

STALIN'S PERFORMANCE AS A LEADER IN
THE SECOND WORLD WAR

by

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PART I

"THE REALITIES OF STALIN"

The first half of the twentieth century was one of those turning points in human history when long established patterns began to disintegrate and the trend toward the development of democracies was halted. Belief in the irresistible spread of freedom and reason was shattered, new forms of authoritarianism arose, and men enslaved themselves to mass movements, ideologies, and leaders. This was an intensely political era, when the momentum in human affairs shifted from the spheres of ideas and economics to the sphere of action to dominate over and manipulate men. It was an era of "movement regimes,"¹ of dictators backed by parties dedicated to the salvation or remaking of national or international society: of Atatürks, Lenins, Mussolinis, Hitlers, and Francos, of Titos, Ho Chi-Minhs, Perons and Stalins.

No man more fully epitomized this era than Joseph Stalin. His political career was directed through a revolutionary model of twentieth-century political movements, that coincided with the first half of the century. He became the twentieth-century dictator par excellence, exercising power over more men and for a longer period than any of his fellow dictators. The movement he dominated was worldwide in its effect and ambitions, unlimited in its revolutionary scope.

A Georgian of Gori who gained central power over an ideology and a movement deeply rooted in European civilization, he employed that power not only to attack Europe's international political position but also to isolate his own domains culturally from Europe. Under his influence the ideology itself was deprived of its rational and liberalizing concerns and refashioned into an incantatory cult and a rationalization of tyranny.

Stalin's career also epitomized the central role of political power which characterized his era. It was not merely that his regime rested heavily on the use of force, fear and falsehood. Although Stalin understood the potency of ideological and economic factors, he never allowed them to take precedence over political considerations: he invariably translated them into political terms. He enjoyed a superb capacity for manipulating men and institutions so as to enhance his own influence and control. At the height of his power Stalin was invested with the synthetic charisma of a "beloved father and teacher" and "savior of the Soviet people." He was acknowledged as the foremost interpreter of Marxism and Leninism, and, during World War II, he became a bemedaled generalissimo. But the qualities which won him power were not those of the charismatic prophet or leader, the party theoretician, or the military hero, but rather those of a brilliant politician.² For he mastered all aspects of the art of politics: the negative aspect of recognizing the limits beyond which particular objectives may not be

profitably or safely pressed, and the positive aspect of perceiving the opportunities to be exploited as presented by a given situation.

Since his rise to power, Stalin has been a controversial subject, on a personal, as well as political level. He was, of course, observed by both the Soviet and western historians. Some of these knew him personally, and others have had to make great efforts to use research to evaluate his contributions and failures as a leader.

The primary objective of this report is to evaluate Stalin's performance as a leader in the Second World War. This portion of the paper is to review the many disclosures concerning his dictatorial era, and the post-Stalin and the reappraisal period. This discussion of his political era will present the views of orthodox and western historians and leading statesmen.

There is limited information dealing with Stalin's pre-revolutionary career, which he began as a radical in the Social Democratic Party. In 1912, Stalin edged into the national leadership of the Bolshevik Party, because he and Vladimir Lenin, his idol, were involved in a political struggle for party dominance with the Mensheviks and other political factions. But Stalin did not enjoy his new role of junior party leader for long. His arrest in 1913 was followed by banishment to a remote corner of Siberia where escape was virtually impossible. He only gained release due

to the 1917 revolution, prior to the Bolsheviks seizure of power.

Lenin's early assessment of Stalin was marked with enthusiasm for and appreciation of Stalin's great initiative and patriotic work for the party, and he called him "a splendid Georgian." He favored Stalin because, in Lenin's opinion, Stalin possessed great abilities as an administrator and organizer, and he could be trusted to accomplish the most difficult task as a revolutionary. Finally, Lenin saw him as impersonal and businesslike, having the ability to "exert pressure."³ He prized this quality very highly.

The Civil War period of 1918-1921 was marked by personality clashes between Stalin and other fellow revolutionaries. The most notable clash was with Leon Trotsky, the Red army leader, concerning Trotsky's military policies. In 1918, a group of Bolshevik leaders at Tsaritsyn, on the Southern Front, including some of Stalin's old comrades from the Caucasus attempted to resist Trotsky's military politics, and Stalin took advantage of this to weld them into a group of personal supporters. Also, he often circumvented Trotsky and dealt with Lenin personally which added fuel to their later bitter feud. Trotsky's estimation of Stalin's military abilities during this period was that he lacked leadership abilities, lacked military bearing and possessed little knowledge of military operations.

In December 1922, as he lay critically ill, Lenin became increasingly concerned about the future of his revolution.

Bureaucratization, corruption, nationalism and the personal failings of his lieutenants were all matters of concern. Meanwhile Lenin personally experienced for the first time the unscrupulousness and vindictiveness of Stalin when crossed.⁴ The incidents involved the rough and rude handling of Lenin's wife during a telephone conversation, in the Georgian campaign. He was also very concerned about the Stalin-Trotsky feud. Stalin's actions infuriated Lenin, causing him to reassess Stalin. In January 1923, Lenin indicated:

Stalin is too rough and this shortcoming, while completely tolerable in relations among us communists, becomes intolerable in the post of General Secretary. Therefore, I propose to the comrades to think over the means transferring Stalin from this post and appointing to it some other person who is superior to Stalin only in one respect, namely, is more tolerant, more loyal, more polite and attentive to comrades, less capricious and so on. But, I think that from the point of view of what I have written above about relations between Stalin and Trotsky, it is not a trifle or it is the kind of trifle that is capable of acquiring decisive significance.⁵

After Lenin's death these remarks were to be known as "Lenin's Testament," calling for the party leadership to get rid of Stalin. Later through a combination of skill, luck and the scruples of his opponents Stalin was able to weather the efforts to remove him; he retained control of the party machine. Stalin kept these attacks by Lenin secret from all but the highest party leadership for the rest of his career, while he built a cult of hero-worship around himself. In 1950, Stalinist Alexi Kosygin says,

Comrade Stalin resolutely led our country along the path of building heavy industry pointing out that heavy industry was the basis of industrialization and

strengthening of the country's defense. . . . The most advanced industry in the world equipped with modern machinery, was built up in our country in an historically short space of time under the leadership of Comrade Stalin.⁶

Stalin's official biography draws together most of the qualities and achievements attributed to Stalin. It projects an image of superhuman proportions, and is meshed in language with marked mythopoeic and even liturgical overtones. For example: In all their languages the people of the Soviet Union compose songs to Stalin, expressing their boundless devotion for their great leader, teacher, friend and military commander.

In the lore and art of the people, Stalin's name was ever linked with Lenin's, "We go with Stalin as with Lenin, we talk to Stalin as to Lenin; he knows all our utmost thoughts; all his life he has cared for us," goes one of the popular Soviet Party tales. A counterview is given by Solzhenitsyn who reveals Stalin: A Short Biography as a complete falsification. He argues these glorifications are Stalin's fiction that historical material reveals that the fictional element is solidly based on facts.⁷

Another student of Stalin, the American historian, Robert C. Tucker agrees with Lenin on this point: "Stalin was a man of dictatorial tendency who saw his party critics as class enemies and was unprepared at the bottom to recognize how inferior he was to his predecessor in ability as a leader."⁸ Lenin has recognized Stalin's characteristics as undesirable for party leadership. He was concerned about

Stalin's power-hungry and dictatorial traits that he observed in Stalin's personality. However, his goal was to succeed Lenin. The aim of his life was to be--and be recognized as--Soviet Communism's second Lenin, a supremely gifted vozhd' leading the movement in new revolutionary exploits comparable in historic significance to the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917.

The western historian's image of the 1918-1922 period in Russia often rests on a conception of Lenin as an essentially "good ruler, a man," in Adam B. Ulam's words "of human instincts," not at all like Stalin with his reliance on terror and his rage "to appease every suspicion and whim with blood."⁹ The Soviet writer and dissident Alexander Solzhenitsyn, while psychoanalyzing Stalin, draws a portrait of Stalin as a man with unlimited power, a man whose squint could mean death and whose every word had to be hailed as genius. Such a self-image inevitably rests on weak foundations, dwells in megalomaniac fantasies, begins to eat away at itself. He says, "That Stalin dreamed of such titles for himself as 'Emperor of the Planet' and 'Emperor of the Earth.'"¹⁰ Also, he states, "Stalin reflecting on his personal greatness, pictured himself correcting Lenin, both in history and in theory. He exaggerated his own role in the Revolution to Lenin's detriment, and he repudiates Lenin's remarks that 'anyone should be able to run a state.'" To Stalin's mind Lenin was impetuous and confused; the state requires the strong hand of one leader.¹¹ Finally, a minor

official in the 1920's, who broke with the Soviet government, describes his experience by saying:

Stalin is widely regarded as a man of mystery. . . . But to us who worked under him, he did not seem mysterious; he seemed a man with a sense of inferiority which made him lonely, vindictive and suspicious. He seemed a ruthless and unscrupulous man, concentrated on problems of personal power, and partly for that reason, partly because of natural limitations, lacking in statesmanlike vision, we knew him as a slow and plodding thinker, cautious and suspicious.¹²

In 1929 Stalin gained full power of the state after replacing all non-Stalinists with Stalinists in all key positions. He increased the use of the secret police as a personal instrument and vastly expanded his command and control of the state. His idea was to bring about the total state regimentation of society, creating in the totalitarian political structure a mechanism for unlimited exploitation of the human and natural resources of Russia with a view to amassing power in the hand of the center. The forced industrialization, beginning with the First Five-Year Plan in 1928, and the terroristic collectivization of peasant farming in the succeeding four years were based upon total state regimentation of society. This period saw the emergence of a full-blown totalitarian state system. Stalin, possibly with the image of Ivan the Terrible already in mind, christened the whole process the "building of socialism." Actually, it was the first stage of "Stalinization."¹³

His contemporaries, comrades and rivals alike, regarded him as unsuitable for the role. He appeared to them to have none of the gifts which make a great leader, Bolshevik or

otherwise. His ascendancy came as a complete surprise. Trotsky wrote of Stalin that he attached himself like a show (movie film) from a Kremlin wall to succeed Lenin. This impression was shared by Zinoviev, Kamenev, Rykov, Tomsky, Burkharin and all the other leaders of the non-Russian communist parties.

Isaac Deutscher's estimate of Stalin's coming to power is as follows: Stalin did not possess the typical traits of a Bolshevik leader. First, Stalin was not a theorist. He was to the end a political tactician rather than a strategist: he displayed his mastery in short term maneuver rather than in long-term conception. However, his genius for tactics did more than compensate his weakness as a strategist. He was cumbersome and ineffective as a writer and speaker. Only as an exceptionally gifted organizer had he made his mark in Lenin's lifetime. Therefore, his contemporaries and rivals had reason to think that he was unfit to be Lenin's successor. Deutscher then praises Stalin by saying, "Stalin was fitted for the role not merely and not even primarily by his great talents for organization and tactics. His background, his experience, and cast of mind had prepared him to lead Bolshevism in the break with its democratic origins and through the decades of its isolation and self-isolation. For the 'function' of such a leadership he was the most perfect 'organ.'"¹⁴

In the second phase of Stalinization in the mid-1930's, Stalin created an absolute autocracy through the suppression

of the Bolshevik Party. This meant the liquidation of the Soviet ruling class through a purge. Stalin branded many economic, party, soviet and activists as enemies although they were dedicated Communist party members. They were charged and sentenced by the regime courts, in trials typifying his abuse of power.

Adam Ulam regards Stalin as a restless man who sensed a universal religious-existentialist craving in human nature because he felt it so acutely himself. And that is why he was able to build a system of terror, and a structure of personal power unprecedented in modern history. The terror was necessary, not only to keep men obedient, but even more to make them believe. Terror transformed forced collectivization with all its irrationalism into historical necessity, and the culmination of the class struggle in the construction of Socialism. From the point of view of the interests of the super-autocrat Stalin, collectivization was a rational procedure. So, too, for that matter, was the extermination of the Russian military leaders in the 1930's--an episode that several western scholars have adduced as evidence of Stalin's insanity, because it was so clearly against his own interest. But in Stalin's super-autocracy only rank could make a nobody a genius of military art, and no one's rank could ever challenge the supreme genius.¹⁵ On the other hand, Herman F. Achminov presents a contrasting viewpoint that indicates Stalin's criminal acts were committed from necessity growing out of the nature of communism and were not, as is frequently

alleged, due to Stalin's personality.¹⁶ Also, one dictator evaluated his peer. Adolph Hitler commented:

Stalin is one of the most extraordinary figures in world history. He began as a small clerk, and he has never stopped being a clerk. Stalin owes nothing to rhetoric. He governs his office thanks to a bureaucracy that obeys his every nod and gesture. . . . Stalin pretends to have been the herald of the Bolshevik revolution. The actual fact he identifies himself with the Russia of the Tsars, and merely resurrected the tradition of Pan-Slavism. For him Bolshevism is only a means, a disguise designed to trick the Germanic and Latin people. Stalin is half-beast and half-giant. To the social side of life he is utterly indifferent. The people can rot, for all he cares.¹⁷

Lastly, Soviet historian Alexander M. Nekrick criticizes Stalin by saying that, "The economy of the Soviet state could have developed faster still and achieved an even higher level by the time the war started, if the situation in the country had not been adversely influenced by the cult of personality and in connection with it, by the mass, baseless repressions conducted by Joseph Stalin against Party and Soviet officials."¹⁸ Nekrick describes Stalin's purges as affecting industrial production with an atmosphere of suspicion and "spy-mania" in which "unprincipled coercists" advanced their fortunes by denouncing good and competent officials and technicians to the NKVD witch-hunters.¹⁹

Stalin knew how terribly he had compressed the spring of fear and hatred of himself within the party by his reckless purges of the preceding years. Meanwhile, he feared the possibility of war with Germany and Japan simultaneously. Also, he was sure that his comrades, or military leaders, or both, would take advantage of this adversity to make an end to him.²⁰

In the late thirties Stalin's policy advocates avoiding, in any way possible, a military conflict with the Germans. He maneuvered cautiously and delicately from 1938 to 1939 for a deal with the Germans that would buy them off and turn the point of their spear westward. He thought he had achieved this in the Non-Aggression Pact of August 1939, which helped to unleash the war and set the Germans against the western powers.²¹

The Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939 was to be Stalin's security against a German invasion, but his calculations misfired. On June 22, 1941, Vyacheslav Molotov announced to the Soviet people the German invasion of the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, Stalin was not prepared for the attack and was thrown into confusion and despair when it happened. But, he quickly recovered his balance and pursued with skill and courage the policies of victory. This victory was later to be attributed to the virtues of the Soviet system and to the political and economic policies he pursued in the 1930's. The Soviet and Western historians have noted that this system and these policies had both positive and negative effects on Soviet strength and morale, and give due weight to other factors contributing to victory, such as the patriotism and fortitude of the Russian people, the efforts of Russia's allies, and the political miscalculations of the Nazis. Since 1956, some Soviet historians and citizens have criticized the Soviet military organization as being unprepared for the German invasion in 1941. On the contrary, Nekrick's version of these

events differs considerably from the Stalinist and the post-Stalinist version. He charges Stalin and the Soviet government with ineptitude, nearsightedness and inefficiency in meeting the German invasion, and views these as systematic weaknesses.²²

Sir Winston Churchill made several rare affirmative comments about Stalin in recalling his wartime dealings with Stalin. These comments provide insights into the Soviet dictator's character and political methods, and are related to the first meeting of the two leaders in August 1942. Churchill's purpose was to break the bad news to Stalin that there would be no Second Front in France in 1942, and to inform him of the alternative Anglo-American plans. Churchill had explained operation "Torch" (invasion of North Africa) to Stalin and the strategic significance of the operation. At this point Stalin seemed suddenly to grasp the strategic advantage of "Torch." He recounted the four main points instantly. Churchill said, "I was deeply impressed with the remarkable statement. It showed the Russian Dictator's swift and complete mastery of a problem. Very few people alive could have comprehended in so few minutes the reasoning which the British planners had all so long been wrestling with for months. He saw it all in a flash."²³

During World War II in Moscow, Deutscher observed that:

Many allied visitors who called at the Kremlin were astonished to see in how many issues, great, and small, military, political, or diplomatic, Stalin personally took the final decision. He was in effect his own commander-in-chief, his own minister of defense, his

own quartermaster, his own minister of supply, his own foreign minister, and even his own chief of protocol. . . . A prodigy of patience, tenacity, and vigilance almost omnipresent, almost omniscient.²⁴

At the same time Milovan Djilas, Yugoslav leader, communist, and writer, presents an alternate view of Stalin. Djilas, who sat with Stalin at the table in the Kremlin where the midnight war meetings were held, describes how he was filled with admiration for the Soviet war effort, that he literally worshiped Stalin. He once wrote:

Stalin was something more than a leader in battle. He was the incarnation of an idea, transfigured in communist minds into a pure idea, and thereby into something infallible and sinless. Stalin was the victorious battle today and the brotherhood of man tomorrow.²⁵

But after more extensive personal experience with the dictator, Djilas ultimately decided that Stalin "will face the glory of being the greatest criminal in History." Djilas summarized his conclusions by saying:

He knew that he was one of the cruelest, most despotic personalities in human history. But this did not worry him one bit, for he was convinced that he was executing the judgment of history. His conscience was troubled by nothing, despite the millions who had been destroyed in his name and by his order, despite the thousands of his closest collaborators whom he had murdered as traitors because they doubted that he was leading the country and people into happiness, equality and liberty.²⁶

The Soviet victory in World War II extended Stalin's power over large areas of Eastern Europe. His objectives were to establish Soviet patterns of totalitarian control and to maximize direction from Moscow. He supported the creation of communist regimes that he could control himself. (He

failed to control Yugoslavia and China.) His policies toward the non-communist world were ones of cautious militancy. The world as he saw it was divided into two implacably hostile "camps." The "imperialist camp" was to be weakened by all means possible including local and revolutionary wars, while the "socialist camp" must bend all its efforts toward strengthening its economic and military might against the ultimate showdown, but that showdown must be avoided pending the achievement of a ponderance of power.²⁷ Internally, Stalin's postwar policies were aimed at keeping intact the totalitarian dictatorship as it was established in the 1930's. With his power to rule absolute, Stalin personally directed the party and all other agencies within the state apparatus, and he required many reliable heads of organization to operate the government. These subordinates were fiercely ambitious men who pushed and jostled for position, continuously scheming to disgrace or destroy their opponents, whispered accusations against their rivals into the old man's ears, and offered him doctored documents to prove a rival's guilt or disloyalty. During this period Stalin became carefully isolated from outsiders; he could learn about what was going on in the world only from men like Andrei Zhdanov, Georgi Malenkov, Lavrenty Beria or from men who were trusted. In his isolation, he became ever more distrustful, capricious, irritable and brutal; in particular his suspicion grew.²⁸

In late 1951 and early 1952, Stalin charged that he had discovered a conspiracy in the so-called Mingrelian

Nationalist Organization, in the Republic of Georgia. There, he claimed, Nationalists were conspiring for the overthrow of the Soviet power in Georgia "with the help of imperialist powers." The evidence, however, turned out to be too thin for further speculation.²⁹ Also, later the case of the "Saboteur Doctors" was announced by Pravda and fears mounted. Seven distinguished physicians were charged with forming a "terrorist group who made it their aim to cut short the lives of active public figures of the Soviet Union through sabotage medical treatment." As this case has been interpreted, primarily by Nikita Khrushchev, the "Doctor's Plot" signaled Stalin's intentions to prepare a new terroristic purge of the party leadership. Prominent leaders, Beria, Kliment Voroshilov, Molotov and Anastas Mikoyan and other Jews and Western sympathizers were probable victims. Whatever Stalin's plans, he was not to live long enough to implement them.³⁰

The historian Ulam sees Stalin at the peak of his political prowess during the war years, when, in negotiating with western leaders, he easily won his objectives at Yalta. But after the war the dictator could not adjust to a world in which he had become an old man. Ulam believes that Stalin's age and obsessive suspiciousness turned him in three years, even more than before, "to the habits and mentality of a hunted revolutionary and conspirator."³¹

In 1953, on the eve of Stalin's death, the bankruptcy of his system and policies were abundantly apparent as viewed by his likely heirs. His apocalyptic vision of a two camp

world now a reality, the danger of mutual destruction was multiplied. Totalitarian controls, terror and a mythological ideology, had proven one way of initiating industrialization and modernization, but now they manifestly obstructed further progress at every turn. New ways had to be found. His heirs would need political skills not inferior to Stalin's skills, but, addressing issues completely foreign to those of the ex-seminarist turned progressional revolutionary, machine-boss, intriguer and dictator Stalin. The success of this effort can be seen.

The period following Stalin's death was a time when the Soviet oligarchy sought to strengthen its uncertain position by reducing international tensions, and to give its own people greater freedom and improving living standards. As people grew accustomed to breathing easier and living without a "beloved father and teacher," a flood tide of revulsion rose against all the grayness, fear and deprivations of Stalin's era. The Soviet Union was ready for de-Stalinization. In 1956, it was Khrushchev who seized the opportunity in his surprising "Secret Speech" to Twentieth Congress of Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). In his speech, he stunned the Politburo and reported Stalin as being responsible for the country's unpreparedness for the invasion by Germany. He announced that Stalin personally edited his own biography and even made additions in his own handwriting to the draft of the text. He disclosed Lenin's "Last Testament." Also, he declared that Stalin was a distrustful man who had abused his

powers, and who had directed numerous crimes and terrorist acts. In the end, he says Stalin possessed a mania for self-glorification and greatness. Afterwards, the Soviet people were shocked beyond belief, and public opinion later caused a backlash against Khrushchev's de-Stalinization policies.³²

Both Solzhenitsyn and Khrushchev have documented Stalin's vainglory, his brutality, his military ineptitude and his trust in Hitler. In one significant respect, however, the two differ. Solzhenitsyn opposed Stalin's crimes and his accomplishments. But, Khrushchev denounced the excesses of Stalin's methods but did not reject the political process which brought Stalin to power.³³ The Marxist-Leninist dissident Roy Medvedev sees a peculiar link between the official Soviet view of Stalin's progressive role and the symbolic interpretation of Western bourgeois historians, both see Stalinism as inevitable. Finally, Djilas warns Stalin's critics by arguing that the socialist system created in the USSR could not have been created in any other way than by monstrous crimes, and it had removed a monstrous system.

By the spring of 1967, the Soviet Union's communist party had abandoned de-Stalinization and established a new course that once again recognized Stalin. Books and articles portraying Stalin in a favorable light were cropping up. In brief, the party had decided new guidelines for historians in the USSR concerning the history of the Great Patriotic War (World War II). The writers were admonished to keep in mind

that "the Supreme Commander, Joseph V. Stalin, showing great fortitude, guided combat operations correctly on the whole, and rendered considerable service in the field."³⁴

Soviet spokesmen of the post-Stalinist era saw Stalin's reign as a period of universal progress toward socialism. Soviet de-Stalinization depicted Stalin's crimes as mistakes, serious ones, to be sure, but still limited. "We know," wrote Molotov, "that particular mistakes, sometimes serious mistakes, are inevitable in carrying out such great and important historical tasks."³⁵ On the other hand, Stalin's activity has attracted many bourgeois (Western) as well as Soviet historians. The Marxist-Leninist Roy Medvedev states:

. . . that the Bourgeois historians typically see Stalin as the greatest leader of the world communist movement after Lenin, whose actions changed not only the face of Russia but of the whole world. While acknowledging and to some degree condemning Stalin's crimes, the typical bourgeois historian tries to prove that socialism could not have been built in USSR without such crimes, without a barbarous totalitarian state.³⁶

It is significant that many socialist and revisionist of various persuasions take a view of Stalin that is essentially similar to that of the western historians. The anti-Stalinist Deutscher implies that Stalin's terror activities were not necessary, that Stalin's triumphs were to have been inevitable in due course of events. Furthermore, he contends that Stalin no longer knew where to stop in offending and outraging his own nation. He was completely unaware of the moral crisis in which he had thrown Russia. He did not realize that it was impossible either for himself or anyone else to continue with his methods of government and that his ideas and

concepts were in irreconcilable conflict with the country's needs and the realities of the age.³⁷ Then, Arthur E. Adams, western scholar, author of Stalin and His Times, tends to accept Stalinism as a necessary evil in the process of modernization, and he considers the western responses to the USSR in the early postwar years "probably panicky and premature." Lastly, Medvedev argues that the greatest tribulations of the Soviet experience are attributable to Stalin personally, and that there is no necessary contradiction between the Leninist party and humanist communism.³⁸

In sum, the Stalinist and western historiographers agree that the man of steel has done much to transform Russia and has inflicted great harm on her people. He magnified the power of the state and greatly enhanced the influence of Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist doctrine around the world. But for the Soviet Union itself the effects of his techniques of social construction were in many areas counter productive. He died at an opportune moment, because the nation was moving beyond him, beyond Stalinism.

Having reviewed Stalin's historial past, one can readily assess this man as most controversial and mysterious, defended by some and scorned by others. The military performance of Stalin, as Commander-in-Chief in the Second World War is a mixed one. A retrospective assessment cannot ignore the cumulative backlog of the pre-war and early war years. These years were marked with Stalin's purge that decimated the Red Army's leadership,³⁹ and the Finnish Winter War of 1939-1940

which demonstrated the inadequacy of the Red Army, as well as Stalin's poor leadership and weak sense of strategic doctrine. These faults contributed to incredible losses of manpower in the initial days of the German invasion.⁴⁰ Stalin's collapse during the early days of the Second World War added to the disorientation and the poor performance of key leaders and front commanders and thereby caused many military defeats.⁴¹ Yet, later, Stalin's performance as Commander-in-Chief improved markedly, as he regained self-assurance and experience. At this point the caliber of his advisers and their advice improved, as better-trained, younger commanders advanced to senior positions. As the eventful years of 1941-1943 passed, Stalin's Red Army experienced decisive victories over the German armies. This gave Stalin new confidence in his key subordinates. A confidence that allowed subordinates to plan freely and conduct operations with more authority while keeping Stalin informed of the situation. However, Stalin maintained the absolute prerogative to make all decisions of major importance, while he gradually yielded additional command authority to subordinates. This trend toward operational initiatives for subordinates prevailed throughout the remainder of the war, except during the Battle of Berlin, when Stalin took direct personal command for political purposes.

ENDNOTES

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²²Nekrick, June 22, 1941, p. 25.

²³Winston Churchill, The Second World War, Vol. IV: The Hinge of Fate (London: Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1950), pp. 433-34.

²⁴Deutscher, Stalin: A Political Biography, pp. 466-67.

²⁵Milovan Djilas, Conversations with Stalin (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Janvanonich, 1962), p. 57.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 106, 187.

²⁷Rigby, Stalin, pp. 17-18.

²⁸Nikita Khrushchev, The Crimes of Stalin's Era (New York: New Leader, 1962), p. 46.

²⁹Arthur E. Adams, Stalin and His Times (Hinsdale, Illinois: Dryden Press, 1972), p. 204.

³⁰Ibid., p. 405.

³¹Adam B. Ulam, review of Stalin: The Man and His Era, by Arthur E. Adams, in Russian Review, 33 (1974): 217.

³²Nikita Khrushchev, The Crimes of Stalin's Era (New York: New Leader, 1962), p. 192.

³³Edward J. Brown, "Solzhenitsyn's Cast of Characters," Slavic-East European Journal, 15, No. 2 (1971): 164.

³⁴Nekrick, June 22, 1941, p. 27.

³⁵Roy D. Medvedev, Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences (New York: Alfred H. Knopf, 1971), p. 561.

³⁶Ibid., p. 559.

³⁷Deutscher, Stalin: A Political Biography, p. 624.

³⁸Roy D. Medvedev, review of "Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences," by Robert H. McMaes, in Russian Review, 33 (1972): 179.

³⁹John Erickson, The Soviet High Command (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1962), p. 465.

⁴⁰Medvedev, Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences, p. 456.

⁴¹Seweryn Bialer, ed., Stalin and His Generals (New York: Pegagus, 1969), p. 40 FF.

PART II

"STALIN: THE SUPREME COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF"

The role played by Stalin as the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet Union, during the pre-war and war years is a difficult one to research accurately, due to the limitations and access to primary source documents. However, the books and memoirs of some of the most respected Soviet and Western historians and statesmen have been used to attempt an evaluation of Stalin's performance.

In the mid-1930's, Stalin continued to consolidate his power by accelerating the process of disposing of all forces which he considered a threat to the Communist government and to his personal leadership role. From 1934 on, when the murder of one of his colleagues, Kirov, in Leningrad was interpreted as an attack on Bolshevik rule, each year witnessed trials, court-martials, purges and executions. Rightists and leftists alike found themselves accused and tried, and ultimately all lost their positions and many their lives. Tomskey committed suicide. Zinoiev and Kamenev, after admitting their guilt were executed in 1936, as were Bukharin and Rykov in 1938. Each time many followers died with them while less conspicuous figures were imprisoned or exiled.¹ In 1937, the purges extended to the Red Army. The leading Red Army leader and military theorist, Marshal M. N.

Tukhachevsky, was accused of a plot against the Communist government. (In 1936, he had warned the Central Executive Committee of the USSR of German expansion, and the German preparation for a surprise attack upon the USSR.)²

The origin of the accusation against Tukhachevsky lay in a 1937 plan by Reinhardt Heydrich of German intelligence. He had ordered Walter Schellenberg, an ABWEHR officer, to prepare a survey of the mutual relations between the Reichswehr and the Red Army in years past. Heydrich informed Schellenberg that he had information that Soviet generals, headed by Tukhachevsky, were preparing to carry out a revolt against Stalin, with the help of German generals. This information had been furnished to Heydrich by the Russian White-emigré General Skoblin, a double agent who also worked for the Soviets. Heydrich, according to Schellenberg, immediately understood how to make use of this information. "If one went about it the way, one could deal such a blow to the leadership of the Red Army that it would not recover for many years," Schellenberg later wrote. The plan was reported to Hitler and received his approval. Then the Gestapo forged documents accusing the high command of the Red Army of a plot.³ A German in Prague established contact with an agent in the confidence of the president of Czechoslovakia, Edward Benes, and reported to him that he had documents concerning a plot among the high command of the Red Army. Benes immediately informed Stalin. In April and May 1937, the arrest of the highest officers of the Red Army took place, including

Marshal Tukhachevsky, I. E. Yakir, I. P. Uborevich, A. I. Kork, R. P. Eideman, and B. M. Feldman were also arrested, and before them, V. M. Primakov and V. I. Putna. Those who gave the orders for their arrests and their trials must have known that the accusations were baseless and the documents forged. On 12 June 1937, Tukhachevsky and his comrades were shot.⁴ Afterwards Stalin's NKVD continued to purge the Red Army's officer corps.

The devastating impact of the ever wider arrests set off by the Great Purges was astronomical. Japanese intelligence estimates placed Army losses at three-quarters of the members of the Supreme War Council, two of the nation's five marshals, thirteen of fifteen generals, sixty-two of its eighty-five corps commanders, 110 of its 195 division commanders, and 220 of its 406 brigade commanders--all of whom were executed. Some ninety per cent of the Army's generals and eighty per cent of the colonels were arrested with thirty thousand officers of lower rank. The Army was paralyzed.⁵

Stalin's method of dealing with opposition or potential threats to his policies was to remain basically the same throughout his thirty years of power. He would use politicians and generals to a certain point; and, if he viewed them as too successful, powerful and popular, as for example Marshal Tukhachevsky was, he would replace or eliminate them.⁶

In the fall of 1938, Stalin's policies, painfully pursued on the road to collective security through cooperation with Western powers, collapsed at Munich. When Hitler

threatened war because of alleged aggressive acts on the part of Czechoslovakia, England and France deserted the cause and without consulting the Soviet Union, submitted to the Nazi leader's demands. After the French refused to come to the aid of the Czechs, Russia felt isolated, and so cancelled her obligations to Czechoslovakia. The Soviet Union was in no position to oppose Germany's expansion alone.

In the spring of 1939, Soviet intelligence in Berlin informed Stalin of the German plan to attack Poland.⁷ Still, Stalin sought security from Germany's expansion by attempting to form an alliance with England and France to support Poland. His strategy was to commit the western powers to support Poland, which would mean Germany would be occupied in a war with England and France leaving the Soviet Union safely on the sidelines. The negotiations failed due to the Western powers mistrust of the Communist regime in the Soviet Union. The underlying feeling, after the failure of negotiations, was that England was the Soviet Union's principal enemy.⁸

In July and early August 1939, Germany displayed much eagerness for a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union. Hitler's primary intention was to secure his eastern front and avoid the strategic mistake of fighting an east and west war simultaneously. He wanted to postpone war with Russia, whom he considered his primary enemy, until he had defeated the Western powers and Poland. Hitler became desperate in his efforts to sign the pact because of the attack schedule upon Poland. Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop

virtually begged Stalin to sign the pact. The Soviet Union was therefore in a position to gain favorable terms in the agreement. The Nazi-Soviet Pact became a reality on August 23, 1939. Simultaneously, the Soviet Army launched a counter-offensive, led by General Zhukov, against the Japanese in the Far East. Many Western historians argue that Stalin's signing of the pact was a grave mistake, that it unleashed Hitler on Europe. Soviet historian A. M. Medvedev disagrees with this analysis arguing that Stalin was attempting to protect the country by taking advantage of the conflicts among the imperialist states.⁹ The Western world, shocked by the sudden change of Soviet policies, was paralyzed by the outbreak of the war on September 1, 1939.

Sixteen days after the German invasion of Poland and the prompt defeat of that country, Soviet troops invaded Poland from the east. They occupied almost half of the country and divided it with Germany. Through an amity treaty with Hitler, a new common Russo-German border line was established. Although the Soviet Army was virtually devoid of experienced leadership, this military venture into eastern Poland presented no real problems to the Soviet Army.¹⁰

The division of Poland was supposed to serve as security for the Soviet Union and to stop any further German advance eastward, particularly in the direction of the Soviet Union's Baltic harbors. Such a move would have constituted a serious menace, for since the times of Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great, access to the Baltic Sea was justly considered a

basic prerequisite of Russian independence. Aware of the German threat, the Soviets tried to forestall it by pacts with Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Finland. A mutual agreement was secured with the Baltic states; but those with Finland broke down and, after a number of border incidents, the Soviets attacked Finland in order to secure advantageous military outposts in the event of an attack from the West. After this act of aggression the Soviet Union was expelled from the League of Nations. Stalin thought that this war would only last a few days. Not long before it began, the chief Military Soviet met in Moscow to outline the campaign. The plan of Marshal B. M. Shaposhnikov, Chief of the General Staff, was harshly criticized by Stalin, who accused him of underestimating the strength of the Red Army and overestimating that of the Finns. The plan was rejected. General Meretskov of the Leningrad Military District was told to draw up a new scheme which was accepted. The Meretskov plan followed Stalin's guidelines by calling for fighting with "little loss of blood," counting on a rapid victory, using limited forces, and without concentrating reserves. Actually in application, this plan doomed the Soviet troops to long weeks of failures and heavy losses.¹¹

Stalin's short war was, from the beginning plagued by poor leadership and inadequate training, the lack of centralized field command and the exceptionally bitter weather which resulted in heavy Red Army casualties and repeated failures.¹² Outraged and disgusted that his supposedly

invincible Red Army was progressing at a snail's pace, Stalin dispatched Commissar Leo Mekhlais to the area to dismiss, arrest, and recommend the shooting of division commanders.¹³ Meanwhile, Commander Meretskov was called repeatedly to Moscow for presentation of briefing reports to Stalin and his staff. Only after committing 1,200,000 men and suffering untold additional losses, was the Mannerheim Line finally broken in the spring of 1940.

The Soviet victory came only at a great expense, not only in lives lost, but also in loss of respect abroad among the Western powers, including even Germany. Hitler became annoyed with Stalin's greed and his bullish policies, especially during the Russo-Finn war. Stalin never appreciated Hitler's change of attitude, and he remained convinced that the German Fuehrer considered Soviet support indispensable.¹⁴ Furthermore, the war revealed Stalin's capacity for miscalculation, underestimation of the enemy and the weakness of the Red Army. The men who followed Tukhachevsky lacked insight into the probable forms of modern mobile war which had so preoccupied the purged commanders; they lacked intellectual curiosity, either singly or as a group. They mouthed slogans but understood nothing of principles; they paraded statistics about firepower without grasping any of the implications of the new weapons their own designers were developing, they were martial in a swaggering sense to the military.¹⁵ The lessons of the war became the subject of

intensive study and considerable controversy during Stalin's military conference called to assess the Finnish war.

In the spring of 1940, Hitler first seized Denmark and Norway, then Holland, Belgium, and France. The acts of aggression proved once again that Fascist Germany would tear up an international agreement when it seemed advantageous to do so. It was at this time that Hitler decided to attack the Soviet Union. In an article titled, "Operational Command Decision in the Critical Stages of the Land War," General Kurt von Tittlekirsch writes:

The overwhelming success in the west convinced Hitler that a similar success was certain against the USSR. All operational considerations were observed by the psychological. "There is reason to expect," Hitler said in a conversation with Army commanders on December 5, 1940, "that the Russian Army, once assaulted, will suffer a still greater defeat than the French in 1940." In another conversation, Hitler strongly influenced the decision of the German military staff to invade the Soviet Union when he declared at a summit meeting: "The Red Army has been decapitated; 80 per cent of its leaders have been liquidated; the Red Army is weaker than it has ever been." On June 9, 1941, he added that "the Russian armed forces are a clay giant poorly equipped It should be our objective to destroy the Russian Army, to capture the most important industrial areas and demolish all other industrial areas, and moreover, to seize the areas around Baku." It was on the strength of this conception that Directive No. 21, Dec. 18, 1940, i.e. the Barbarossa Plan was drawn up. The first paragraph says, "the German Wehrmacht must be prepared to bring the USSR to its knees in a rapid military campaign."¹⁶

In April 1940, Stalin called for a commanders' meeting. He ordered a reorganization of the army with new emphasis upon mechanized and armor tactics and air power. Also, the generals' and admirals' ranks replaced the revolutionary

designation of Komkor. In August the single command principle was reintroduced by Shaposhnikov with the Commissar being subordinate to the Commander. By the disciplinary code of October 1940, commanders became liable to court-martial if they could not enforce obedience.¹⁷

Following the defeat of the French Army in May 1940, the Soviet leaders frantically reorganized the Red Army on the German pattern, testing large formations of mechanized corps consisting of two tank divisions and one motorized infantry division, in all utilizing over one thousand tanks. The Red Army was still floundering, and there remained a wide difference of opinion as to the role of armor and the strategy in case of an invasion. Meanwhile, Stalin replaced Chief of Staff Shaposhnikov with Meretskov. This move according to Stalin was "to show the world that there had been a complete change in the military leadership of the Red Army since the Finnish war."¹⁸

In January 1941, a General Officers' conference was held to verify how well the Soviet generals understood the principles of modern warfare, particularly the application of defensive and offensive tactics on the Western front. It soon became obvious to Stalin that the older commanders were having problems accepting the new mechanized concepts. On the other hand, the younger generals Zhukov, Romanenko and Eremenko pleaded for modern mechanized concepts. They presented studies which discussed the German success in Sedan and Cambrai against the French and British. These generals

stressed the need to adapt methods and capabilities for controlling mass mechanized operations coordinated with air operations.¹⁹ In sum, many officers indicated that the conference improved their operational outlook, fundamentals of strategy, tactics; and set the guidelines for wartime. Other results of the conference were Stalin's appointment of Zhukov as Chief of Staff and a reshuffling of commanders with continued emphasis upon increased training, additional fortifications and artillery firepower in the building of a modern mechanized force. Eremenko noted later that throughout the conference, Stalin did not want to talk of the trivialities of successful modern warfare, and that he preferred instead to talk about the political international situation. In addition, he did not ever mention a probable time of war.²⁰

The most serious of Stalin's mistakes in foreign policy was his misreading of the military situation in the spring and summer of 1941. In Sochineniia, XIII, p. 279, Stalin commented (in 1933): "No people can respect its government if it sees the danger of attack and does not prepare for self defense." Stalin and the Soviet government as a whole, did foresee in general terms the possibility of war with Germany and Japan, and they did make preparations by creating a modern defense industry, military aviation, an up-to-date navy, civil defense training for the whole population, and so on. In 1939-41, the army increased in size by 2.5 times. Many troops and supplies were transferred to the western districts, war production increased, and the number of military schools

grew. Especially after the war with Finland, military training was intensified. The development of new weapons was speeded up. The fortification of the new western borders was begun. Taken all together these were truly impressive preparations. However, they were scheduled for completion no earlier than 1942. And overwhelming evidence in the spring of 1941 showed that war could not be postponed that long. The time brought by the nonaggression was clearly coming to an end; Stalin's calculation that war could be postponed until 1942 or later was obviously wrong.²¹

In January 1941, Samuel E. Woods, serving in the U.S. embassy in Berlin as a commercial attache, gained access to the entire details of Hitler's Barbarossa Plan through a German informant. After confirming the accuracy of the information, Woods passed it to President Roosevelt in Washington. On March 1, 1941, the Soviet Ambassador K. Oumansky was informed of German plans by Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles during a conference. This was the first warning through foreign diplomatic channels that the USSR had received. Prime Minister Churchill, in April, also warned Stalin of the imminence of attack. But all the warnings were received in the same manner: Stalin simply ignored them.²²

During May and June, in Tokyo, Soviet agent Richard Sorge, in the confidence of a German military attache, received information concerning Germany's plan to attack the Soviets on June 22, 1941, and the Japanese intention to

attack the United States. Also included were secret Japanese documents for expansion in southeastern Asia.²³

Stalin did not believe that Hitler would break his pact with the Soviet Union, and he did not want to give the German leader any excuse to attack. Marshal Zhukov indicates that Stalin's actions were dictated by a desire to avoid war and he appeared confident that he would succeed. Although Stalin considered hostilities improbable, he believed that if Germany did attack the Soviet Union the main enemy thrust would be made in the Ukraine.²⁴

After the swift German victory in the Balkans (Yugoslavia and Greece collapsed within three weeks), the Soviet leadership began to display signs of concern and, eventually, of mortal fear of a German attack. The enormous concentrations of German armies along the Soviet borders could no longer be dismissed as a tactic of intimidation of the erstwhile partner. Soviet commanders confronted Stalin with their intelligence reports concerning German troop build-ups and requested permission to move troops to defensive positions and put them on military alert. Stalin refused. At this point, Soviet military and foreign policy was in a state of almost total paralysis. After Stalin finally realized the USSR was the next German objective, he was paralyzed with fear and could think of nothing but to search for ways to placate Hitler--vainly hoping that this could avert the catastrophe.²⁵

The scale of disorganization in the Soviet military industry on the eve of war in June 1941 indicated its unpreparedness for a war. Only seventeen per cent of Soviet aircraft in the active status were of modern design; the serial production of Yak-1s and MIG-3s (the first modern types) began only in 1941; the rate of production of automatic weapons and machine guns actually decreased during 1940 and the first half of 1941; the first anti-tank guns began to come out in October 1941. The tank industry was progressing but had produced only 396 KV (heavy) tanks and 1,110 T-34 tanks at the beginning of the war. However, Stalin interfered and overruled military technicians on occasions. That proved to be a costly mistake for the army later. The most significant occurrence was the 45 MM gun production halt. This gun was the only anti-tank weapon capable of defeating the German tank at the lower unit level. As a consequence of the production halt, the war began with a Soviet deficiency in anti-tank weapons.²⁶ Lastly, Stalin had attempted to organize heavy industry and the military defense industry by stepping up production in early 1941, but this was insufficient for the situation on June 22, 1941. His aim was to establish a strong industrial capability in case of war, and by the summer of 1941 he had formed a powerful industrial base, yet there were tremendous shortages of new weapons, spare parts, communication equipment and aircraft. Despite Stalin's efforts, the Soviet Union found itself economically as well

as militarily at a disadvantage in comparison to Germany's economic power.²⁷

Undoubtedly informed of the Soviet Union's unpreparedness, the German command became brazenly open in May, 1941. Artillery units brought up to the front were not even camouflaged. In May and June combat patrols reconnoitered more openly, encroaching on Soviet territory and opening fire on Soviet border guards. In conjunction, the Germans used anti-Soviet groups of Fascist organizations, such as Polish nationalists, some Ukrainians, white-guard groups, and semi-fascist groups to conduct sabotage and espionage inside the Soviet border. These German activities produced thousands of border violations during this period.²⁸ Meanwhile, the Soviet border fortifications were not completed, the troops had not been placed on a war footing, many divisions of the border screen were at reduced strength, and others consisted of untrained contingents newly called up on the eve of the war. These failures were due to Stalin's leadership and his instructions to his front commanders. The commanders were told to avoid giving the German any pretext for hostilities. Most divisions in the border screen were ordered to keep only one of their regiments on the border, while the main forces were held in camps or military towns well behind the front.²⁹

According to Marshal I. Kh. Bagramian, at the end of May German planes flew over Soviet territory unopposed, photographing installations along the border. At one point, shortly before the attack, an entire flight of German

reconnaissance planes landed at a Soviet airfield. The pilots said, they were lost, and were released to go "home." When the commander of a military district, Colonel-General M. P. Kirponos asked Moscow for permission to direct at least warning fire at the German planes, he was rebuked: "What do you want to do, provoke a war?" Moscow also forbade troops to occupy lightly fortified fields in front of uncompleted heavy fortifications.³⁰ On the contrary, the German High Command observed that the Soviet armies from the Baltic to the Black had been clustered hard against the frontier since April, with the new and incomplete mechanized forces shored between them. In the view of the German Chief of Staff Franz Halder, the Red Army deployment made little sense, but he judged it to be merely a political demonstration of force.³¹

With the border incidents increasing, and with Soviet Ambassador Ivan Maisky's information that an invasion of the Soviet Union was imminent, the field commands increased their requests for deploying their forces. On 13 June, Stalin refused Marshal Timoshenko's request to bring the border districts to war readiness, but two days afterwards he agreed to the deployment, from 17 June, of the second echelon rifle division in the border areas. By 19 June the situation was sufficiently tense for Timoshenko, undoubtedly with Stalin's agreement, to order this move of the front headquarters in the border areas.³² On 21 June a further telegram was received from Maisky, and Stalin himself telephoned Tiulenev, the Commander of the Moscow Military District, ordering the

anti-aircraft defenses to be brought to combat readiness.³³ Timoshenko, Zhukov and Vatiutin were summoned that evening to see Stalin, who was, according to Zhukov, clearly worried, for a German deserter had brought news of the imminence of war. Stalin thought the deserter had been sent by German generals to provoke war. On this premise he dismissed the deserter incident, and declined to authorize the draft directive, brought by the Commissar of Defense, ordering the districts to war readiness. He would only agree that the districts be warned of the possibility of provocations; they were specifically ordered "not to be incited." In addition, the directive specified that fortified border posts were to be occupied during the night and aircraft dispersed and camouflaged. The message was signed but was dispatched as a text and not in code. It was not received by the field until 0230 hours, June 22, 1941.³⁴ The German invasion began just one hour after the message was received in the field.

In view of the military and political events prior to open hostilities between Germany and the Soviet Union, the Soviet historian Medvedev offers his observations of Stalin and Hitler. The main cause of Stalin's mistakes in 1941 was the system of one-man rule combined with that one man's limitations. Unlimited power was in the hands of a limited tactician and a limited strategist. He did not perceive all the weaknesses of the Red Army, which he had caused to lose its finest officers. He did not perceive many of the difficulties still troubling the cities and villages. He

overestimated Soviet strength and therefore hoped that Hitler would not dare to attack the USSR. Of course attacking the USSR was a risky adventure for Germany, especially since Hitler gambled on victory within a few weeks, in any case before winter. The German war plan did not provide for adequate reserves of manpower or industrial production. The Nazi Army could beat the Red Army in some battles, but Germany could not enslave the whole Soviet people in addition to all the nations of Europe. Considering that the German Army suffered defeat in spite of its unbelievably favorable situation in 1941, it is useful to imagine what would have happened to it if the Soviet government had been prepared. Hitler was also a dictator; he too based his actions on imaginary rather than real factors. Intoxicated by the German victories in the west, he overestimated the strength of the German Army, and underestimated the strength of the Soviet people and the cohesion of Soviet society. He thought that after early defeat the USSR would collapse like a house of cards. Hitler was an adventurist and a reckless maniac, but Stalin perceived him as a rational statesman. Stalin's tendency to mistake illusions for reality prevented him from seeing the same fault in Hitler. That is one of the main reasons why both Hitler and Stalin miscalculated in 1941.³⁵

It is acknowledged by historians of all persuasions that Stalin was responsible for the Germans' great advantage of surprise and for the Soviet troops' unpreparedness, and that the Soviet Union entered the worst war in its history with

its best military and civilian leaders recently destroyed. Yet some Soviet authors try to salvage Stalin's reputation by arguing that whatever his faults before the war, during it he proved to be an excellent commander-in-chief. The memoirs of Marshal A. Grechko, I. Konev, K. Meretskov, S. M. Shetenko and K. Rokossovsky indicate the latter. Marshal Meretskov argues that along with other Soviet generals Stalin was well aware of the events prior to the war, and he wanted to avoid it as long as possible in order to gain time to take in the harvest, build up the defense industry, improve the weapons systems and to complete the mechanized armies.³⁶

Shortly after the German invasion, the Commissar of the Navy N. G. Kuznetsov reported to Malenkov that Sevastopol was under attack. By 0340 hours Zhukov received further reports of air raids from the chiefs of staff of the Belorussian and Kiev Military district, and was told by the Commissar of Defense Timoshenko to telephone Stalin. When Zhukov made his report to the dictator, there followed a long silence and the only sound to be heard at the other end was that of heavy breathing. Zhukov asked whether he had been understood. Still there was no answer. Finally, Stalin instructed Zhukov to go to the Kremlin and tell his secretary A. N. Poskrebyshch to summon the Politburo.³⁷

When, shortly after 0430 hours, Timoshenko and Zhukov were called in to the Politburo meeting, Stalin sat pale and silent, cradling an unlit pipe in his hands. Molotov returned from a meeting with the German Ambassador Schulenburg

with the news of Germany's declaration of war. According to Zhukov, Stalin sank in his chair, lost in thought.

Even after the formal declaration of war Stalin still appeared to believe that the attacks were provocation on the part of the German generals. Along the entire length of the vast front the German Army of 4,600,000 men achieved tactical surprise. Soviet troops were caught in their camps and barracks. With its aircraft trapped on the ground, the Soviet Air Force suffered grievous initial loss of two thousand aircraft as the Luftwaffe worked its destruction. The field fortifications, either incomplete or unmanned, were quickly pierced by German troops. German Army Group Center intercepted plaintive and desperate Russian wireless signals: "We are being fired on. What shall we do?" To which Soviet headquarters replied with asperity and reprimand--"You must be insane. And why is your signal not in code?"³⁸ The German bombers struck at Soviet towns, communications centers, rear installations and naval bases before the Soviet radio made any announcement of war or military operations. At 0715 hours, the first order was issued for the Red Army to destroy the enemy penetration, but to keep out of Germany and restrict air activity to a limit of ninety miles within enemy territory.³⁹

The German surprise invasion disclosed Stalin's neglect of command organization within the agencies of the Soviet High Command prior to the attack. A number of military writers admit that prior to the outbreak of hostilities there

was no clear decision as to how the Soviet High Command would be organized and how it would function in the event of war. The conversations between Marshal K. E. Voroshilov and General I. V. Tuilenev on the day of the German invasion reveal that even facilities to house the High Command headquarters had not been prepared.⁴⁰ State Defense Committee Commissar Timoshenko sent a draft to Stalin on the morning of the 22 June proposing the setting up of the (GKO) High Command, with Stalin as the Commander-in-Chief. Stalin signed the decree but twenty-four hours later, it had been redrafted. Stalin named General Headquarters of the High Command which consisted of a war council with Timoshenko as chairman, and Stalin, Molotov, Voroshilov, Budenny, Zhukov and Kuznetsov as members. Although this body took the somewhat grandiose title of Stavka, with its imperial echoes, it was, in fact, merely a committee, without a separate secretariat or staff, and had nothing in common with the organization of the last tsarist Stavka.⁴¹ Stalin had assigned his duties as Commander-in-Chief temporarily to Timoshenko, and afterwards he went into isolation during the first days of the war. No one dared to disturb him. During this period there was confusion among the staffs, a lack of instructions to the field command and, mass losses of manpower and equipment.

Khrushchev told the Twentieth Congress how Stalin, on hearing of the Red Army's defeats, believed that the end had come, that everything created by Lenin had been irretrievably lost. Thereupon Stalin withdrew from direction of the war

effort, until some Politburo members came to him and said that immediate measures had to be taken to correct the situation at the front.⁴²

When Stalin emerged from isolation, he was depressed and nervous; any task that he required done, he ordered done in an impossibly short time. He appeared to have no grasp of the scale of operations and the vastness of the war into which he had been hurled. The destruction of the enemy he demanded in the shortest possible time, unaware or unconcerned of what he was asking. He was prompted to pursue this course by vastly exaggerated preliminary reports of German losses. Not that Stalin put in more than rare appearances at the Stavka in those early days; the main military administration, was for all practical purposes, seriously disorganized and the General Staff, with its specialists dispatched to the Front Commands, functioned with agonizing slowness. The evening situations reports presented by the General Staff scarcely corresponded in the early days to the mass deployments at the fronts. The Stavka discussions ground into operation--administration bogged down, while trying to formulate strategic-operational assignments, Stalin and his officers busied themselves with minutiae which devoured valuable time.⁴³

During the early defeats of the Soviet armies at Bialystok and Minsk, and with the news of tremendous losses, Stalin often went into a blind rage. He called for staff members and commanders and relieved them without sound

judgment, mostly out of anger. He relieved Timoshenko then reinstated him, the same for Shaposhnikov and Zhukov early in July 1941. The generals were nervous as they never knew what to expect next from Stalin. The Commanders were told to carry out impossible tasks and if they failed or questioned the order they were removed, arrested or shot.⁴⁴ Commanders in the field had a fear of being summoned to the Supreme Headquarters. Eremenko says he was concerned with these calls for he was just getting a firm grip on the situation, and he did not know whether he was being relieved or complimented until after the meeting at Stavka. Stalin continuously, shifted commanders to new fronts, by relief or reassignment. Eremenko was unsure of how Stalin appraised his work, for many of the top military leaders had been dealt with severely on charges that he scarcely believed.⁴⁵ However, Meretskov says that Stalin liked to summon the Front Commanders to Moscow to discuss upcoming operations. He felt Stalin favored personal contacts whenever possible, because he preferred private conversations and felt it was easier to get acquainted with affairs while talking on a personal level. Also he liked to evaluate people, and formed his opinion of them during such conversations. Most important, Stalin used these meetings to gain information from others. This was the primary way he gained knowledge about warfare throughout the period as Supreme Commander.⁴⁶

A State Committee of Defense (GKO) was brought into being on 30 June 1941, being responsible for general control

over the Soviet war effort which included the military, police, economic, administrative and political organization. The GKO also handled the mobilization of manpower, the forming of new reserves, organizing of replacement units in the field, issuance of directives for training, and management and supply of war materials. It originally consisted of Stalin, Molotov, Malenkov, Voroshilov and Beria, and its orders, in the form of numbered GKO resolutions, were supreme, being enacted by the Council of Peoples Commissars through the machinery of the Commissariats.⁴⁷ The Stavka, subordinated to GKO, continued as the main directing organ for military matters; but, on 10 July, it was reformed with Stalin as its chairman, Molotov, Timoshenko, Budenny, Voroshilov, Shaposhnikov and Zhukov as members, and was renamed the Stavka of the Supreme Command. On 19 July Stalin nominated himself as People's Commissar for Defense; and, on 8 August, he became the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces of the USSR, his military committee taking the name of Stavka of the Supreme High Command (VGK). This committee was responsible for military decisions, strategic planning, deployment of forces, distribution of material, and utilization of reserves. It had control of the implementation of decisions sent to the armies in the field. Stavka consisted of approximately 18-24 key senior officers, the General Staff was subordinate to Stavka. Their responsibility was to direct the military operations.⁴⁸

The Supreme Headquarters in the first three months of the war was purely a military establishment dominated by the commanders of the civil war era headed by General Timoshenko. Stalin became dissatisfied with their conduct of the war and slow adjustments to the modern war environment. This July staff reorganization witnessed a shifting of some of the old line to other positions, and the gradual incorporation of younger more energetic and better educated group of officers into key positions. Marshals Shaposhnikov, Zhukov, Vasilevsky, Voronov and Antonov constituted the core of Stalin's military brain trust. In January 1942, Shaposhnikov retired and Antonov became acting Chief of Staff from the winter of 1943 until the end of the war. Vasilevsky was both Chief of Operations and Chief of Staff from the fall of 1941 to January 1942. Zhukov began the war as Chief of General Staff but after a week became Stalin's personal emissary to key sectors of the front as the First Deputy Supreme Commander in Chief. The Stavka representatives, for example, Zhukov and Vasilevsky, often assumed command of many key campaigns, as well as planning and coordinating them.⁴⁹ But, generally the Front Commanders were given operational plans worked out by Stavka and General Staff. These senior advisers to Stalin functioned as his personal emissaries to the fronts. They were used to investigate the poor performance of front and field commanders or merely to observe as Stalin's eyes and ears, for Stalin believed that any officer of ability should be at the front.⁵⁰

Marshal Zhukov indicates that in July 1941 the General Staff was in confusion, not only because it had been drained of its principal experienced members. On Stalin's orders, officers were dispatched from the General Staff, as well as from the directorate of the Commissariat of Defense, to field formations or as members of the many investigating commissions, which Stalin used as his eyes and ears.⁵¹ Stalin held the General Staff in low regard in the first few months of war, and he constantly vented his anger upon it. He viewed most of them as incompetent and untrustworthy. In short, Stalin made all the decisions and the General Staff was rarely consulted, being used only to transmit Stalin's orders.⁵²

Stalin's key role in directing the war effort was supported by his heavy reliance upon the judgment of quality civilian and military subordinates. This was especially true after the first year of the war. The depth and accuracy of his information, the range of alternatives, and the methods of supervising their implementation depended significantly on the level of knowledge of professional experts and lastly on the courage of those people with whom he dealt on a daily basis.⁵³ However, Zhukov and Shetemko agreed that Stalin was attentive to advice, but he did not want to decide important military questions personally, for he well understood the necessity for collective work in these complicated spheres. Initially, Stalin made capricious and wrong decisions at crucial moments, without consulting anyone. As a result, his rash and faulty decisions caused a lack of coordination and disharmony between

Stavka and the field commanders.⁵⁴ Finally, Marshal N. N. Voronov indicates that Stalin's collective and excessive centralization of decision-making were extremely vexing. It not only robbed commanders and staff members of a great deal of time and prevented them from concentrating on the main thing, but it fettered the initiative of subordinates, slowed things down, and lowered efficiency. Sometimes absolutely urgent decisions were made only when long overdue.⁵⁵

Stalin has been criticized for his poor judgment and ineptitude dealing with military operations at the beginning of the war. Many argue that Stalin issued directives often without knowing the situation on the front, that he would merely sweep his hand over the globe and issue snap decisions with little regard for any pertinent factors. Marshal Meretskov says these allegations that Stalin guided military operations with the help of nothing more than a globe are ridiculous. Upon visits to Moscow, he did observe Stalin referring to the globe, but he also had a detailed situation map at hand. Stalin let subordinates work out the military detail of an operation, then openly discussed them. Stalin's role was that of an arbiter and ultimate judge of operational plans. He always made the decisions dealing with policies or economics on the basis of his prior experience. Meretskov states that many of Stalin's poor decisions concerning military operation were caused by inexperienced military advisers before he and his advisers learned the business of war.⁵⁶

The State Defense Committee (GKO) from the outset remained small in size with Stalin as the Chairman and a basic overall membership of eight. The GKO (political arm) was empowered to issue decrees that were superior to all state, party and Soviet military organizations. The GKO and Stavka were closely fused by giving GKO members the right to sit with Stavka as part of it. The main characteristic of the GKO-Stavka system was that it was a super-centralized system that unified military and political direction. Often there was conflict between these two elements with the political overriding military decisions, and interfering with the field commanders under the dual command system re-imposed 16 July 1941.⁵⁷

The primary roles of GKO during the initial portion of the war was to salvage the wrecked Red Army by rebuilding its manpower, equipment, supplies and operational readiness. This was accomplished. During the period July to November 1941 the GKO organized and supervised the monumental task of evacuating the 1523 Soviet industries, of which 1360 were described as large-scale, from the threatened region to the Urals, West Siberia, and Central Asia.⁵⁸ Meanwhile the Soviets suffered terrible blows. By November 1941 over three hundred armament factories were in occupied areas. The Soviet troops abandoned much equipment in their retreat. Output fell. In November 1941 industrial production totalled only 51.7 per cent of the output of November 1940.⁵⁹ Yet by re-deployment and improvisation, and the imposition of ruthless priorities, even in 1942

the arms industry managed to produce 25,436 aircraft, sixty per cent more than 1941, and 24,688 tanks, or 3.7 times the production of 1941.⁶⁰ Mobilization for war was extremely thorough. Control over all resources was strictly centralized, and both materials and labor were directed to serve the war effort, to a degree unknown elsewhere. Needless to say, wartime planning involved many errors, some of them, "to a considerable extent due to the personality cult of Stalin." However, as in other warring countries, centralization was essential to mobilize resources, and the USSR, after suffering what could have been crippling losses in the first months of war, carried out centralization very effectively.⁶¹

The inefficiencies inherent in the Stalinist system of super-centralization were inevitably channeled into wartime organizations, the chief distinguishing feature of which was the further concentration of power at the top. The GKO itself was a visible and powerful manifestation of this in its own right. The decision making process remained massively centralized and persistently cumbersome. The very lowest echelons of the party and administrative machine were prone to be inflexible to the point of inertia; the initiative which senior officials demanded conflicted with the need to show proper zeal in the execution of duties, zeal which too often congealed as bureaucratism. The chain of command thus tended to snap at its lower links.

With the German armies moving quickly and deeply into the country, Stalin refused to give up his dogma about carrying

the war to enemy territory. As a result he forbade retreat even when it was absolutely necessary. At the beginning of September, 1941, for example, remnants of the armies of the Southwest Front fell into a pincers from the west and east. The commander of the front, General M. P. Kupinos, decided to organize a defense on the Sula River along the southern branch of the Dnieper River. He and his chief of staff, General Tupikov, sent a detailed report of their desperate situation, along with a request for permission to withdraw. Later they got a reply: "Kiev was, is, and will be Soviet. I do not permit you to retreat to the Sula River. I order you to hold Kiev and the Dnieper. Stalin."⁶² The commander-in-chief of the southwest armies Marshal Budenny, tried to change Stalin's mind. In a report to headquarters he stressed that delay in the withdrawal of the Southwest Front might lead to great loss of troops and an enormous amount of material. Stalin ignored the report, and the result was the loss of approximately 700,000 troops captured.

From June to September, despite stubborn resistance on individual sectors of the fronts, the armies were forced to retreat hundreds of kilometers. More than three million soldiers were killed or taken prisoner, while German losses at the end of September 1941, numbered approximately 550,000.⁶³ Since it was the basic cadres of the regular army that suffered the losses, they were especially serious. Losses of equipment were also enormous. Despite the tremendous losses of the battles at Smolensk and Kiev, Stalin's Red Army had

gained time to reorganize units, organize reserves, and gain experience in dealing with German Blitzkrieg tactics, and for Soviet industry to relocate. Furthermore, the Germans were behind in their time schedule of defeat of the Soviets.⁶⁴ As the Germans began their drive on Moscow, they enjoyed a great advantage in men and equipment. Marshal Vasilevsky attributes the critical situation not only to the lack of strategic reserves in the Moscow district but also to the bungling of headquarters and the General Staff. Stalin was flustered. One example of his confusing, inconsistent, and sometimes impossible orders in the most crucial days of October, 1941: Colonel General P. A. Belov, who had last seen Stalin in 1933, on meeting him again during the defense of Moscow was startled to see

. . . a short man with a tired, drawn face. In eight years he had aged by twenty. His eyes lacked former firmness, and confidence was no longer sensed in his voice. But I was more surprised by Zhukov's behavior. [At that time Zhukov was commanding the Western Front.] He spoke sharply in an imperious tone, giving the impression that he was the senior commander here. And Stalin accepted this as necessary. Sometimes his face even showed signs of being flustered.⁶⁵

Marshals Konev and Zhukov tell about Stalin's serious error in directing military operations near Moscow in October 1941. Konev, for example, could not get permission for a strategic withdrawal early in October at Bryansk and Vyazma that would have saved four armies from encirclement. The marshals contend the primary cause of defeat was that Stalin directed Stavka to order Konev to establish a defense that over-extended the front and lacked depth and adequate reserves

to control the defense. Lastly, Stavka appears to have made the decision without knowing the correct situation.⁶⁶

As the German armies progressed toward Moscow, a crisis came when German tanks advanced to within fifteen miles from Moscow on 15-16 October 1941; however, a Soviet counter-attack threw them back. Meanwhile, Zhukov indicates that Stalin panicked and fled the city, undoubtedly intensifying the panic by his flight. He gained control of himself and returned. On 19 October, he gave the order: "Moscow will be defended to the last." He declared a state of siege, charged Marshal Zhukov with the defense, made Marshal Shaposhnikov Chief of Staff, sent Timoshenko south to defend Rostov and Voroshilov and Budenny to the rear to organize new armies. Secretly, Stalin had additional trained reserves, including divisions from the Urals and Siberia, arriving in the birch forest behind Moscow; but they were not flung prematurely into battle. Instead, the citizens of Moscow, even those who had no military training, were called to volunteer; and four Soviet divisions went into action, without any weapons heavier than machine guns, while other citizen divisions dug trenches and tank ditches. The German advance was slowed.⁶⁷ The Germans reorganized and reinforced their armies to complete encirclement in the north of Moscow and conduct their final assault, during 16 November-5 December 1941. The assault was halted by Zhukov using all available resources while appealing to Stalin for reinforcements. Meanwhile, in the south the German advance pushed the Soviets equally. Again Zhukov, using the necessary reserves,

struck the Germans' exposed flank and center, causing their advance to collapse. Finally, after the fury of the assault was spent, Zhukov moved from a passive to active defense, as Stalin allocated the strategic reserves and prevented encirclement of the flanks north and south of Moscow. He launched a counteroffensive on all sectors against the dangerously extended enemy.

On 6 December, the German units were separated 140 miles from headquarters and logistical elements in the rear. Heavy snow covered the roads around Moscow, the temperature fell below zero, German tank engines stalled as the lubricating oil froze, and the Luftwaffe was grounded. The Soviets with skis on their planes and stoves to warm the oil for tanks were better equipped for the winter fighting, and consequently gained superiority over the Germans in air power, armor, and fire power. The Soviet counteroffensive consisted of a series of small punches planned on a scale so great that the enemy had no chance to recover. In the Battle of Moscow the Germans were superior to the Soviets in maneuverability, mobility, and armament. Their tanks, two and a half times as many as the Soviets had, failed to take Moscow. The Red Army held the city and won the battle by saving their strategic reserves until the enemy was exhausted and then hurling them at the exposed flanks.

Zhukov's own account of the Battle of Moscow testifies to Stalin's meddling with the conduct of operations and his continual requests for information from field commanders. This

account shows Stalin's self-doubts about the prospects for a successful defense and his reliance and sometimes even dependence on Zhukov's leadership of the battle. In the defensive stages of the Moscow battle, Stalin was in command but Zhukov commanded. That the extent and substance of Stalin's leadership during the battle were very well summarized in the following statement by Zhukov:

I am often asked: "Where was Stalin during the battle for Moscow?" Stalin was in Moscow, organizing men and materiel for the destruction of the enemy at Moscow. He must be given his due. . . . He performed an enormous task in organizing the strategic reserves and the material-technical means needed for armed struggle. By means of his harsh exactitude he continued to achieve, one can say, the well-nigh impossible.⁶⁸

Both Zhukov and Shtemenko testify to Stalin's work in organizing strategic material and technical resources, and they have said that Stalin's real achievement during the winter of 1941 was the creation of carefully husbanded Stavka reserves, details of which he guarded from his front commanders. They describe Stalin's capacity for work and for detail, his retentive memory--he was never at a loss for a name and he never forgot a face--his gift for sifting essentials and factual data and his ability to uncover the weakness of others. They have told how he demanded clarity and exactitude, and spoke of his intolerance of verbosity, of his sternness, formality, and reserve, broken by spiteful rages.⁶⁹ He was also fervent, impetuous and headstrong; and, as Zhukov put it, "if Stalin was already decided there would be no further

argument--discussion ceased anyway as soon as Stalin supported one of the parties."⁷⁰

The significance of the Battle of Moscow is recognized by most Soviet military writers. Marshal Vasilevsky indicates that by the end of battle the Red Army had won a great military and political victory. The German armies had suffered their first major defeat in the Second World War. Also, the offensive of the main and best forces of the German Wehrmacht against Moscow had completely failed, causing the collapse of the notorious Plan Barbarossa which embodied Hitler's hopes for a lightning war. The Moscow victory was the turning point of the war. Later the total and final failure of the Blitzkrieg against the USSR compelled the German leadership to face the necessity of waging a long, protracted war with all the problems that entailed. Until the Soviet victory, U.S. and British leaders doubted that the USSR could hold out in war against Nazi Germany. The victory proved to the world the fighting ability of the Soviet soldier. This played an invaluable role in strengthening the anti-Nazi coalition. Finally, the victory aggravated German plans to involve Japan and Turkey in the war against the USSR. It was a decisive factor convincing these countries not to declare war on the USSR.⁷¹

Nekrick indicates that the Hitlerites (Germans), in preparing their attack of June 22, 1941, on the motherland of socialism, made two fatal mistakes: first, they underestimated the military and economic power of the Soviet state. And

secondly, in their contempt for the people, they could not imagine that the popular masses, united and inspired by high ideals, "In the name of these ideals were ready for the most incredible sacrifices, sufferings and deeds." In a like manner, the Soviet military historians and Western historians agreed with Nekrick's conclusion.⁷²

During the dark days of 1941, Soviet historian Alexander Werth argues Stalin dropped the Communist Party line by using his leadership and direction at the Battle of Moscow to proclaim that the people were fighting for Russia and the Russian heritage, thus stimulating Russian national pride and the national sense of injury to the utmost. By appealing to the people he succeeded in getting himself almost universally accepted as Russia's National leader. Even the church was roped in. Later, he even deliberately singled out the Russians for special praise, rather at the expense of the other nationalities of the Soviet Union, for having shown the greatest power of endurance and the greatest patience, and for never having lost faith in the Soviet regime and, by implication, in Stalin himself.⁷³

Reviewing the past performance and accomplishments of Stalin and the Supreme Headquarters prior to the winter campaign of 1942, a new trend gradually emerges. The Operations directed by Stalin and his staff in the first period of the war were characterized by errors in strategic judgment. The discrepancy between strategic goals and the magnitude of means and forces mobilized to achieve them negatively affected

the outcome of these early operations. Stalin and staff utilized patently unsuitable principles of planning such as the rigid attachment to the principle of linear defense, without a policy for withdrawal, and the hastily organized counterattacks in conjunction with delays in withdrawal orders, the uneconomical use of available reserves, and the failure to discuss the intentions and to estimate the capabilities of the enemy. While Stalin and the Soviet High Command continued to direct resistance despite the initial shock of unexpected defeats, they never flinched from the application of the most extreme emergency measures. They demonstrated what was the crucial ability to mobilize numerically superior reserves, and to organize around-the-clock production of war equipment, they only gradually and slowly began to comprehend the nature of war from the strategic and operational point of view. The Battle of Moscow revealed the first significant steps Stalin and his staff took in perfecting the procedures and quality of planning and leadership.

In the spring of 1942 Stalin and the Red Army general staff believed that the seizure of Moscow would be the main enemy strategic objective, and, according to Vasilevsky, "the majority of the front commanders thought so too." Any enemy offensive in the Ukraine was likely to have as its aim not the occupation of Caucasia but the envelopment from the south of both the West Front and Moscow. Marshal Shaposhnikov urged Stalin to go over to the strategic defensive in order to accumulate reserves, so that the expected enemy offensive

could be met with a counter blow.⁷⁴ Stalin accepted Shaposhnikov's proposal in principle, but it transpired that Stalin's interpretation of active defense was a series of major offensives at Demyansk, the Crimea, Kharkov, Kursk, Smolensk and Leningrad. Meanwhile the strategic reserves were held in the areas of Tula, Voronezh, Stalingrad and Saratov.

Believing that the German armies were exhausted because of casualties and poorly equipped for winter, Marshal Timoshenko requested to conduct a major offensive operation in the vicinity of Kharkov. Stalin approved the operation against the advice of Zhukov and Shaposhnikov. They later condemned Stalin's strategy as a frittering of strength and effort. At first Timoshenko's operation was successful and this caused Stalin to make some bitter comment on the worthlessness of the General Staff.⁷⁵ The Germans countered the Soviet offensive on 17 May 1941, dividing and attempting to encircle the Soviet forces moving toward Kharkov. Khrushchev and Vasilevsky warned Stalin of the danger of encirclement and called for a halt of the operation, but Stalin refused. Later, Khrushchev telephoned the Kuntsevo dacha to appeal to Stalin once again. Stalin refused to speak to him but allowed the conversation to be conducted through Malenkov, at the end of which he directed that everything should remain as it was.⁷⁶ The operation ended with a crushing Soviet defeat with losses of 214,000 prisoners, 1200 tanks and 2000 guns. With this defeat the Soviet Union had lost the strategic initiative. Furthermore, Kharkov was not the only defeat suffered by the

Red Army during Stalin's offensive. Elsewhere the Crimean Front (Sevastopol) fell, and Leningrad, Northwest and West Front offensives gained no real advantage. While the Soviet counteroffensive fell; short of its chief objectives, it proved that the great German offensive had also failed, for the Soviet armies were so far from being destroyed that they could turn upon the invader in full force.

Just what Stalin's role was in the strategic direction of the Soviet Army is not entirely clear, as is acknowledged by western historians. Khrushchev's account, in his secret speech, of the telephone calls he made to Vasilevsky and Malenkov at the time of the Kharkov battle establishes the fact that Stalin exercised at least a general supervision over military operations.⁷⁷ It is probable that his dictatorial habits and affectation of military competence led him to interfere more directly in military matters than the other Allied leaders commonly permitted themselves to do. But in the actual conception and direction of military operations, he was probably cautious enough to limit his interference to the confirmation or veto of plans presented by General Headquarters. Even within these limits, and judging by the bits of evidence available, his record as a war leader was far from consistently good. His gross error in discounting the advice of senior officers and discounting the numerous intelligence indications of the German preparation for attack has already been discussed. His strategy of "no retreat" during the first period of the war played into the hands of the German

encirclement tactics, and his stubborn insistence on continuing the Kharkov offensive in 1942 after the Soviet position had become hopeless was, to say the least, militarily unjustified. His competence for command was apparently also negatively affected by his moodiness. For example, Khrushchev charged that Stalin became panic-stricken in 1941, and Churchill's account of Stalin's desperate appeal for a British expeditionary corps at that time lends corroboration to this charge.⁷⁸

On 19 June 1942, a German light plane, carrying the Germans' summer offensive plan into the Ukraine, crashed in Soviet held territory. Details of the plans were hurriedly transmitted to Moscow. Stalin and Vasilevsky asked Timoshenko for an evaluation of the documents. He replied that he had no reason to doubt their authenticity. Stalin, however, was not convinced, for he believed that the captured order covered only part of the German plan.⁷⁹ Caution, then, caused a great strategic error for these really were the Germans' summer offensive plans for the Ukraine. Stalin's interpretation of the plans was that the Germans were trying to create the impression that the seizure of the oil regions of Grozny and Baku was the major, and not the subsidiary, objective of the German summer offensive. He pointed out that in reality the main offensive was to envelop Moscow from the east, to cut it off from the areas of the Volga and the Urals, then to strike at Moscow, and in this way end the war in 1942.⁸⁰

As the German summer offensive "Operation Blau," swept southeasterly in the Ukraine, a sense of growing disaster, if not actual doom, began to spread, stimulating enormous and persistent mass indoctrination of the shaken Red Army. The Soviet Command toward the middle of July to early August began to organize its defense in the south along the Volga River as the German armies converged on Stalingrad for encirclement. While neither Stalin nor his generals had yet mastered the essentials of mobile defense, at least the appalling "hold at any cost" had been abandoned at Rostov, and a substantial element of the Soviet forces had gotten back across the Volga, though they were a despirited lot.⁸¹

Stalin in August 1942, held a series of conferences to consider a reshaping of the Red Army. The quick results were sweeping and necessary internal reforms. The changes in the Red Army were caused by a mild revolt of the younger generals against the inefficient commissar controls and incompetence within the officers corps as a whole, exemplified by the Civil War generals trying to cope with the complexities of modern operations. Even though a new command group had emerged in the winter of 1941-42, it was still largely untested and rested on a very narrow base; Stalin was evidently pleased to let this run its own course as one concession to the officers. Also, young commanders of growing reputations, like Generals K. K. Rokossovsky and I. D. Chernyakhovsky were able to assemble their talented men in their own staffs and commands while conducting operations competently as a modern army

should. Meanwhile, the struggle against party interference in military affairs was long, silent and bitter, its outcome for the future developments of the Soviet armed forces was of decisive importance. An important accomplishment was the Red Army's reestablishment of the unitary command system prior to the operations around Stalingrad, while the army and officers corps had been able to rise to a level of acceptance and competence of prewar days.⁸²

Stalin's highly centralized machine remained, for all this, little changed, and its principal weakness was the gap between decisions taken at the center and the requirements at the front. The front commanders complained that Stavka-General Staff directives failed to meet the realities of the operational-tactical situation, and never less so than in the early stages of the Stalingrad Front fighting, when lack of information about enemy strengths and movements as well as incomplete data about Soviet forces caused Soviet formations to be committed piecemeal or straight off the march. The Stavka would not listen to the front command. However, after the Bryansk Front defeat in which Stalin had personally issued detailed orders and acted as a coordinator of Front Operation, he had begun to listen to his generals more than before. This did not save them from being sworn at and personally abused when things went wrong, as they did when German tanks broke through to the Volga. Siding with the Front Commands and his senior advisors, Stalin reorganized his high command in the summer of 1942. Two echelon of command were established: the

Supreme Command and the Front. This was a decisive development, for this decentralized the Stavka by sending representatives to the Front headquarters for assistance and coordination. The presence of Zhukov and Vasilevsky helped to bridge the gap between the center and the front. A result of Stalin's reorganization was his increased confidence in his senior advisers and smoother operations in the field, even the German High Command recognized these changes in the Soviet Army's performances. The Germans acknowledge that Stalin's policy of "not a step backward" had a great effect upon the Soviet soldier in that he stiffened his resistance and become more formidable.⁸³

With the German siege of Stalingrad in the autumn of 1942, the Soviet Stavka began planning their next operations against the Germans. Stalin established two new fronts in the south around Stalingrad, General Rokossovsky was assigned to the New Front while General Eremenko became the Stalingrad Front Commander. Although this was a critical period for Stalin and the Red Army there seemed to be a new air of confidence and freedom of movement between Stalin and his planners. Stalin had ordered a new offensive to break the siege of Stalingrad city but it had failed. He was pleased, however, by the army's persistence in attacking other areas in order to divert the enemy from Stalingrad.

The concept of a massive counteroffensive was born, according to Zhukov, in Stalin's office on 12 September 1942. He and Vasilevsky had given their estimate to Stalin of a

double envelopment plan to encircle the German army in Stalingrad. He was interested in the operation and told them to continue planning, to their surprise. Meanwhile Stalin reinforced the Stavka reserves with men and new equipment, as well as, additional aircraft for air superiority.⁸⁴ During the siege of Stalingrad, Stalin challenged and forced his subordinates to perform by his close monitoring of the situation, but he took into account the views and recommendations of his commanders; often he listened to briefing without making any comment.⁸⁵ Vasilevsky argues that Stavka and the General Staff had gained the confidence of Stalin in the autumn 1942, by their planning of the Stalingrad counteroffensive. Shtemenko attributes this new development to Stalin's wish to uphold the authority and prestige of his immediate subordinates, for he was very conscious of the dignity of office.⁸⁶

For sixty-six days (September 14-November 19, 1942) the German Sixth Army of twenty-two divisions under General von Paulus smashed at Stalingrad with everything it had. Actually he conquered most of the city in the course of two months' relentless fighting, and occupied four miles along the western bank of the Volga around the Garricade Factory. But they never swept the Soviets entirely out of the city across the Volga River.

The sixty-second army of sixteen divisions under General Chuikov held Stalingrad while the great counteroffensive, "Operation Uranus," was prepared. But the main blows to liberate Stalingrad were struck from outside the city. Zhukov

mounted a winter counteroffensive to trap the Germans in Stalingrad. This drove other enemy forces back to the Donets. A double envelopment was planned and used in German style; the Soviets called it a "hammer and sickle," and planned to trap the German Sixth Army in an area of fifty square miles. The first thrust came in the north through Serafimovich by three tank and two cavalry corps, and the next came as a thrust from the south by two tank and one cavalry corps. These forces contained approximately 500,000 men using tanks supported heavily by artillery and air power. After encirclement, the Germans attempted to break out while outside relief forces try to break-in, but all efforts failed.⁸⁷

Paulus refused to surrender because Hitler had ordered him to resist to the last man. The Soviets tightened their encirclement of the German army, cutting off all outside support. Later, after extensive pounding, the Soviets attacked from the west, divided the German army, and annihilated it causing German surrender on 2 February 1943. The Red Army claims the Paulus surrender accounted for 147,000 enemy dead and 94,000 prisoners, which does not include 100,000 Rumanian, Italian, and Hungarian losses outside the circle.⁸⁸

The Red Army had inflicted the greatest defeat ever administered upon the German army. It was the turn of the tide in the war: henceforth the Germans were pushed steadily west until they were driven from the Soviet Union.⁸⁹

The military commanders Stalin and Hitler had much in common, particularly in their roles directing their forces. By 1943, the military situation had begun to reverse, in that the German armies were experiencing fighting conditions with air inferiority, lack of fire superiority and problems of mobility. Hitler's military strategy had become weakened in that he was determined to hold territory by a rigid defense. As a result, he had assumed the role played by Stalin in 1941-42. No withdrawals, however limited, could be undertaken without his consent. Those generals who disagreed with him were dismissed, for the halcyon days of the brilliant panzer envelopments were long passed. Now with Stalin's successes, the German army slowly fell into the Red Army maw as the easy prey of its swift moving Soviet tank armies. The wheel of fortune had turned a full circle.⁹⁰

In an overview of Stalin as military commander it seems he was a success. Although he must be held responsible for the Soviet's ill preparedness prior to the beginning of the war; the purges which decimated the Red Army leadership; the poor performance of the army in the Finnish winter war; and his miscalculations associated with the Nazi-Soviet relations down to June 22, 1941. Furthermore, he lacked an understanding of an adequate strategic doctrine which left his forces unprepared for the nation's defense in the first days of the German invasion. In fact, most western historians agree that Stalin's greatest failure as the Soviet leader lay in his

awareness of the Red Army's unpreparedness to defend the nation.

Stalin's failure in the opening days of the war was as much political as military. Khrushchev argues that Stalin abdicated national leadership during the first weeks of the war and lived in a near state of total shock. Without Stalin's initiative little could be or was done.⁹¹

Historian Medvedev says Stalin was a poor Commander-in-Chief in several respects, with a weakness for abstract schematizing, for underestimating the enemy and overestimating his own forces. He was shortsighted and cruel, careless of losses, unwilling or unable to fight with little loss of blood, little interested in the fate of soldiers or the common people. Medvedev argues, he alone was responsible for the heavy losses of 1941 and 1942. He argues against Stalin saying that with other leadership the army could have defeated the Germans not at Stalingrad and Kursk, but much farther west and much sooner. Hundreds of towns and tens of thousands of villages would not have been destroyed. Victory would not have cost twenty million lives.⁹²

Stalin displayed a lack of operational ability, and when he did participate in such exercises he made major errors. However, he learned to leave the operational planning, and control of large scale military operations to his marshals. Stalin's crucial contribution to victory did not derive from his ability to perform as a military leader or commander, especially in the operational area, but rather from his

ability to organize and administer the mobilization of manpower and material resources. Even when he dealt directly with military, he did so more as an administrator, an organizer, than as an initiator or planner of military action.

As the Commander-in-Chief, Stalin regarded his role as that of arbiter and ultimate judge of his generals' strategic plans and operational designs. His major asset as a military leader was the ability to select talented commanders and to permit them to plan operations, while reserving to himself the ultimate power of decision. Stalin often withheld his own views in discussion until most of his military advisers had spoken, in order to elicit their evaluations of a situation. Stalin's leadership improved, as well as his confidence in the officer corps, over the course of the war and it did so considerably--not so much because he was more willing to listen but because the quality of the group to which he listened improved. The improvement of Stalin's leadership was in large part a function of the improvement in the quality and operational skill of the Soviet military professionals themselves.

Finally, the memoirs of the Soviet generals vary in their opinions of their Commander-in-Chief, with both positive and negative judgments. Marshal Zhukov, one who did not like Stalin, nevertheless paid him tribute: "You can say what you like, but that man has got great organizational abilities and nerves of iron." And among the rank-and-file of the Soviet soldiers, Stalin was popular: as Ilya Ehrenburg put it, "they had absolute confidence in him." A father-figure or shall we

say, a Churchill figure was badly needed in wartime and, in spite of everything, Stalin provided it with remarkable success.⁹³

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PART III

"STALIN THE COALITION WARRIOR"

Joseph Stalin was the most enigmatic and domineering of the Big Three. Despite the profusion of memoirs, biographies and revelations, vast gaps remain in the information; and the available accounts abound in contradictions. Few of these, however, relate to his wartime performance--as the leader of a great people's defense against the invaders and as one of the Big Three. If the Georgian cobbler's son emerged from the war as the awesome architect of Soviet victory, it is not that in adversity he had greatness thrust upon him. In war as in peace, he proved to be capable of teaching and learning, of dissembling and role playing. He was capable of insights and blunders, as well as successes and failures, in these new and unfamiliar roles. Certainly, historians regard him as a brilliant politician for these traits. Milovan Djilas marveled at Stalin's crystal clarity of personal style, the penetration of his logic, and the harmony of his commentaries, as though they were expressions of the most exalted wisdom.¹ Another observer of Stalin at close quarters, George Kennan says: "Stalin's greatness as a dissimulator was an integral part of his greatness as a statesman."²

While German armored spearheads drove toward Leningrad, Moscow, and deep into the Ukraine, the bewildered Stalin

discovered that he had gained enthusiastic and sympathetic allies abroad. Winston Churchill's "historic declaration," delivered on the very day of the invasion, must have come as a pleasant surprise to Stalin. The arch-enemy of Communism declared without any prior conditions or hedging: "we shall give whatever help we can to Russia and the Russian people. We shall appeal to all our friends and allies in every part of the world to take the same course and pursue it, as we shall, steadfastly to the end."³ Churchill hoped his announcement would erase any suspicion of the British and their pre-war affairs. However, even during the most crucial days ahead, Stalin could not refrain from referring to the Rudolf Hess mission that sought an early settlement between the British and Germans, in terms that implied the British were not telling the truth about their intentions. The Soviets could never bring themselves to exhibit toward the British the same degree of trust and amiability they showed (to be sure, not always) toward the Americans. This was not only the result of a deliberate and shrewd appraisal of changing power relationships, but also an almost instinctive response, bred into them by their ideology.⁴

On 12 July 1941, Sir Stafford Cripps, the British ambassador to the Soviet Union, signed an Anglo-Soviet pact of mutual assistance in which each side promised it would never negotiate a separate peace with Hitler. Seven days later, in a letter to Churchill, Stalin gave the only excuse for the Nazi-Soviet Pact that the Allies were to hear from the man who

had concluded it. The Germans' position, wrote Stalin, would be even more favorable had not an additional distance been put between them and the centers of the USSR in 1939. The main purpose of Stalin's letter was to lodge the first of what were to become innumerable requests for an immediate second front to be established in France to draw German pressure away from the east. Churchill gave an answer indicating that, given the present state of British armaments and manpower, any invasion remained in the realm of fantasy. The Soviets never accepted this excuse as having been made in good faith. Churchill argues that Stalin failed to comprehend the vast complexities and demands of an amphibious operation required for an invasion.⁵

Shortly after Churchill's stated support of the USSR, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, cautiously and obliquely, announced through the newspapers that: "In the opinion of this government (U.S.), consequently, any defense against Hitlerism, and rallying of the forces opposing Hitlerism, from whatever source these forces may spring, will hasten the eventual downfall of the present German leaders, and will therefore redound to the benefit of our own defense and security." He affirmed that he was ready to support the Soviet war effort against Germany.⁶

At the end of July Harry Hopkins, President Roosevelt's special deputy, visited Moscow to work out Lend-Lease arrangements, which during the war were destined to deliver some eleven billion dollars' worth of food, fuel, military

equipment, and clothing to the Red Armies. In August, with the aim of making possible the transport of supplies from the Persian Gulf to the Soviet Union, Great Britain and the Soviet Union occupied Iran. And in October, the American, Averill Harriman, and the Britisher, Lord Beaverbook, promised in Moscow to supply a billion dollars' worth of Lend-Lease aid during 1942.

Greeted cordially by Stalin on his arrival in Moscow, Hopkins announced the President's determination to extend aid to the Soviet Union. Stalin acknowledged that he was pleased with the President's intentions. In the second meeting, Hopkins discussed with Stalin his war needs, the military situation, and the outlook. Stalin predicted a possible winter defense line in the front of Moscow. Furthermore, Stalin stated,

. . . that he believed it was inevitable that the U.S. should finally come to grips with Hitler on some battlefield. The might of Germany was so great that, even though Russia might defend herself, it would be very difficult for Britain and Russia to continue to crush the German military machine. He said that the one thing that could defeat Hitler, and perhaps without ever firing a shot, would be the announcement that the United States was going to war with Germany.

Stalin said that he believed, however, that the war would be bitter and perhaps long; that if we did get into the war he believed the American people would insist on their armies coming to grips with German soldiers; and he wanted me to tell the President that he would welcome the American troops on any part of the Russian front under the command of the American Army.⁷

Hopkins was pleased by Stalin's sturdy, capable directness and firmness of decision. He was impressed also by Stalin's assurance that the Russians would fight on. Writing later of

Hopkins' visit to Moscow, Robert Sherwood called it the turning point in the wartime relations of Britain and the United States with the Soviet Union.

During August and September 1941, the Germans' offensive seemed almost sure of victory. Stalin's messages to Churchill calling for a second front reached a degree of frankness never subsequently approximated: "The relative stabilization of the front which we succeeded in achieving about three weeks ago has broken down. . . . Without . . . help the Soviet Union will either suffer defeat or be weakened to such an extent that it will lose for a long period any capacity to render assistance to its allies."⁸ A message of 4 September specified the need for a "second front in the present year somewhere in the Balkans or France, capable of drawing away from the Eastern Front thirty or forty divisions." Churchill explained the impossibility of such support. Still, desperate, Stalin sought help of every sort, even suggesting that Allied troops might be brought in by way of Iran or Archangel and thrown into his front lines.

On 28 September 1941, Harriman and Beaverbrook arrived in Moscow to discuss the details of Stalin's "demands on Lend-Lease." The dictator was cordial and gave a review of the military situation as he wished it to be known to western powers. Stalin felt that British divisions might be sent to the Ukraine; but he dismissed Beaverbrook's suggestion that British troops in Persia could be moved into the Caucasus with the retort that "there is no war in the Caucasus, but there is

in the Ukraine." Beaverbrook's proposal that strategic discussions should take place between the British and Red Army staffs was rebuffed.⁹

On the next day Stalin was surly and hostile, abrupt and rude, restlessly walking about. Beaverbrook believed that Stalin was under some intense strain, which may have been the case due to the pressure of the German offensive in the Kiev encirclement. Stalin showed little interest in western help. Deliberately offensive, he inferred that the Soviet Union was bearing the whole burden of the war and that the proffered aid was of little consequence. The next day he was all smiles, geniality and cooperation, and agreement was speedily reached concerning Lend-Lease, even though this represented hardly more than a readiness by Stalin to accept material assistance.¹⁰

The only intelligence concerning the state of the Soviet armed forces was that which could be deducted from Stalin's requests. He wanted tanks, aircraft, anti-aircraft, and anti-tank guns, and raw materials. Since the dictator showed no interest in field or branch artillery or small arms it was assumed that the Soviets still had plenty. Harriman noted that Stalin was the only man to deal with in foreign affairs and that "that dealing with others was almost a waste of time." British General H. I. Ismay used the same words in describing the military sub-committee discussion with Soviet generals. He noted Stalin's shrewd eyes, full of cunning. His handshake was flabby, and he never looked one in the face. But he had great dignity and his personality was dominating;

as he entered the room every Russian froze into silence, and the hunted look in the eyes of the generals showed all too plainly the constant fear in which they lived. It nauseated Ismay to see brave men reduced to such servility.¹¹

In meeting with representatives of the west, Stalin and his deputies exhibited what was to remain throughout the war an almost stereotyped aloofness. Stalin himself displayed an impressive mastery of grand strategy and minute detail touching on a range of subjects from an exact knowledge of foreign politics to the precise characteristics of the weapons he wanted from his allies. At each of these meetings, as reported by Harriman, Kennan, Beaverbrook, Eden, and Charles Bohlen, who participated, it was obvious that he alone was the Soviet decision maker; for frequently he accepted, or refused to accept, new plans without conferring with his subordinates, many times without so much as a glance at his own technical specialists who were seated nearby. Throughout the war, while negotiating by correspondence or in person with representatives and leaders of the allied nations, he acted with a cool and sophisticated aplomb edged with cruel arguments and merciless logic--always in defense of his nation.

He was at times querulous, at others peremptory, adamant, and even insulting in his demands that other powers fulfill their obligations as he and his nation were fulfilling theirs. On the other hand, he was often capable of showing cordial and heartfelt appreciation for the aid and understanding of his allies, even to the extent of confiding to Churchill or

Roosevelt how painful was the burden of fighting Hitler's armies. But always, in greater or lesser degree, Stalin revealed his permanent and profound suspicion of the western allies. The deep-rooted xenophobia shown by the Marxist-Leninist toward the capitalist West, the paranoid fear of the undergrounder, the hard skepticism born of his disappointing experience in the 1930's, when it appeared to him that Britain and France were trying to turn Hitler in his direction--all these seemed to sustain his belief that he must move cautiously in the international arena where the westerners might at any time betray or destroy him.

In the summer of 1941, President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill met for the first of their wartime conferences off Argentia, Newfoundland. This conference was to establish the basis for future cooperation between these leaders. On August 9, 1941, Roosevelt and Churchill signed the Atlantic Charter. The Charter's eight provisions were to guide Anglo-American wartime policies against the Axis powers. The first draft contained three of the four momentous affirmations made in the Atlantic Charter. The first, that their countries seek no aggrandizement, territorial or other; second, that they desired to see no territorial changes that did not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the people concerned; third, that they would respect the rights of all people to choose the form of government under which they would live. And Churchill added that those people also must have sovereign rights and self-government.¹² By this charter,

Roosevelt and Churchill sought peace and harmony for all nations within their own boundaries. At this time--August 1941--the two leaders were taken by the idea that the United States and Great Britain might be able to bring this about simply because they would be able to dominate the peace settlements, and have the power to suppress aggression; they were to act as the two policemen (who were soon to recruit a third, the USSR, and later a fourth, China).¹³

Initially, Stalin displayed skepticism as to whether he would be satisfied with the principles of the Charter, for it appeared that the principles did not cover the purpose he desired, such as compelling Germany to pay for the war. But on the other hand, he expressed an interest in entering an alliance with the British that would outline their respective political aspirations and intentions. For he wanted to end the war with a confirmation of Soviet territorial gains under an Anglo-Soviet Treaty. Furthermore, Stalin wanted the British to declare war on Finland, Romania and Hungary, who had joined Germany in the attack on the USSR. Lastly, Stalin felt the Charter's principles were being directed against the USSR, and he did not trust the British. Through negotiations the Soviets agreed, with suspicion, to sign the Atlantic Charter on 1 January 1942.¹⁴ This charter made formal the previous Grand Alliance. Thus the western leaders had put off Stalin and his concern for postwar settlement for the moment, but he was to return again and again to the question of the postwar settlement. This was one of the important

issues of dissension that arose between Stalin and the Allies.

During the grim Soviet winter offensive in 1942, the battles fought were bloody and costly, but Soviet military leaders were gaining experience. Not only were they learning how to fight Germans, they were learning, too, that they could win. Meanwhile Stalin sought persistently to persuade or shame his allies, Britain and the United States, into mounting a second front. In May 1942, Stalin sent Molotov to London and Washington, where the Soviets wrung out a tentative and hesitant statement that Britain and the United States had reached a "full understanding with regard to the urgent tasks of creating a second front in Europe."¹⁵ The words were interpreted by Molotov and Stalin as a promise that a second front would be opened in 1942, but such was not to be the case. In postwar comment on the subject, Soviet propaganda stated that the Allies had gone back on their word and had done so, moreover, with the deliberate aim of dragging out the war and exhausting the Russians.¹⁶ The United States, tooling up to become the "Arsenal of Democracy" and to win its place in the Pacific, had a long way to go. Facing the hard facts of logistics, America found itself simply without enough ships to move troops and personnel throughout the Pacific, to send convoys to Murmansk or materials through Persia, and simultaneously to mount an invasion of France that could be successful. These difficulties were due to U.S. and British military setbacks in Southeast Asia theater against

the Japanese. Realizing these problems, western leaders decided that it would not be possible to maintain their earlier promise of a second front in 1942. By late July 1942, Stalin, having sensed the delay in the West, was stressing the need for immediate action: "I state emphatically that the Soviet Government cannot tolerate the second front being postponed till 1943."¹⁷

Despite his urgings, western military advisers declared that a second front could not be mounted. In late July, therefore, Roosevelt and Churchill decided that the latter must visit Stalin personally to explain their position. On 12 August 1942, that meeting in Moscow, as Churchill has described it, was memorable and painful with Stalin pointedly asking why the British were afraid of the Germans and Churchill trying to explain the special problems of a major amphibious landing on a well-defended shore.¹⁸ Churchill's efforts to interest Stalin in a smaller second front, the proposed Allied landing, "Operation Torch," in North Africa, only partially mollified the Soviet leader. On the second day of this visit, 13 August, Stalin handed Churchill the conclusions he and his advisers had reached in response to the announced postponement of the "promised" second front. It was a sullen, angry statement that flatly contradicted all of Churchill's arguments concerning the inadvisability of the second front in 1942: "It appears to me and to my colleagues that the year 1942 offers the most favorable conditions for a second front in Europe, seeing that nearly all the German

forces--and their crack troops, too--are tied down on the Eastern Front, while only negligible forces, and the poorest, too, are left in Europe."¹⁹ In spite of Stalin's strong stand Harriman, Roosevelt's representative in Moscow with Churchill, felt good had come of the visit. Stalin had accepted Operation Torch, together with the hard truth that he could expect no immediate diversion in Western Europe. In spite of all his grumbling about Churchill's reluctance to fight the Germans on the ground, Stalin appeared to have developed a certain admiration for Churchill, and showed that he was anxious to continue the collaboration through the war.²⁰

In 1941-42, Stalin's attitude toward the Western Allies ranged from suspicion, distrust and accusations of cowardice, to dependence upon the Allies for their help. He felt that he was being used by the west, since only the Soviets were sustaining great losses and meeting great opposing forces. As his attitude toward the Western Allies hardened, Stalin said: "Since there is no second front in Europe the Red Army bears the whole burden of the war."²¹ But that the attention of the dictator was already turning to the postwar world was best illustrated by one of his Stalingrad victory speech slogans: "Long live the Bolshevik Party, the inspirer and organizer of the victories of the Red Army." There had been little mention of the Communist Party in Stalin's speeches prior to the Stalingrad victory. Now the political and ideological motif was returning with increasing frequency.

Lastly, the winter of 1943 marked the end of one period and the beginning of another for the Soviet Union. The war took on an increasingly political character now that military disaster had been averted.²² The Soviet Union throughout the remainder of the war possessed an international political authority that Russian emperors had seldom achieved, and Stalin in his relations with the Allies, who had not helped him as much as he thought they should have, was quick to display his awareness of the new role and power of his nation.

The Casablanca Conference, of Roosevelt and Churchill in January 1943, coincided with the concluding stages of the Stalingrad battle. Stalin therefore had excellent reasons for refusing to attend. The absence of Stalin from the conference undoubtedly contributed to the Anglo-American decision to concentrate on Mediterranean operations for the balance of the year, which effectively precluded a cross-channel invasion of France in 1943. Stalin's reaction was predictable: "Fully realizing the importance of Sicily, I must, however, point out that it cannot replace the second front in France."²³ The Soviets did not view operations in Africa, in Sicily, or even the Italian mainland as a second front. In the following months therefore, Stalin's criticism and distrust of the Allies grew harsher while the Allies avoided direct contact with Stalin due to their inability to produce an acceptable second front.

In the spring of 1943, Maxim Litvinov, diplomatic protagonist of pro-western reputation in Washington, received

an important intelligence report. Immediately thereafter, he decided to take Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles into his confidence.²⁴ He indicated to Welles that because of Stalin's distrust of the Allies, and his feeling that Russia was bearing the burden of the war alone, Stalin seemed intent to signal Berlin his willingness to consider a compromise peace.²⁵ Litvinov announced that he had been recalled to Moscow based upon his criticisms of Soviet hostilities, but that he would make every effort to reassure Stalin of the Western Allies' earnest support.²⁶

As Stalin's troops gained victories fighting their way back across the Soviet Union, his position of military strength increased. Also his firmness with his allies grew more peremptory, his moves to achieve his own political ends less cautious. He had long been seeking some good excuse for breaking with the Polish exile government at London, primarily because its leaders blatantly refused to accept as legitimate the Polish boundaries established by Nazi-Soviet Pact and because he intended to ensure the existence of a friendly Polish government on his western frontier when the war was over. His opportunity to breach relations came in early 1943 when the Germans revealed that they had uncovered the mass graves of some 3,000 Polish officers in Katyn Forest near Smolensk. The Germans charged the Russians with having massacred these officers in May 1940. The Polish exile government immediately demanded an investigation by the International Red Cross. Afterwards, a careful weighing of

the evidence led to an almost unavoidable conclusion that the murders had been committed by Soviet security forces in the spring of 1940.²⁷ The one irrefutable element was the disappearance of some 15,000 Polish regular and reserve officers who had been in the Soviet camps until April 1940 and of whom thereafter no one could find a trace, until some of them were found in the mass graves at Katyn.

In a letter dated 21 April 1943, Stalin blamed the Germans, who, he said, had themselves "perpetrated a monstrous crime against the Polish officers," and he complained that the London exile government, led by Wladyslaw Sikorsky, in demanding an investigation, was actually cooperating with Hitler. His accusation against the Soviet Union was exactly the excuse for which Stalin had been looking. He hastened to assert that the Polish government at London, "having descended to collusion with the Hitler Government, has, in practice, severed its relations of alliance with the USSR," and he broke off relations with the London Poles.²⁸ Soon after this break of relations a "Union of Polish Patriots in the USSR" appeared, and it was evident that Stalin expected this group to serve as a pro-communist government under his patronage.

To the Western Allies these developments were profoundly disturbing for a number of reasons. Great Britain had entered the war to defend Poland's sovereignty. Subsequently some 150,000 Polish troops under the London exile government had fought against the German forces in the Middle East, while others led fighter aircraft skirmishes from England,

and still others supported the guerrilla forces inside Poland itself. For the Western Allies to withdraw support from the Poles could only be interpreted by Churchill and Roosevelt as a conscious betrayal of their friends. Thus Stalin pressed them on an issue on which compromise seemed the best solution to Churchill and Roosevelt. In the months that followed, despite repeated efforts by Churchill and Roosevelt to get him to reconsider the Soviet-Polish relationship, Stalin remained firm--the Polish Government in London was his enemy.

While the conflict over Poland and the confrontation of the Allies that it provoked built up anger on both sides, the issue of the delayed second front caused heated verbal exchanges. After the Trident Conference in Washington (May 1943), Stalin was informed by his allies that there would be no second front in 1943.²⁹ Stalin, infuriated over the continued delay, rejected the postponement, pointing out that the decision had been adopted without his participating. Replying to Churchill's effort to explain and justify the decision, Stalin frankly announced that he suspected the motives of his Allies:

I must tell you that the point here is not just the disappointment of the Soviet Government, but the preservation of its confidence in the Allies, a confidence which is being subjected to severe stress.

And he harshly declared that the second front was a

question of saving millions of lives in the occupied areas of Western Europe and Russia and of reducing the enormous sacrifices of the Soviet armies, compared with which the sacrifices of the Anglo-American armies are insignificant.³⁰

Through the middle of 1943 it became more evident to all concerned that the Big Three needed to meet in order to work out differences and prepare for the postwar settlement. Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt met at Teheran from 22 November to 1 December 1943, for the first of the wartime conferences attended by the Big Three in person. At this meeting the problem of the second front ranked high on the agenda, and Churchill worked hard to sell the idea of a small invasion in the Balkans; however, Stalin pressed for the landing in France. Stalin made it clear that he did not want the British navy in the Black Sea or Eastern Mediterranean area, and he thought the idea of invading southern France was a better plan.³¹ Ultimately, all agreed that the second front in France would be launched in May of 1944. Wanting to be certain that his allies kept this promise, Stalin pushed to force Roosevelt to name the commander of the invasion. Other matters were discussed: the probable dismemberment of Germany after the war, the role of Turkey and the chance of its entering the war against Germany, the Soviet's declaration of war on Japan after the defeat of Germany, and the Polish question. In this way, the strategy for the war and the goals of peace were shaped by the coalition.³²

To understand the position taken by the Western Allies in November 1943, regarding the postwar disposition of Poland, the background of the military events must be examined. Previously, the Soviet armies had carried the overwhelming weight of fighting in Europe. Soviet soldiers had

died by the millions against the German army, but now the Soviets were steadily winning battles and advancing westward, reclaiming Soviet territory. The German army could not stop the Red Army which soon would over-run Poland and enter Germany itself. Although the British and Americans had provided the Soviet Union with considerable amounts of military and industrial supplies and had themselves fought on many fronts--in Africa, in Italy, and in raids inside German-held territory, both Churchill and Roosevelt were painfully aware that their contributions were dwarfed by that of the Soviet Union and their armies were mired in Italy in a theater of war which could not compare in scope, or casualties, or results to the huge Soviet front.³³ Moreover, despite all their promises to Stalin, they had been unable to open a second front in the west. The terrible costs of a coastal invasion in France, combined with critical military weakness created by the vast dispersal of their forces in the Asian war, justified their repeated delays but it did not ease the burden of their consciences.

Thus, Roosevelt and Churchill went to Teheran awed by the courage and suffering of the Soviet armies and aware that these armies had paid the price in blood for their victories. The western representatives could not escape a feeling of guilt; they had not done enough militarily against the Reich to deny the Soviet Union the boundaries Stalin demanded for its future security.

Churchill opened the Polish discussion in a private conference with Stalin, suggesting that the eastern boundary of Poland be the so-called Curzon Line (devised after World War I by the British Foreign Securities) which more or less traced the boundary drawn by Stalin's pact with Hitler. Stalin was agreeable. Churchill then went on to suggest that Poland as a whole might simply be moved westward; that is, the new Poland might be recompensed for its losses to the east by moving its western boundaries further westward and absorbing German territory. Stalin was delighted. Subsequently, at a formal conference session the Curzon Line with several revisions was accepted by Stalin as Poland's eastern boundary. The general feeling of all concerned was that the Oder River in Germany would be ideal. Churchill, still doing his best to please Stalin, declared that he found the Oder line satisfactory; and he told the conference, "I would say to the Poles that if they did not accept it they would be foolish, and I would remind them that but for the Red Army they would have been utterly destroyed."³⁴

Throughout these discussions Stalin was genial and courteous yet firm about what the others considered minor details, such as the way the Curzon Line should be bent to his advantage at its northern and southern ends. The role his allies assigned to him was scarcely a demanding one; he was not asked to fight for the Polish boundaries he preferred; the Allies seemed to ask him simply to accept their concessions. Years later, Charles E. Bohlen, Roosevelt's

interpreter, stated that Roosevelt completely acquiesced to Stalin in the Polish discussion, because of electoral reasons, and he argued that this was a great mistake.³⁵ At Teheran, Stalin gained an implicit recognition that Poland was in the Soviet sphere of influence as well as other areas of Eastern Europe; Churchill and Roosevelt conceded this point. It appears that Roosevelt came away from the small inter-conference meetings somewhat puzzled. He had found Stalin "correct, stiff, solemn, not smiling, nothing human to get hold of."³⁶ Bohlen viewed the conference as being the most successful of the wartime Big Three Conferences. The atmosphere was good while the leaders expressed confidence and optimism over the strategic decisions which would lead to the defeat and surrender of Germany.³⁷

From a political standpoint, at Teheran, Roosevelt and Churchill had in effect begun to accept Stalin's ideas for altering the postwar frontiers of Poland without the approval of the Polish government-in-exile--indeed against the Poles' dogged opposition. Their acquiescence may have led Stalin to believe that the President and the Prime Minister would, sooner or later, also agree to further plans he might have for Poland and other neighboring states.³⁸

On 6 June 1944, the Western Allied forces opened a second front in northern France, by launching "Operation Overlord," a cross-channel invasion from England. Consequently, Stalin graciously sent the following telegram which in some ways seems almost an implicit acceptance of many of Churchill's

explanations previously rejected by Stalin. "My colleagues and I," Stalin wrote,

cannot but recognize that this is an enterprise unprecedented in military history as to scale, breadth of conception and masterly execution. As is known, Napoleon's plan for crossing the Channel failed disgracefully. Hitler the hysteric, who for two years had boasted that he would cross the Channel, did not venture even an attempt to carry out his threat. None but our allies have been able to fulfill with flying colors the grand plan for crossing the Channel.³⁹

The Allied forces had mounted one of the largest amphibious operations known, using tactical surprise and vastly superior firepower in overcoming fierce German resistance. The Allied forces managed within a few days to establish a firm beach-head in Normandy. During the first forty-eight hours alone some 250,000 troops advanced ashore, and despite the most strenuous efforts of the German forces they could not be driven back into the sea.⁴⁰ Stalin, in a generous message to Churchill on 11 June, hailed the successful invasion of Europe: "History will record this deed as an achievement of the highest order."⁴¹

At no time during the war was Stalin's trust in his allies greater--or, rather his indelible mistrust of them more subdued--than in the wake of the launching of the Second Front, which his suspicious mind had construed as the litmus test of their good faith. Official Russian statements in the aftermath of the June 1944 Normandy landings eulogized the alliance, exuding confidence in the impending common victory.⁴²

The initial Allied landing did not lead immediately to further successes. Hitler had ordered his commanders in France to hold every foot of territory, and for nearly six weeks German forces managed to contain the Allied troops in their initial landing area. For the Soviets, the summer of 1944 was a time of almost unchecked advances, with significant military victories in Poland and the Balkans following one another in rapid order.

Churchill was concerned by the increasingly dangerous political consequences of the rapid Soviet advance to the west. As noted in the official American history of joint strategic planning, "by the summer of 1944 the war was entering a new era, and Churchill was already looking at the European continent with one eye on the retreating Germans and the other on the advancing Soviets." Churchill's principal concern was over the fact that the advance of the Red Army would enable the Soviets to impose Communist government on large parts of Eastern Europe, establishing themselves as the dominant force in Europe, a development that Churchill opposed bitterly. The Prime Minister was especially concerned about events in Poland, where Stalin was apparently planning to install the Moscow-directed, Communist dominated Committee of National Liberation, better known as the Lublin Committee, as the new Polish government.

The controversy about which Poles should rule had by now grown into a major issue of conflict between East and West, and in August it took on even more serious proportions. When

Soviet troops under General Konstantin Rokossovsky reached and occupied Praga, across the Vistula River from Warsaw, on 1 August, Polish resistance forces inside Warsaw who were loyal to the exile government in London rose and began to attack the Germans inside the city. By this daring act they hoped to secure a place for themselves and their government in the postwar nation. But while Soviet forces continued active operations in the Danube area, their Baltic front suddenly came to a halt. In fact, the Soviet troops made no attempt to cross the Vistula River into Warsaw. Rokossovsky's forces did not move from August 1944 until January 1945. Meanwhile, the Germans within the city viciously leveled it, block by block and street by street, in fierce fighting that wiped out the resistance force of some 35,000 men and reduced the city of Warsaw to rubble.⁴³ On 22 August in a message to Churchill Stalin referred to the Polish Home Army (AK) as both criminal and irresponsible in needlessly sacrificing Polish lives and he called the AK a group of criminals.⁴⁴

During the Warsaw battle, Roosevelt and Churchill repeatedly begged Stalin to take some step to save the Poles in Warsaw, but nothing was done to accede to their requests. In order to drop airborne supplies to the fighters in Warsaw, they also asked for permission to land planes in the Soviet Union, but were refused. Stalin, in short, permitted the AK to be destroyed, presumably to guarantee the destruction of the London-based government and the success of his own Lublin Poles. This act demonstrated to Churchill and Roosevelt that

Stalin had no qualms whatever about using his new position of strength to gain his objectives.

Stalin had been unwilling to move into Poland fast enough to save the AK from annihilation, but in early September he sped into Rumania and proceeded to conquer non-belligerent Bulgaria. This action, without any advance notice to the Allies, caused Churchill to react with horror. This was the time Churchill saw his nightmare of "the Red Army spreading like cancer from one country to another," and Harriman began dispatching to Washington his ever more urgent warnings that the USSR might become "a world bully."⁴⁵

Even as late as the autumn of 1944, Stalin still did not want to establish liaison between fronts as earlier proposed by the Allies. Stalin realized the purpose of the liaison would be to report the Red Army's advance to the Allies. Stalin wanted to remain independent and aloof from their monitoring. The intentions of the Soviet government remained obscure as to their ultimate objectives in eastern-central Europe. Meanwhile, Stalin silently allowed the popular front organizations in the newly acquired territory to eliminate opposition and to establish themselves as the accepted government. Also, knowing the Allies would not do anything to stop him, Stalin had his forces begin collecting reparations against the Anglo-American wishes. For, the Anglo-Americans did not want to cause problems that would hamper diplomatic exertions after the war. Now Stalin knew he had the upper-hand.⁴⁶

As Allies' concerns grew over the Soviets' actions and advances in eastern-central Europe, Stalin refused to come out of Moscow to discuss affairs with Churchill and Roosevelt; so Churchill decided to go to Moscow. On 9 October 1944 Churchill, against Roosevelt's wishes, arrived in Moscow for a conference with Stalin to see if he could work out spheres of influence in the Balkans where Britain had long had friends. At his first meeting with Stalin, Churchill, reflecting the traditions of the British Empire, suggested numerical proportions for the sharing of influence. Writing on a piece of paper while his words were being translated, Churchill set down the names of the Balkan states and briefly indicated the proportions of influence he thought proper for Russia and Britain: Rumania 90:10, Greece 10:90, Yugoslavia and Hungary 50:50, Bulgaria 75:25.⁴⁷ He then slid the paper across the table to Stalin, who studied it a moment, put a large check on it with a blue pencil, and pushed it back to Churchill. The Prime Minister was then seized with remorse: should they not burn the compromising document disposing cynically of millions of human beings? "No, you keep it," said Stalin.⁴⁸ Thus was completed another deal that would bring endless headaches to East and West through the following decades; for, though there were to be other formal decisions about the Balkans at other conferences, Stalin proceeded to act as if he regarded his arrangement with Churchill as legitimate and binding.

During this same visit, Churchill and Stalin struggled again over the Polish question. Churchill persuaded Stalin to meet with Stanislas Mikolajczk, premier of the London exile government, to talk over terms of a mutually acceptable postwar settlement. But to Mikolajczk the terms of the agreement at Teheran were intolerable; even in Moscow he would not agree to the Curzon Line. Certainly the London Poles, by their intransigent insistence upon Poland's pre-1939 boundaries and their grim opposition to Soviet Communism, did much to bring down their own house; and Stalin's insistence that in any Polish government his Lublin Poles must hold the preponderant majority of official posts also went far to eliminate any real possibility of agreement.⁴⁹ In the end Churchill said the atmosphere of the Moscow talks was quite cordial, except for the Polish problem: "We got closer to our Soviet allies than ever before--or since."⁵⁰

In December 1944, the Lublin Committee declared itself the Provisional Government of Poland; and, on January 5, 1945, the USSR recognized it as such. Both the British and the Americans continued to recognize the London Poles. Thus the stage was set for further controversy at the new meeting of the Big Three at Yalta.

At the Yalta Conference, which met from 3-11 February 1945, the three Allied leaders, Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill bargained over the world's future. Each professed the desire for permanent peace and good will among men, but did not rush to the task of conciliation. These Allies

anticipated the future realistically, while maneuvering for positions that would give their countries power and security during the coming years of peace, and calculating how to achieve and protect their own national interests most effectively.

The military situation had changed significantly since Teheran (November 1943); for the Second Front, launched 6 June 1944, had successfully beaten back Germany's divisions in France and Belgium. The Western Allies had kept their pledge; as Ulam suggests, they came to Yalta with fewer feelings of guilt and inferiority, and were more suspicious than before. As at Teheran, however, they were still inclined to treat Stalin with extreme attentiveness, this time because they were concerned about the Pacific war, which Stalin had not yet entered. Regardless of how the war with Germany ended--and victory now seemed assured--they still had to turn their efforts to defeat Japan. Both Roosevelt and Churchill went to Yalta eager to please Stalin and to obtain his active intervention in the Far East.

In the struggle to influence the decisions of the conference, the relative strength of the participants were in many ways unequal. Stalin seemed to be the only one operating from a position of strength. His victorious armies were already in place, holding territory where he had determined that Soviet influence would predominate.⁵¹ He behaved as if the West had acquiesced to such practices--a misconception nourished in turn by his allies' negligence in making

sufficiently clear to him what were their purposes and the limits of their tolerance.⁵² Churchill's empire was collapsing; in terms of simple power, Britain had exhausted itself helping to win the war and had lost its former position of leadership to the two superpowers, Russia and the United States. Now Great Britain needed a new balance of power in Europe. Churchill thus called for leniency toward Germany and for France to resume the status of a Great Power. Most of all the British wanted a continued involvement of the U.S. in the affairs of the continent. Without this, the pattern the British had opposed since the seventeenth century would become a reality more pronounced than it had been even in the heyday of Napoleon; one power would dominate Europe, the Soviet Union.⁵³ Churchill's florid and passionate arguments were beginning to bore both Stalin and Roosevelt. His verbal arguments were no match for the physical presence of Stalin's Red Army in eastern Europe. Roosevelt, at Yalta, confided to the others that the United States would be able to maintain a peacekeeping force in Europe for only two years. On the other hand, Stalin intended to stay in Eastern Europe permanently and he had the power to do so.

James MacGregor Burns, Roosevelt's biographer, compared Roosevelt with Stalin and Churchill. In his view, both Stalin and Roosevelt were brilliant tacticians, masters of the art of timing, and superb in playing off adversaries against each other. But Stalin had a much greater ability than Roosevelt to link wartime strategic decisions to long-range security

and to stick to them tenaciously.⁵⁴ Churchill, for Burns, had a longer but narrower view of the world than Roosevelt and no comprehension of the forces of unrest in Asia or Africa. Both Roosevelt and Churchill were opportunistic and preferred to improvise their approach to grand strategy; but Churchill "lacked the comprehensive principles that gave at least a general direction and focus to Roosevelt's day-to-day decisions." Churchill's strategy "drew from intuition and insight rather than long-run purpose and settled goals." Also, he lacked the steadiness of direction, the comprehensiveness of outlook, the sense of proportion and relevance that mark the grand strategist.⁵⁵

Stalin came to Yalta determined to have his way with respect to certain issues. In order to achieve these objectives he willingly made a number of concessions about matters that were of little or no concern to him but of great importance to Roosevelt and Churchill. This gracious series of concessions persuaded the Western Allies by the time they left the conference that they had won much by securing Stalin's agreement to their verbal formulas. Yet almost immediately afterward they were to find that the agreements and guarantees negotiated at Yalta had little or no meaning in those regions where Stalin and his Red Army prevailed.

In discussing the fate of a defeated Germany, the Big Three decided that the country would be occupied by the Three Powers and by France, with a Central Control Commission of the Three Powers to be located in Berlin. France would also

be given an option to participate on the Control Commission as a fourth member. A Reparations Commission was to be established, and Germany was to pay for the damages of war by giving up a portion of its industrial plants, machines, rolling stock, and other goods. In addition, Germany was expected to provide part of its future production and its labor to its debtors. Churchill opposed excessive reparations from Germany and any attempt to reduce Germany's industrial production permanently, while Stalin favored the extensive reparations that would leave Germany permanently divided.⁵⁶ The final formula, with British reservations, envisaged as the basis of the future decision a sum of \$20 billion of reparations to be exacted in industrial goods, 50 per cent of it going to Russia.⁵⁷ Also, Stalin wanted to have two or three million Germans as forced labor to help rebuild the country they had partially destroyed.

Among the Big Three, after a bitter and prolonged discussion, the Allies reached an agreement looking toward the eventual reorganization of the Lublin Committee's Provisional Government on a broader democratic basis with the inclusion of democratic leaders from Poland and from Poles abroad.⁵⁸ It was agreed that the Polish Provisional Government of National Unity would be pledged to the holding of free and unfettered elections as soon as possible on the basis of universal suffrage and secret ballot. In these elections all democratic and anti-Nazi parties would have the right to take part and put forward candidates.⁵⁹ While the wording of

these terms seemed favorable for the democratic evolution of Poland's postwar government, Stalin's determination to have a friendly, pro-Soviet government in Poland made the words meaningless. Later, the promised reorganization of the government did occur, but the free elections pledged by the participants at the Yalta Conference never occurred.⁶⁰

The second major Polish question, concerning where to locate Poland's boundaries, was only partially settled. The Curzon Line, with minor difficulties, was accepted for the eastern border, and it was stipulated that Poland must receive substantial accession of territory in the north (East Prussia) and west. But the final delimitation await the Peace Conference.⁶¹ The peace conference never came. Nor was such a conference necessary so far as Stalin was concerned. He sent Poles into Germany as far as the Oder and (Western) Neisse Rivers, unilaterally disposing of the matter.

Finally, there was the increasingly urgent question of the Soviet Union's entry into the war against Japan, and the price to be paid for such assistance. At a secret Roosevelt-Stalin meeting on February 8, 1945, about which Churchill learned only on the following day, Stalin agreed to enter the war against Japan within two or three months after the defeat of Hitler, but his demands were high. Roosevelt agreed that the Soviets were to receive back all the rights and territories the Japanese had gained from them in the war of 1904-1905, the status quo in Outer Mongolia would be

preserved; and that the Soviet Union would receive the Kurile Islands, some of which they had voluntarily exchanged for Sakhalin under a treaty with Japan in 1875. Following Chiang Kai-shek's acceptance of these conditions, which Roosevelt undertook to obtain, Stalin also promised that China would retain full sovereignty over Manchuria and that the Soviet Union would conclude a treaty of friendship and alliance with the Chinese government.⁶²

Stalin's character was observed by all observers at Yalta, because so little was known about him previously. He appeared as a calm and skillful negotiator, who showed strong emotion only when he spoke of German reparations and of the fearful devastation caused by the Germans in Russia. On the whole, he was reasonably accommodating, and did not press on his fellow allies demands they thought wholly unreasonable--such as the one that all the sixteen Soviet Republics be represented at the United Nations. Western observers were impressed by the fact that, throughout the conference, Stalin remained in the closest touch with the conduct of the war and did his work as commander-in-chief between midnight and five a.m., leaving the impression that he was a very organized, efficient, and dedicated man with complete control of affairs.⁶³

The conference ended in a friendly atmosphere. The three leaders were, however, in a wistful mood, feeling perhaps that with the victory approaching their partnership would be subject to even greater strains. For it would be a

mistake to consider the Soviet attitude at Yalta as entirely cynical, or to consider insincere Stalin's statement that as long as the three of them remained as leaders peace would be secure but would require great effort. The exhilaration of victory, the relief at the almost miraculous survival not only of the Soviet Union but of his own power must have inspired in Stalin some gratitude to his two partners, each with his peculiar greatness, and each sharing the wish that another war might be avoided. But whatever his feelings, Stalin could not in the long run withstand the logic of his position as the ruler of a totalitarian society and as the supreme head of a movement that sought security through expansion. In these facts of omission by the West must be seen the basis of the growing discord and of the Cold War.

Stalin's role as one of the "Big Three" was a new one to him. If one assumes that his long range purpose was to maximize Soviet power by the combined efforts of military action (which afterwards placed his forces in control of Eastern Europe) and his dealing with his allies, his performance was, on the whole, remarkably successful. Despite enormous war losses the Soviet Union emerged from the conflict not only with vastly enhanced standing in the international community, but with greatly increased de facto domination over neighboring areas in Europe and the Far East.

Alexander Dallin indicates that as one reads accounts of Stalin's behavior with foreigners, be they Hopkins and Harriman, Brooks and Montgomery, or Kennan, Bohlen and Djilas,

one is struck by Stalin's dominant role and typical control of the situation. Except for rare instances when he was upset or unnerved (usually when he felt threatened or ridiculed), he appeared to be both self-assured and remarkably knowledgeable. Some of this was undoubtedly consummate role-playing.⁶⁴ For example, Stalin emerges from the memoirs of the war-time conferences as more secure and more certain of his position than his allied counterparts, who were still taking his measure, testing his intentions and mood. Stalin seemed to enjoy his contact with the capitalist "whales," which to him symbolized their acceptance of him--and thereby relieved his marked sense of inferiority. Some of Stalin's success in dealing with Roosevelt and Churchill may have been due precisely to the fact that he enjoyed the sessions. He skillfully manipulated his partners, playing them off against each other⁶⁵ and seeking to outmaneuver them. Stalin was reassured by his sense of superiority over Roosevelt and Churchill, who were at times ignorant of his maneuvering and were usually reluctant to contradict and confront him, even when they patently disagreed. Indeed, only when he realized that he could no longer "play this game" did he shift gears and adopt a tougher stance.⁶⁶ Lastly, as Djilas contends that viewed from the standpoint of success and political skill, Stalin was hardly surpassed by any statesman of his time.⁶⁷

During Stalin's political dealings with the wartime Allies, he had essential freedom being able to ignore

pressures and constraints at home, including Soviet public opinion. He knew the limits of the possible in pressing for a second front and for military aid, much as he needed both. Further, Stalin was eager to extend the alliance as long as there was a reasonable prospect of a benefit from it. Perhaps it came to an end earlier than he had hoped. But, as Maxim Litvinov had well understood, Stalin always took for granted the inevitability of an ultimate clash with the capitalist world system.⁶⁸

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⁶⁸Dallin, p. 18.

CONCLUSION

Stalin's diplomatic-political superiority over the Western Allies from the middle of the war to its end placed him as one of the most powerful leaders in the world. It has been argued by some historians that Stalin's postwar diplomacy allegedly deceived the western leaders in their successive summit meetings. However, George Kennan contends that there was no deception on Stalin's part, that, in fact, western leaders deceived themselves.¹ Stalin was perhaps better aware than were the others of the true meaning of the military events that had placed him in control of half of Europe. He desired the same political and military advantages on the western frontier that had inspired his dealings with the Germans before the war broke out. His task, therefore, was easy. He had little need to deceive.

Of the three men who sat together at Teheran and Yalta, it was he, Stalin, who was in the most fortunate position. Churchill had by this time, an extremely realistic understanding of the situation, but very little power; and he was near to his fall from office. Roosevelt had great power but only a faltering vision of the future world and was rapidly failing in health. Stalin alone was powerful, psychologically superior, realistic and in good health, as well as having a secure political position to carry him into the

postwar future. He was the only one, perhaps, who saw quite clearly, with a vision unclouded by pity or remorse, the situation in which they found themselves. Stalin had planned long-range postwar goals, while he had accomplished much and survived the most difficult ordeals. His position was, therefore, a favorable one.²

Thus, for Churchill and Roosevelt, this was obviously not the ideal way to end a war. But considering that the western powers were unable to defeat Germany without the aid of Stalin, of such a nature that it placed him automatically in command of half of Europe, this was perhaps all that they could expect.

Soviet war memoirs testify to Stalin's complete control over the political, industrial and military aspects of the Soviet war effort. Not content to exercise merely formal control, Stalin personally made every wartime decision of any importance. He alone seems to have possessed the power to impose his will on both civilians and military associates alike. Stalin's domination over his civilian associates was complete. Changes in the administrative system during the war in no way altered the prewar distribution of authority between the leader and his closest associates in the Politburo whose pattern of docile response to an anticipation of Stalin's wishes had already been clearly established from the time of the Great Purge. The accounts of the People's Commissar of the Navy Kuznetsov show that Stalin seldom conducted business

without the presence of Politburo members, for he believed in collective work.

There are two levels of military leadership where Stalin's strength impressed and surprised Prime Minister Churchill, western military leaders, diplomats and journalists concerned grand strategy and tactical detail. In grand strategy, it appeared to them that Stalin had an extraordinary grasp of war goals and major long-range plans for conducting the war and a talent for adjusting the conduct of military operations to political realities. This point is drawn from Churchill's impression of Stalin while presenting the Anglo-American plan "Torch"--the invasion of North Africa. While Stalin's judgment proved erroneous in a number of instances, it nevertheless brought the admiration of his "Big Three" counterparts, who may have been led by the unexpectedness and the extent of his success to exaggerate his skill in attaining it. Although his faulty judgment cost the lives of many, his errors were never so gross that the Red Army could not recover and advance to later victory.

On the level of tactical and technical expertise, western observers, such as Djilas, Kennan, Bohlen, and Harri-man, were surprised by Stalin's mastery of details, his attention to the purely professional aspects of waging war. Accounts of Kremlin meeting during the war, however, reveal Stalin's ability to distinguish between primary and secondary military matters. Considerable time was devoted to discussing details concerning the war effort, and some Stavka members

complained of this in their memoirs. Stalin demanded very detailed information from his subordinates about the situation at the front and throughout the country. Initially, he zealously exercised his prerogative to approve every plan of action in its smallest particulars; later in the war he relinquished this prerogative to a great extent to marshals Zhukov and Vasilevsky. Yet, he frequently interfered with the actual conduct of combat operations to insist on changing petty details or to challenge a field commander who under pressure of circumstances departed from the approved plan and timetable of action. While his technical knowledge was indispensable in insuring that his decisions were not random selections from existing alternatives. It would appear that military urgencies were superceded in importance by his fascination with detail.

Stalin displayed a weakness in operational matters which involved the planning and control of large-scale military operations, battles and campaigns. In this area the Soviet memoirs indicate that Stalin made no real contribution, but instead relied upon his key advisors, Zhukov, Vasilevsky and Antonov. Their professional military judgment was employed to plan and conduct military operations. The marshals were quick to point out that Stalin's critical contribution to victory did not derive from his ability to perform as the Supreme Commander, especially in the operational area, but rather from his ability to organize and administer the mobilization of manpower and material resources. Even when

Stalin dealt directly with military operations, he did it as an administrator, an organizer, rather than as an initiator or planner of military action.

Stalin's major asset as Supreme Commander was his ability to select qualified commanders and permit them to plan operations, while he acted as the ultimate judge and arbiter of the plans. He often welcomed the discussions and opinions of subordinates, and in this manner he was able to evaluate his leaders, while at the same time he enhanced his own knowledge of the particular situation. Stalin's leadership improved over the course of the war. This improvement in leadership ability was in large part a result of the improvement in the quality and operational skill of the Soviet military professionals themselves. Likewise, Stalin's confidence in the Soviet military profession improved, resulting in his assent to the delegation of greater authority and responsibility to the profession.

One of the most unique characteristics of Stalin's method of command was, for most of the war, to send military members of the Stavka as representatives to supervise operations in crucial areas; they usually coordinated the actions of several army groups. Zhukov and Vasilevsky were kept especially busy in this job. Shtemenko recalls that one of Stalin's first questions whenever they returned was when they proposed to leave again. Their frequent absences no doubt made it easier for Stalin to retain absolute centralized control.

In sum, from the years of World War II until Stalin's death the Soviet dictator was often portrayed as a "military genius," in a simple military tunic, adorned only with a gold star of a Hero of the Soviet Union, his country's most coveted military decoration. Stalin's role in World War II more than any other single aspect of his long leadership gave him the authority which together with the system of terror permitted him to dominate the minds and lives of his people as perhaps no other leader in the twentieth century.

ENDNOTES

¹George F. Kennan, "Comment," Survey, Vol. 21, No. 1/2 (94/95) (Winter-Spring 1975): 35.

²Kennan, pp. 35-36.

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STALIN'S PERFORMANCE AS A LEADER IN
THE SECOND WORLD WAR

by

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

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This report examines the performance of Joseph V. Stalin as the leader of the Soviet Union immediately prior to and during the Second World War. Its primary aim is to review the realities of Stalin's thirty year dictatorship and the reactions to that reign afterwards as seen by different Soviet and Western historians. In addition, the writer has reviewed Stalin as the Supreme Soviet Commander-in-Chief from the beginning of the war and until the Battle of Stalingrad, and his political relationship as a principal member of the Allied coalition.

The methodology consisted of researching the memoirs of Soviet generals written after the war, concerning their observations and relationship with Stalin during the war. Numerous books and articles produced by Soviet and Western historians, who have proven to be knowledgeable about Stalin during this period were also used in this research. However, this research effort is limited due to the inaccessibility of primary resources to the writer.

The first portion of this report focuses on Stalin's rise to power, his dictatorship, and the impact of de-Stalinization on Stalin's place in history. Stalin was assessed as a controversial and mysterious leader by scholars. These conclusions are drawn from the research and study of various historians both Soviet and Western. The different perspectives of Stalin are presented.

This paper attempts to deal with differing opinions concerning Stalin's responsibility for the Soviet Union's unpreparedness for the German invasion on June 22, 1941. Furthermore, it reviews the observations of many writers concerning Stalin's responsibility for early war defeats, his struggle to consolidate all the resources at hand into an efficient war machine, and the final establishment of confidence between Stalin and his subordinates. The writer attempts to show how final victory for the Soviets hinged on the developments just previously discussed.

Lastly, Stalin's political character, and his relationship during World War II, with the Allied coalition leaders, Churchill and Roosevelt, is investigated. Often Stalin is depicted as being cordial at times, then overbearing and demanding at other times. He used the Red Army's military success as a position of strength, and his political shrewdness to enable him to psychologically dominate his coalition partners, particularly in the final negotiations. The outcome of Stalin's political skill was the gain of security and the international prominence as one of the most powerful leaders in the world.