system of propaganda and indoctrination in which such “hawkish” officials as A. A. Zhdanov and A. S. Shcherbakov were promoted in this area of party work. Stalin made Zhdanov his chief assistant in the Secretariat in charge of civilian and military propaganda. This was followed by a number of militant secret and public speeches by Zhdanov and Shcherbakov extolling offensism.

# APPENDIX 2

## *May 15, 1941, Memorandum*

The following is an excerpt from the memorandum of the people's commissar of defense and chief of the General Staff of the Red Army to the chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, J. V. Stalin, "Considerations of the Plan for the Strategic Deployment of the Armed Forces of the Soviet Union in Case of War with Germany and Its Allies," May 15, 1941:

"At the present time, according to data from the Intelligence Administration of the Red Army, Germany has deployed nearly 230 infantry divisions, 22 tank divisions, 20 motorized infantry divisions, 8 air divisions, and 4 cavalry divisions all totaling 284 divisions....

"It is estimated that given the present political situation in today's Germany, in the event of an attack on the USSR, Germany is able to deploy against us 137 infantry divisions, 19 tank divisions, 15 motorized infantry divisions, 4 cavalry divisions, and 5 paratroop divisions all totaling 180 divisions....

"Taking into account the fact that at the present time Germany can maintain its army in mobilized readiness together with its deployed forces in the rear, it has the capability of preempting us in deploying and mounting a surprise strike.

"In order to prevent this from happening while destroying the German army, I consider it necessary that in no way should we yield the initiative to the German command.

“We should preempt [*upredit*] the enemy by deploying and attacking the German Army at the very moment when it has reached the stage of deploying [in order to wage an attack] but has not yet organized itself into a front or concentrated all units of its armed forces along the front....

“In order that the above may be carried out in the way indicated, it is necessary in timely fashion to take the following measures without which it will not be possible to deliver a surprise strike against the enemy both from the air as well as on the ground. [There follows a list of measures relating to the locations along the Western Front for deploying Red Army infantry, tank, etc., divisions and the number of days or weeks the various measures will take to execute the Red Army’s ”surprise strike.“]

[signed] “USSR People’s Commissar of Defense, S. Timoshenko  
Chief of the General Staff of the RKKA, G. Zhukov”

## **NOTE**

This is from A. N. Yakovlev, ed., *1941 god. Dokumenty* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi Fond “Demokratiya,” 1998), pp. 215–20, my translation.



# APPENDIX 3

## *Stalin's Speech to the Politburo, August 19, 1939*

The following is J. V. Stalin's secret speech to the Politburo of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, August 19, 1939:

“The question of war or peace has entered a critical phase for us. If we conclude a mutual assistance treaty with France and Great Britain, Germany will back off of Poland and seek a ‘modus vivendi’ with the Western Powers. War would thus be prevented but future events could take a serious turn for the USSR. If we accept Germany's proposal to conclude with it a nonaggression pact, Germany will then attack Poland and Europe will be thrown into serious acts of unrest and disorder. Under these circumstances we will have many chances of remaining out of the conflict while being able to hope for our own timely entrance into war.

“The experience of the past 20 years shows that in peacetime it is impossible to maintain a Communist movement throughout Europe that would be strong enough so that a Bolshevik party could seize power. A dictatorship by this party becomes possible only as the result of a big war. We are making our choice and it is clear. We must accept the German proposal and politely send the Anglo-French delegations back home. The first advantage we will get will be the destruction of Poland up to the very approaches to Warsaw, including Ukrainian Galicia.

“Germany has given us full leeway in the Baltic Countries and has no

objection to returning Bessarabia to the USSR. Germany is also prepared to yield on giving us a sphere of influence in Rumania, Bulgaria, and Hungary. The question of Yugoslavia still remains open.... At the same time we must anticipate what will ensue from the destruction of Germany in war as well as from a German victory. If it is destroyed, the sovietization of Germany follows inevitably and a Communist government will be established. We must not forget that a sovietized Germany would face great danger if such sovietization occurred after the defeat of Germany in a short war. England and France would be powerful enough to seize Berlin and destroy a Soviet Germany. We would not be able to come to the aid of our Bolshevik comrades in Germany.

“Therefore, our task consists in helping Germany wage war for as long as possible with the aim in view that England and France would be in no condition to defeat a sovietized Germany. While hewing to a policy of neutrality and while waiting for its hour to come, the USSR will lend aid to today’s Germany and supply it with raw materials and foodstuffs. Of course, it follows that we will not allow such shipments to jeopardize our economy or weaken our armed might.

“At the same time we must conduct active Communist propaganda especially as directed at the Anglo-French bloc and primarily in France. We must be prepared for the fact that in France in wartime the Communist Party there must abandon legal activities and go underground. We realize that such work will require an enormous sacrifice in lives. However, we have no doubts about our French comrades. Above all their task will be to break up and demoralize the French army and police. If this preparatory work is completed in a satisfactory way, the security of Soviet Germany is assured. This will likewise ensure the sovietization of France.

“To realize these plans it is necessary that war last as long as possible and that all efforts should be made, whether in Western

Europe or the Balkans, to see that this happens.

“Let us look now at the second possibility—namely, that Germany becomes the victor. Some propose that this turn of events would present us with a serious danger. There is some truth to this notion. But it would be erroneous to believe that such a danger is as near and as great as they assume. If Germany achieves victory in the war, it will emerge from it in such a depleted state that to start a conflict with the USSR will take at very least 10 years.

“Germany’s main task would then be to keep a watch on the defeated England and France to prevent their restoration. On the other hand, a victorious Germany would have at its disposal a large territory. Over the course of many decades, Germany would be preoccupied with the ‘exploitation’ of these territories and establishing in them the German order. Obviously, Germany would be too preoccupied to move against us. There is still another factor that enhances our security. In the defeated France, the French Communist Party would be very strong. A Communist revolution would follow inevitably. We would exploit this in order to come to the aid of France and win it over as an ally. Later these peoples who fell under the “protection” of a victorious Germany likewise would become our allies. We would have a large arena in which to develop the world revolution.

“Comrades! It is in the interests of the USSR, the Land of the Toilers, that war breaks out between the Reich and the capitalist Anglo-French bloc. Everything must be done so that the war lasts as long as possible in order that both sides become exhausted. Namely for this reason we must agree to the pact proposed by Germany and use it so that once this war is declared, it will last for a maximum amount of time. We must step up our propaganda within the combatant-countries so that they are prepared for that time when the war ends.”

**NOTE**

This is from the central collection of Historical Documents of the former “Special Archive of the USSR,” Folder 7, Set 1, Doc. 1223. It is reproduced from Dimitrov’s diary in T. S. Bushuyev, “Proklinaya—Poprobuite Ponyat’” (“Curse It but Try to Understand”), review of two books by Viktor Suvorov, *Novyi Mir*, no. 12 (1994), pp. 232–33.

# APPENDIX 4

## *Russia's New History Textbooks*

In the introduction to this book, I referred to the Soviets' Orwellian Memory Hole. The distortions introduced into Soviet historiography, including military history, have been so potent—and convincing—as to mislead not only Soviet citizens but also Western observers, who, in some cases, still rely on Soviet interpretations of major events. Such distortions may crop up at any time and on any topic. Distinguishing the chaff of lies from the wheat of truth is an ongoing task for all students of Soviet history, especially in the West. That certainly includes those who take an interest in Stalin's policies from 1939 to 1941 as well as the other events and issues raised in this book within the context of Stalin's Grand Strategy.

When the Soviet regime collapsed in 1991, it became necessary to begin thinking freely in new, un-Soviet ways. As to education, because of Soviet-style Marxist-Leninist indoctrination and the party line in the schools' texts, it became necessary to write new history texts for both the secondary (high) schools and institutions of higher learning in Russia. Every topic of Soviet history—the former official ideology, Soviet foreign relations, domestic policy, Red Army military doctrine and strategy, Stalinism, the purges, the Nazi–Soviet pacts, the Winter War against Finland, the causes of the Great Fatherland War, everything, in fact, that happened in the preceding seventy-four years of Soviet rule—henceforth had to be explained to students truthfully without the Marxist-Leninist or propaganda glosses on the past.

Here is the background for these revolutionary changes in Russian education and the way they impound, directly or indirectly, on various topics and events covered in the present book. Educating children in the old, pre-1917 way, Lenin had said, meant “cramming their heads full of knowledge, 9/10ths of which was useless, 1/10th of which was distorted.” Under communism, he continued, students are indoctrinated in “socialism by its vanguard, the Communist Party [in order to raise] a generation able to accomplish the final realization of communism.”

The “distortion” was thereupon updated and augmented by the Communist rulers themselves. For over two generations under Lenin, Stalin, and their successors, the teaching of Russian history and world history was shaped—that is, deformed—to fit the mold of Marxist-Leninist “science.” Teachers were ordered to serve as “transmission belts” imparting to students “the idea of communism” and absolute loyalty to the regime. They were to describe the world as an “arena” of “inevitable” two-camp struggle between capitalism and socialism. Teachers were trained to be purveyors of class hatred, proponents of “class struggle” against “bourgeois enemies” at home and “capitalist-imperialist states” abroad. They were, in effect, “engineers of human souls.”

Soon other elements were added into Soviet education and indoctrination of the masses, in and out of school. These methods became totalitarian prototypes that were deliberately copied by the Nazis (as Hitler himself admitted) as well as by other one-party dictatorships then and now. One of these Soviet methods was the promotion in education of the Lenin Cult, later adapted to Nazi conditions as the “Leadership Principle” embodied in the person of Adolf Hitler. Lenin and Stalin, as Hitler was later, were each depicted for children and adults as a *Vozhd'* (a Russian term equivalent to *Führer*, *Duce*, *Caudillo*, et al.). He was a historically incomparable “genius,” a role model who, “Christ-like,” delivered mankind into the

earthly paradise as depicted in the official ideology.

Concomitant with this is the notion of the Leader's selfless sacrifice for The Cause. This is found in tales of Lenin's exile to Siberia and his wounding in an attempted assassination in 1918. Both adapted to Nazi propaganda in Germany, such as in Hitler's incarceration in 1924 or his wounding in the 1944 assassination attempt, together with, in both the Soviet and Nazi cases, the taking of hostages and demonstrative executions. All this was personified in the heroic, even lovable Leader.

## **SOVIET PROPAGANDA ECHOES IN THE WEST**

That this Soviet propaganda could be—and was—echoed in the West is seen in a number of distorted eulogies to Stalin that have appeared in Stalin's day in the American press. For instance, in former U.S. Ambassador to the USSR Joseph E. Davies' best-selling book (later made into a Hollywood film), *Mission to Moscow*, Davies claims that Stalin's trumped-up show trials, the purging and execution of Old Bolshevik leaders and of military officers in the Soviet Union in 1937–38, was an instance in which “justice had indeed been.” Davies depicts Stalin as a goodhearted reformer who only wanted peace and prosperity for Soviet Russia, not war or world revolution.

*Collier's* magazine, in December 1943, under the title “What Kind of Country Is Russia Anyway?” told readers editorially that Russia is “neither socialist nor Communist [but] a modified capitalist set-up [advancing] toward something resembling our own and Great Britain's democracy.” *Look* magazine, with a readership in the millions, ran a cover story with a band that read, “A Guy Named Joe.” Stalin, the story said, is into “Arctic meteorology. Leatherstocking Tales, soap, and war [and is] among the best dressed of the world leaders, making Churchill in his siren suit look positively shabby.” *Life* magazine (March 29, 1943) described Stalin's and Beria's secret police/Gulag police organization, the NKVD, as “a national police similar to the FBI.” For

that matter, the U.S. Office of War Information and U.S. Army orientation materials regularly referred to the USSR as a “democracy” (see introduction).

In his messages to Churchill, President Roosevelt himself referred to Stalin in a jolly way as “Uncle Joe.” At same time near the time of his death, FDR is reputed to have angrily observed to an aide: “Averell [Harriman, U.S. emissary to and adviser on Russia] is right. We can’t do business with Stalin.”<sup>1</sup>

## **PURGING SOVIETISMS**

For Soviet youths to be true “comrades,” said the former Communist Party indoctrinators and educators, they must be taught to merge their wills into the “general will” of the mass, the community, as expressed in microcosmic form in the school classroom. In such a rigid curriculum there was no place for “bourgeois individualism” or for open discussion. *Individuum* (individual) in Russian, in fact, became no less a pejorative buzzword than a Soviet epithet like *bourgeoise*, *wrecker*, *cosmopolite*, or *hooligan*.

Fortunately, with the demise of communist rule in Russia in 1991, the country’s educational system has been steadily purged of all such “Com-munazi” contents and methods. No longer do youths flock to Octobrist and Komsomol youth organizations, those former junior auxiliaries of the “paternal” Communist Party. Nor do boys and girls in Russia any longer wear student uniforms with red neckerchiefs, flash the stiff hooked-arm Lenin salute, or stand at rigid attention at their desks when reciting. Nor do they squeal on members of their families to authorities if mama and papa or brother and sister show anything less than complete loyalty to the leader, the party, and the state.

All of these totalitarian methods were exported not only to Nazi- and Fascist-ruled countries but to Sovietized nations and client-states before and after World War II—in Eastern Europe, Cuba, Africa, the



Middle East, and Asia. More than one-third of all educational institutions in today's Russia are nonpublic—that is, not supported by the government. In the latter “public” schools, education likewise looks quite different from that in Soviet days, as do the textbooks that the students read in such institutions. Russian students today are no longer forced to read texts whose chapters are slanted according to *partiinost'* ideology imbued with “class consciousness,” global struggle, and adulation of the Leader, living or dead, or both dead *and* living.

## NEW CONTENTS

Then, what are Tolya and Tatyana reading today as they do their homework for their history classes? How do their education and textbooks differ from those of Soviet days? What light do the new books throw on topics discussed in this book? Two representative textbooks well illustrate the sea change that has come over latter-day Russian education.<sup>2</sup> They are written for tenth and eleventh graders in the tuition-free, public-supported secondary schools as well as in some private schools. They are recommended for voluntary adoption by the Ministry of General and Professional Education of the Russian Federation. Titled *The World in the 20th Century* and *A History of Russia*, the books are accompanied by an “apparatus” (e.g., “Questions for Discussion”) that is designed, state the authors, to stimulate free discussion in the classroom. Indeed, the questions are mostly thought provoking and well intended. Each chapter includes fragments of primary source material, some of which would be edifying even for some Soviet specialists in the West; tables of governmental organization under the tsars and Soviets; and the post-1991 political structure.

One of the pair of books includes a glossary, and both contain chronologies and maps. The glossary is noteworthy for its nonideological definitions in contrast to those found in the texts of the Soviet period right up to 1991. The latter provide only “correct”

definitions designed for uncritical student consumption. These were additionally boilerplated in the well-known “Political Dictionaries” that provided strict, party-line definitions for civilians and soldiers.

The general topics for the domestic scene in Russia covered in both books are predictable: the fall of Tsar Nicholas II and the short, nine-month rule by the Provisional Government under Lvov and then Kerensky; the seizure of power by Lenin’s handful of Bolsheviks; the Soviet-inspired civil war and “War Communism”; the advent of Stalin’s rule following Lenin’s death; the Five-Year Plans and collectivization; the Gulag and Soviet genocide; the consolidation of totalitarian rule under both Lenin and Stalin and their successors through Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Andropov, and Chernenko; the ambivalent Gorbachev period after 1985; and the attempted coup of August 1991. Covered, finally, are the events marking the Yeltsin presidency through 1996. All periods are treated in the main with stunning candor, laced with primary-source documents.

In international relations, the topics are also predictable, including as they do Lenin’s, Stalin’s, and their successors’ plans for subversive world revolution; the interwar period; the Nazi–Soviet pact and its consequent Soviet territorial expansion; World War II and the Great Fatherland War; the Cold War; the Cuban Missile Crisis; the U.S.–USSR arms buildup and nuclear standoff; the Soviet-led invasion and occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968; “détente” during Brezhnev’s rule; the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan; and so on.

All of these topics—with few exceptions—are treated no less objectively than they are in many contemporary Western history texts. As a matter of fact, as Westerners pore over the pages of these Russian texts, they may be struck by the contrasts in content and cogency in some cases between the Russian books and those used at equivalent educational levels in the United States and perhaps elsewhere. That is, the Russian books in many cases are much more candid and incisive,

as, for example, in their presentations of the minority coup aspect of the “October Revolution”; Lenin’s and his colleagues’ wily, conspiratorial methods; Soviet genocide; the Soviet-led, global “ideological struggle,” which, it is intimated, helped unleash the Cold War; Soviet “offensivist” diplomacy and military strategy; and so on. The Russian student draws, certainly, sharp conclusions from this reading and discussion of the topics—inferences totally different from those that the two preceding generations in Soviet Russia were obliged to draw.

At the end of each chapter and elsewhere, the textbook authors remind the students what the “lessons from history” might be. One of the above books phrases it this way in the introduction:

The end of the 20th century once again confronts us with the question of what roads of development our country should take. Above all, we see that Russia exceeded the limits of “revolution” of the type that does not lead to national harmony but, rather, to catastrophe and the destruction of human life. Those who forget the past are doomed to repeating it over and over again.... We trust that this text will provide a truthful way of thinking about the past while helping everyone find ways of leading the country to true greatness.<sup>3</sup>

In interviews with young high school-aged students I conducted informally, it became clear that their reading of such post-Communist texts has created a generational “time warp” of knowledge and understanding about their own country and the world in comparison with the awareness of previous generations of students. One senses that today’s students have experienced shock and horror in learning so

much about the grimness and hypocrisy of the Soviet past. To a foreigner—in this case, an American—a given Russian student, as he or she discusses such historical events, communicates a sense of embarrassment crossed with the resolve “never to let it happen again.” At the same time, several of the teenaged students expressed a pent-up pride in their country projected, as it were, into the future. Too, their interest in pre-1917 Russian history, which in Soviet histories had been routinely distorted by the Communists, and their involvement in Russia’s millennium-old religious traditions are strongly characteristic of today’s younger generation.

## **SOVIET-CLEANSED INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

Perhaps one of the most striking threads running through both textbooks concerns the loss of democracy, civil liberties, and individual freedom in Russia as a consequence of what one of the books terms the “despotism” imposed by the Bolsheviks on Russians and other peoples of the Soviet Union. On the international front, students are frankly informed that when it was aimed at democratic countries abroad,

peaceful coexistence [as conceived by the Communists] was a temporary set of relations with the “capitalist encirclement.” The West had legitimate grounds for fearing the export of revolution from the capital of the Soviet Russia.... This gave much support to the view that [Communist parties in other countries] were forces that were hostile to the parliamentary system together with the perception that these parties were “agents of Moscow.”

In its glossary, the above textbook provides students with the following, ideology-free definition of *parliamentarism*: “It is a system

of governmental rule in which the functions of the legislative and executive are strictly delimited, and in which the parliament plays the leading role. In this system, the parliament is viewed as both subject and object within the political struggle and is linked to traditional democratic values existing in the country.”

Contrast this 1997 definition of political democracy with that found in the 1988 encyclopedic dictionary titled *Sovremenniy Soyedinennoye Shtaty Ameriki* (*The Contemporary United States of America*), edited by six ideologists including, ironically, Russia’s sometime post-Soviet prime minister, Yevgeny Primakov: “The most important aspect of the American political system is its two-party system[, which is] an instrument for retaining political domination by the monopolistic bourgeoisie.” Or contrast it with this definition of Western democracy made by Lenin, which cropped up in many textbooks in the Soviet period: “Capital dominates and stifles everything [and] this they call ‘democracy.’”<sup>4</sup>

Today’s schools throughout Russia, their administrators and teachers, enjoy broad freedom in the choice of textbooks. No longer are they bound to adopt texts, as in the Soviet period, that were passed by the censor or approved by a remote Ministry of Education in Moscow. Moreover, free, outside reading by curious students of other books, domestic and foreign, is very common. Open discussion in the classroom is encouraged as seen in the “apparatus” of discussion questions provided at the end of chapters in the history textbooks.

A new generation of Russian youth is being educated at an early age to be freethinking individuals as they assimilate the main developments of the twentieth century. This is perhaps one of the most, if not *the* most, important consequences of Russia’s transition away from Communism. It is a valuable preparation of that country’s future adults for the new century and millennium.

## NOTES

1 Quoted in Martin Walker, *The Cold War: A History* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1993), p. 17.

2 See O. S. Soroko-Tsyupi, ed., *Mir v XX veke*, 2d ed. (Moscow: Proveshcheniye, 1997), for tenth-eleventh grades, recommended by the Russian Ministry of General and Professional Education of the Russian Federation; and V. P. Ostrovskiy and A. I. Utkin, *Istoriya Rossii XX vek*, 2d ed. (Moscow: Drofa, 1997), for eleventh grade, recommended by the Ministry of General and Professional Education of the Russian Federation.

3 Ostrovskiy and Utkin, *Istoriya Rossii XX vek*, p. 3.

4 V. I. Lenin, "Report to the Seventh Congress of Soviets" (1919), in Albert L. Weeks, *Soviet and Communist Quotations* (New York: Pergamon-Brassey's Publishers, 1987), p. 84.

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# About the Author

Albert L. Weeks has studied Soviet Russia for more than fifty years, and he is an expert in the field. He began as translator and editorial adviser for *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* and as translator and glossary compiler on the classified USAF technical-translation project for McGraw-Hill. He also translated some of the Smolensk Collection of official Soviet documents (about Gulag prisoners' rations) for the AFL-CIO. During the Cold War, he served as senior soviet analyst for the U.S. Department of State and Radio Free Europe, Inc. In the late 1950s, he was an editorial assistant at *Newsweek* magazine where he is credited with having coined the term "sputnik" to describe the Soviets' first artificial earth satellite.

He guest-lectured at West Point Military Academy and taught at New York University for over twenty-five years until he retired in 1989. Currently he is teaching global studies at the Ringling School of Art and Design in Sarasota, Florida. One of his hobbies is watercolor painting.

Weeks is the author of several books, among them: *Reading American History*; *The First Bolshevik: A Political Biography of Peter Tkachev*; *The Other Side of Coexistence: An Analysis of Russian Foreign Policy*; *The Troubled Détente*; *The Soviet Nomenklatura*; *Myths That Rule America*; and *Soviet and Communist Quotations*. His articles have been published in numerous academic and U.S. military and intelligence journals.