

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

by

THOMPSON ALLEN TERRELL III

A.B., North Georgia College, 1962

A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree


MASTER OF ARTS

Department of History

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1976

Approved by:


Dr. Jacob Kipp, Major Professor

LD
2668
R4
1976
T47
c.2
Document

110

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The unselfish assistance provided by many people made this report possible. Special recognition and thanks go to my major professor, Dr. Jacob W. Kipp, for his guidance and encouragement throughout the academic year at Kansas State University. His standards for hard work and for excellence in scholarship were a constant source of inspiration. Dr. Donald Mrozek stimulated my interest in American military policy in a course he taught in Military History. I am grateful for his advice, constructive criticism, and assistance. The third member of my committee, Dr. Burton Kaufman, was a source of encouragement and provided valuable counsel on aspects of the paper concerning American diplomatic history.

My deepest love and appreciation go to my most important critic, my wife Virginia, who was a great source of encouragement. She was my editor, and companion during the months of study at the university. Also, I give special recognition to Nedra Sylvis, who is one of the finest typists in the area.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
PART I. "THE REALITIES OF STALIN"	1
PART II. "STALIN: THE SUPREME COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF"	25
PART III. "STALIN THE COALITION WARRIOR"	78
CONCLUSION	118
BIBLIOGRAPHY	125

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