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Stalin Prepares for What Kind of War

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

—J. V. Stalin

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

—J. V. Stalin, May 5, 1941

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

—Oleg Kalugin, former chief of Soviet foreign intelligence

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

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

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

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

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

THE SOVIET VIEW OF GLOBAL WAR

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

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

The war is going on between two groups of capitalist states (the poor vs. the rich ones in terms of colonies, sources of raw materials, and so on) for a re-division of the world and for world domination! We're not opposed to the idea of their fighting among themselves very well. Nor would it be bad if by the hands of Germany the position of the richest capitalist countries were shattered (in particular that of England). Hitler himself does not appreciate this fact nor does he wish to, but he is demolishing and undermining the capitalist system. . . . On our part we will maneuver while pitting one country against the other so that they can fight each other all the better. The nonaggression pact to a degree helps Germany. But in the next moment, it batters the other side.³

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

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

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

Yet Lenin, many times quoted to this effect in the military literature (even as late as the 1970s), was on record as having said that it does not matter which side starts a war when Soviet class or revolutionary interests are on the line: "The character of a war (whether reactionary or revolutionary) is not determined by who the aggressor was, or whose territory

the enemy has occupied. It is determined by the class that is waging the war, and the politics for which this war is a continuation."⁴ And he said: "If war is waged by the proletariat after it has conquered the bourgeoisie in its own country, and is waged with the objective of strengthening and extending socialism, such a war is legitimate and 'holy.'" He said too:

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

To these Leninist views, Stalin added his own offensivist language: "We are for a liberating, anti-imperialist, revolutionary war despite the fact that such a war, as is known, is not only not free from the 'horrors of bloodshed,' but abounds in them."

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

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

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

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

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

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

So, the Soviet record in practice is by no means clean as concerns the USSR's putative status as a merely defensist war fighter. The suspicion concerning Soviet motives in launching its attack against Finland was provoked by another factor: Soviet intentions and overt Soviet attempts to sovietize that country. A "revolutionary government"—the Finnish Democratic Republic—to be led by Comintern official Otto Kuusinen was established by Stalin as the invasion proceeded.⁶ A clandestine radio station and a Communist headquarters were set up on the Soviet-Finnish border to swing into action once the country was conquered. Documents confirming all this and more are now available from former-Soviet archives. They tell the story of outright Stalinist aggression in the name of "proletarian revolution." But can we conclude that ideology led the way in this aggression? Or was Stalin merely preparing for what he considered to be an inevitable German attack on Soviet Russia at some future time? If the latter is true, then Finnish territory had an undeniable geostrategic military importance to the USSR.

Along these lines, an interpretation of these moves lingers abroad among some observers that all Stalin really had in mind vis-à-vis Finland was securing some crucial territory from that country in order to defend Leningrad against future attacks led by Germany. Yet for other authors it

appears in retrospect that Stalin really sought to sovietize Finland, much as Outer Mongolia had been conquered and sovietized in 1921 together with the rest of the borderland nations annexed during the preceding and succeeding years under Lenin and Stalin. These were nations that had composed the former tsarist empire and which had sued for independence and had become independent since 1917.

Thus, Finland, too, it seems, was to be restored to the Soviet Empire as it had been under tsarist imperial control before 1917. Part of it was incorporated as the Karelo-Finnish Soviet Republic, the USSR's sixteenth republic. Stalin, so runs one version, was prevented from achieving sovietization of the entire country of Finland—as he did later succeed in the case of each of the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—because he knew he could not conquer the plucky Finns. He would only inherit a thorn-in-his-side civil war and endless anti-Soviet guerrilla warfare. A compromise, the Soviet-Finnish peace treaty of March 1940 that ended the bloody war—bloody especially for the Soviet side—appeared to show that Stalin had been chastised as far as Finland was concerned.

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

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

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

The Marxist-Leninist definition of the essence of war is fully applicable to nuclear world war. [The root cause of such a war] would be the capitalist system and imperialist policy. [Consequently,] as long as war exists in the world, it always . . . will continue to be the continuation of politics by violent means [in which] the complete victory of socialism throughout the whole world is inevitable.

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

DEFENSIST/OFFENSIST CONTROVERSY

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

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

OFFENSIST WAR PLANS

Yet no less an ex-Soviet official than the Soviet officer in charge of indoctrination in the Soviet armed forces in the 1970s, Dmitri Volkogonov, erst-

while widely read, Soviet-period indoctrinator-author of Marxist-Leninist-slanted tracts on the army and war, himself began the process of “revision” in the history of that war. Two other former Red Army senior officers, General Oleg Sarin and Colonel Lev Dvoretsky describe the Nazi–Soviet pact and Stalin’s machinations as follows:

The Molotov–Ribbentrop pact set up a vicious partnership between Stalin and Hitler. It gave the two dictators a free hand in determining the destinies of other peoples, allowing them to occupy other countries’ territories. . . . The Soviet mass media in those days not only persuaded our people that the occupation of foreign territories by the Soviet Union was necessary and just, but excused the combat actions of Hitler’s Germany against democratic nations, depicting [these actions] as defending the German people against aggression. Thus is the nature of propaganda. At the same time, the USSR was supplying Germany with many things necessary for aggression against her neighbors. . . . Hypocritically smiling at each other and keeping up false pretenses, each had diabolical ideas relative to each other. Hitler was preparing for “Operation Barbarossa,” the invasion of the Soviet Union, and Stalin was preparing a preventive strike at Germany.

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

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

Running over 15,000 words and written by Pavel N. Bobilev, candidate in historical science in the Russian Federation’s Ministry Defense Institute of Military History, the long, well-sourced article is unusual in the way it assumes a generally pro-offensist line on Stalin’s war plans as revealed from new documents unearthed by Bobilev and other, fellow Russian researchers such as Mikhail I. Mel’tyukhov of the All-Russian Scientific Research Institute of Document and Archive Affairs (VNIIDAD). Some of

these documents had just been published in 1998 in the big, two-volume set of primary sources titled *The Year 1941. Dokumenty*, under the editorship of A. N. Yakovlev.¹⁰ Other documents have come from the Presidential Archive as well as from secret police and army archives accessed by Bobylev, Mel'tyukhov, and others.

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

The "preemption" option: In the General Staff document of May 15, signed by People's Commissar of Defense "S. Timoshenko" and Chief of the General Staff "G. Zhukov," titled "Considerations on a Plan for Strategic Deployment of the Armed Forces in the Event of War with Germany and Its Allies," found in Historical Archive and Military-Memorial Center of the General Staff, this statement appears: "Preempt [upredit'] the enemy by deploying against and attacking the German Army at the very moment when it has reached the deployment stage but is still not able to organize its forces into a front or coordinate all his forces."¹¹ In the section of the May 15 strategic "Considerations" where Timoshenko and Zhukov recommended concrete measures to Stalin to realize their preemptive strike, the plan reads: "In order to carry out the above-proposed plan, it is necessary to carry out in timely fashion the following measures without which it is impossible to deliver a sudden strike against the enemy whether from the air or on the ground." Thence follows exhaustive details for concealed mobilization and concentration of troops.

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

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

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

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

TWO STALIN SPEECHES, MAY 5, 1941

As to Stalin's secret speech to graduates of the military schools and his remarks at a reception thereafter, on May 5, 1941, the stenographic text of this significant speech was for the first time published very recently in its entirety (I have translated it in appendix 1). It is found in book 2 of the Yakovlev collection of documents, 1941 *God. Dokumenty (The Year 1941: Documents)*. A partial text had been discussed in academician Yuri N. Afanas'iev's edited 1996 volume, *Drugaya voina 1939–1945 (The Other War 1939–1945)*, a collection of articles written by Russian military historians.

In his secret address followed by his pithy remarks at the reception for the graduates in the Grand Kremlin Palace just weeks before the German

invasion, Stalin had reversed his and Molotov's allegations of 1939–40 that England and France were the principal "instigators of a new war." Germany was now Potential Enemy No. 1, Stalin declared. It had become the main "warmonger." *Podzhigateli voiny*—warmongers—was the epithet that had been reserved at that time by Soviet propaganda for France and England, not Nazi Germany.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Follow-up commentaries on Stalin's speech and remarks at the reception were included in various speeches or reports, some of them secret, delivered in succeeding days and weeks by such top officials as Molotov, Zhdanov, Malenkov, and Shcherbakov (secretary in charge of propaganda) and by Generals Alexander Vasilievsky and Nikolai Vatutin. In their glosses on the May 5 Stalin speech and the Leader's remarks, these subordinate party officials and senior military officers, always referring to *Khozain* (The Boss), Stalin, by name, touted the Stalin-dictated "military policy of conducting offensive actions." Among other offensivist phrases, they repeated the aggressive declaration of Lenin's: Any war fought against capitalist powers by the

USSR "is a just war, *no matter which side starts the war*" (emphasis added). Such observations as these were made publicly during the one-month run-up period just prior to the German invasion. Historian V. A. Nevezhin, of the Russian Academy of Sciences, who specializes in ideology, has devoted his latest book—*The Syndrome of Offensive War*—to exploring the offensivist indoctrination of Red Army soldiers in this period.¹²

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

Bobylev comments that up until these recent archival document disclosures were made concerning Stalin et al.'s emphasis on taking the offensive, "ideological blinders" in the Soviet as well as in the post-Soviet period distorted any discussion or speculation in Russia concerning Stalin's war plans. Such discussion fell into the "propaganda trap," as he puts it, of emphasizing the putatively defensivist rather than the authentic offensivist thrust of Soviet military planning on the eve of the German invasion. (The same accusation is directed at certain Western writers as well, who had become suspicious of the claims of the "ringer," the émigré Viktor Suvorov, who had not had access to the new documents.)

"Thus, it is not surprising," Bobylev concludes, that nothing substantive was written about the May 15 "Considerations" or Stalin's May 5 speech and his remarks at the graduates' reception "either in the academic journals or in memoir literature." Neither have Western scholars objectively discussed these disclosures, assuming the documents were at

their disposal. But since these revelations, he hastens to say, the matter is being “deeply researched.”

RED ARMY CONCENTRATIONS ON THE EVE OF JUNE 22

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

As some Russian historians (including some in the West) had already noted, the author discusses how Stalin and his General Staff officers made crucial mistakes in the way Red Army forces were ordered by Headquarters in spring 1941 to be deployed in such great numbers so near the front lines without sufficient defensive measures having been taken—because essentially the Red Army’s tactics were offensivist, not defensive. Moreover, the dangerous gambit of deploying so near German lines in order to be able to jump off to wage offensive war, or a “preemptive strike,” was designed before what Stalin had called in his reception speech “modern weaponry” was actually in the hands of the deployed Red Army and Red Air Force. Another factor in bringing about the catastrophe of June 22, notes the Russian military historian, is that it appeared that Stalin and Red Army staff officers did not expect a German move at least until mid-July. (There is some evidence that Stalin projected the date even further into the future.)

NEGLECT OF RETREAT

The anathema of retreat afflicting Red Army war planning was the other side of the offensivist coin. In spring 1941 no concerted preparations were made for tactical, let alone strategic, withdrawal (retreat) if the Red Army were taken by surprise or at some point were overwhelmed by the enemy.

To Stalin’s way of thinking, inherited from Lenin, “retreating”—*otstupleniye*—was virtually a crime. The professional military thought twice about even using the words *otstupleniye* or *otkhod* (meaning “withdrawal,” a slightly more acceptable term).

The very wording of the definitions of *offense* and *defense* in the post-World War II *Military Encyclopedic Dictionary* differs significantly. *Offense* is defined as the “basic [*osnovnyi*] form of [Soviet] military actions.” *Defense* is defined simply as a “form of military activities.”¹⁴ The extreme opprobrium attached by the Stalin regime to the idea of “retreating” was proved when some of the Soviet armies were forced to withdraw during the opening days and weeks of the German onslaughts of Barbarossa. Stalin had senior officers of such retreating units in some cases executed for ordering tactical withdrawals. Rank-and-file soldiers, or *vanki* (GIs), would themselves be shot as well (according to soldier eyewitnesses, in the back of the head) if and when political commissars or NKVD officers, both of whom were distributed within the ranks, caught them retreating, let alone defecting to the enemy. Hundreds of thousands of soldiers and civilians actually did defect in the opening days and weeks of hostilities when they regarded the invading Germans as “liberators.” The estimated number of Red Army deserters at that time has been put at 630,000.¹⁵

EXPECTED TIME AND PLACE OF THE GERMAN ASSAULT

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

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

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

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

SECRECY, CONCEALMENT, AND SURPRISE

Both elements—concealment and surprise—in achieving mastery in the very opening phase of hostilities were, in any case, recognized and appreciated by both German and Soviet military planners and theoreticians long before the war started in 1941 or in the first phase in 1939. This was basic to both armies’ operational art, especially as both anticipated waging mainly offensive actions.

The Soviet leadership kept abreast of—and misled by—the Wehrmacht’s ceaseless output of misleading disinformation and dissimulation in the weeks just before Barbarossa. In this period the Germans tried to fool the Soviets into thinking that the large deployments of German troops along Russia’s western borders were merely in preparation for their later deployment to the north against the British. Some of the input of Soviet

intelligence to Moscow, in reporting this farfetched German disinformation, was described by Soviet agents as disinformation when they conveyed it through secret channels. But the warning that it might be *dez* (i.e., *dezinformatsiya*, disinformation) fell on deaf ears when it reached the highest Soviet officials.

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

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

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

Such secrecy about offensive war planning was a most sensitive point with Stalin. The dictator went out of his way to conceal any Soviet plans or preparations for launching an attack. He would sternly warn and reprimand, if not severely punish, any commander who gave the slightest indication to the enemy of Soviet intentions to launch preemptive attacks lest it provide an excuse to the Germans to attack first. All mobilizations and deployments were to be concealed and carried out at night. No anti-aircraft fire was to be directed at any overflying German spotter planes or

other German aircraft. Such violations of Soviet airspace, of which there were many in the weeks before the invasion, were to be ignored and were ignored lest the Germans be “instigated” into attacking because of such “incidents.” On the German side, concealment of the opening blitzkrieg invasion against the Red Army, as previously noted, was hidden even from Wehrmacht line commanders as well as from close aides to Hitler (exceptions were Goebbels, Goering, Ribbentrop, and a few others plus some in the General Staff).

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

BLAME STALIN OR THE MILITARY?

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

In this context the Russian military writer in the RF Ministry of Defense Institute mounts a strong criticism of Marshal Zhukov. In his latter-day memoirs (in the 1960s and 1970s), the marshal, contends Bobylev, had concocted a mainly self-serving, self-exonerating version of what actually occurred in mid-1941 on the eve of the war. Zhukov’s heavily edited if not strongly slanted memoirs simply overlook the numerous miscalculations made by the Soviet military personnel themselves and the way the military had evidently misled Stalin, who, of course, was not guiltless either. An important reason for their miscalculations, he insists, stemmed from Red Army emphasis on offensiveness to the detriment of taking defensive measures.

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

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

RUSSIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCE HISTORIAN’S FINDINGS

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

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

- By the end of the 1930s, the Bolshevik leadership recognized the “illusoriness,” as he puts it, of the Soviet pursuit of world revolution as a means of liquidating the “capitalist encirclement.” Stalin began to think in more pragmatic terms. He began to view offensive actions

by the Red Army against certain countries as a military, "world-revolutionary cause." The several invasions of neighboring countries in the period 1939–40 thus were characterized in Soviet propaganda as "revolutionary crusades."

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

- There was a general awareness that the "Big War" lay in the near future. It was surmised by Stalin that Germany would be the Soviet enemy in that war despite the Nazi–Soviet agreements of 1939 and the subsequent toning down of mutually hostile propaganda on both sides. At the same time Soviet propaganda singled out for attack the English and French "imperialists," "warmongers," "Polish subjugators," "Rumanian barons," and so on. By fall 1940, when Soviet–German relations began to show strains, anti-Nazi motifs began to creep into Soviet propaganda, although the basic line on "friendship" continued. However, by the end of that year the propaganda accent shifted to one of military preparedness—in fact, writes Nevezhin, to a "transition in the propaganda to military themes."
- By spring 1941 the propaganda line was based on new directives issued by the former chief of Red Army indoctrination until late 1940, and after that the deputy commissar of defense, Lev Mekhlis, who began to switch to offensivism. This was in line with Stalin's speech and remarks to the military school graduates on May 5. "Stalin let it be known," notes Nevezhin, "that from now on Germany was to be regarded as the potential enemy in war. As a consequence, Stalin said, it was necessary to change from a peace policy to one of a 'defense policy based on offensive actions.' Therefore, propaganda should adopt the same offensivist spirit."

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

"As a result a degree of opprobrium became associated with the defensist [*oboronitel'nyy*] positions held by some of the military while the 'offensivist' spirit penetrating the propaganda became embarrassing to them."

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

CRITICS OF SUVOROV AND OTHERS

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

One of the more articulate if not vehement of the "defensists" is Gabriel Gorodetsky, Russian émigré scholar in Tel Aviv and author of

several volumes on Soviet foreign policy. In his books, *The Myth of the "Ice-Breaker" on the Eve of War* and *Grand Delusion: Stalin and the German Invasion of Russia*, Gorodetsky scores the offensivist line, and Suvorov in particular, along a number of vectors as follows.

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

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

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

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

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

Too, his reference to a "combination" of defense and offense in traditional Soviet military doctrine is puzzling. As noted in the introduction, even a high-ranking contemporary official such as former President Yeltsin's military adviser and former Russian first deputy minister of de-

fense, Andrei A. Kokoshin, describes Soviet military thought from 1917 to 1991 as follows: "The offensive character of Soviet military strategy was quite obvious. [As the 1939 Red Army Field Manual states] the Red Army will be the most offensivist army of all armies that have ever been offensively oriented. We will wage an offensive war, carrying the conflict into the territory of the adversary . . . with the aim of the total defeat of the enemy."¹⁷ Kokoshin further complains in his 1995 book that the traditional emphasis put on Red Army offensivism led to neglect of defense in military strategy, which showed up so critically, he says, in the debacle of June 22 and thereafter.

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

The writer then refers to a defense plan—a "defensive policy," as he calls it, possibly meaning "defensivist"—drawn up by Timoshenko, Zhukov, and Zhdanov on May 17, two days following the more offensivist-sounding May 15 "Considerations." Referring to a document cited by Volkogonov, Gorodetsky maintains that it appears that the May 17 Red Army General Staff report took the defensivist line that it did because there was doubt that a "preemptive strike was possible at this stage" (emphasis added). The report, he continues, "reflects a desperate attempt to put the house in order. . . . Consequently, a new set of orders [of May 17] clearly displays a defensive disposition and the ineptitude of the armed forces," which, as the report states, was seen from a survey conducted by the military over winter 1940–41.

There is no solid support for Gorodetsky's assumption. Indeed, some of the documents of late May 1941 that are reproduced in the Yakovlev

compilation, *The Year 1941*, do implicitly reflect a defensist “disposition,” including those of May 17 and May 2, the latter of which even mentions “withdrawal” (*otkhod*). But these documents consist of directives issued by Timoshenko and Zhukov to various commands along the Western Front to adopt the usual defensive measures *during the process of deploying and concentrating troops prior to any attack they might make*, as the orders to the military districts along the western frontier specifically state. These orders neither contradict nor replace any of the overall strategic planning as outlined in the basic document of May 15. The directive of May 20 signed by Timoshenko and Zhukov strongly emphasizes building defensive fortifications to “prevent any enemy breakthroughs.” Yet this must be interpreted as meaning unexpected, premature enemy breakthroughs that might disrupt Soviet plans for attack as the units were getting into position. Significantly, a point overlooked by Gorodetsky, the same order mentions the need to ready the troops “under favorable conditions to launch sudden strikes”: “. . . launch sudden strikes”—as Stalin used to say, “Clear, one would think.”

Meanwhile, it is interesting to note that among the documents for the immediate pre-June 22 period the number of intelligence “warning” reports to Stalin et al. increase. So the presumption might be that as these reports poured in, the military—and perhaps even Stalin—then became more conscious of the need for defensive preparations after having earlier put the stress on offensism. Or perhaps a combination of offense and defense, as Gorodetsky seems to suggest, is what was reflected in the various directives of late May or early June.

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

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

Shcherbakov then concludes: “Thus, Leninism teaches that the country of socialism, exploiting a favorable international situation, must and cannot

avoid seizing the initiative in launching offensive actions against the capitalist encirclement with the aim of extending the front of socialism.”

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

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

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

Respected Russian historian Aleksandr Nekrich references a letter from one V. P. Zolotov, posted in summer 1939, that was found recently in the archive of a Soviet party secretary and close Stalin aide, Andrei A. Zhdanov. The writer addresses the issue of whether the Soviet Union should

adopt a policy of collective security with the Western Allies against Hitler. He then goes on to draw certain inferences from this as affects the Soviet posture in June 1941. The letter reads in part as follows:

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

Nekrich makes this comment on the letter:

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

Stalin would use this tactic with considerable success.

NOTES

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

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

Regarding the third, ex-KGB Major-General Oleg Kalugin is an author and former deputy chief and then head of foreign intelligence (First Directorate) of the KGB serving in the 1970s and 1980s at the time of Brezhnev, Andropov, Chernenko, and Gorbachev. He wrote this interpretation, and more on the topic, to me in an e-mail message in 1998. Kalugin appears to be correct in asserting (see below) that no document exists that indicates Stalin was preparing to attack Germany precisely in mid-1941 or 1942. Author Ernst Topitsch errs in stating that Stalin's May 5, 1941, address to the graduating cadets included a reference to a date of attack (*Stalin's War: A Radical New Theory on the Origins of the Second World War* [New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987], p. 8).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

10. See Yakovlev, *1941 god. Dokumenty*. In reproducing the two important Stalin speeches on May 5, 1941, the volume's editor gives this background for the Stalin texts published: "No stenographic copy of Stalin's speech [to the graduates] was made and no text was found among his personal papers. In May 1948 the Central Party Archive (Ts.PA of the Central Committee) received a typed copy of the speech that was recorded by K. V. Semyonov (presumably an employee in the Ministry of Defense . . .). It was planned to include the speech in the 14th volume of Stalin's *Works*. But this volume never appeared. The accuracy of the Semyonov text is testified by the fact of its similarity to the paraphrasing found in the diary of G. M. Dimitrov [head of the Comintern], who was present at the May 5 gathering in the Kremlin and who copied the text into his diary." Yakovlev then reproduces the whole Dimitrov text. Interestingly, as the editor notes, *Pravda* (May 6, 1941) printed a terse notice that the ceremony had been held and that Stalin had addressed the graduates. Then the Soviet authorities proceeded to leak but falsify

the contents and tenor of the speech and Stalin's remarks during the reception. These leaks were targeted on London, Berlin, and elsewhere amid speculation that the Red Army was said by Stalin to be not yet prepared for war, that the Soviets were trying to ward off any hostilities until autumn 1941. German Ambassador Schulenburg was led to believe, by well-aimed leaks to him, what Stalin purportedly had said on May 5—namely, that “new Soviet compromises with Germany” were in the offing! On his part, author Alexander Werth, based in London, also was misled to report in his book, for British consumption, *Russia at War 1941–1945*, according to Yakovlev, that Stalin had indicated in his remarks on May 5 that “talks with England were still not concluded” and that Stalin “was attempting to delay a conflict until autumn.” Such false leakage amounted to Soviet disinformation in which even experienced journalists could be taken in.

11. Yakovlev, *1941 god. Dokumenty*, book 2, pp. 215–20, emphasis added.

12. V. A. Nevezhin, *Sindrom Nastupatel'noi Voyny* (Moscow: Airo-XX, 1997). The author cites archives at the secret police, the office the Russian president, the Russian Ministry of Defense, and others. Another historian who relies on the latest documentary evidence is Mikhail I. Mel'tyukhov. His findings are discussed in the conclusions in chapter 8.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6

Stalin's Response to “Barbarossa”—I

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

—Nikita Khrushchev

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

—V. M. Molotov

June 22, 1941—Russia's “December 7”—is a day that for Russians will forever live in infamy. Sixty years ago the Nazi armies, following Generals Mannstein's and Guderian's battle-tested blitzkrieg tactics and strategy applied so successfully against Poland in autumn 1939 and the Western Allies in 1940, juggernauted into the Soviet Union in massive strength before the first light of dawn. Within hours they had advanced 30, 40, and

long-held notion of fratricidal war between the capitalist powers. If true, one wonders how Stalin could have put such a low price on Lend-Lease aid, which obviously would not have been forthcoming, as it had been since late 1941, with any such severe weakening of the “antifascist coalition” of the USSR and the Western Allies that was formed soon after the German attack on the Soviet Union.

15. One such historian, M. I. Mel'tyukhov, goes so far as to maintain that if all of Europe had been sovietized, it would have provided much-needed “stability” to the region. Mel'tyukhov, as we saw, documents Stalin's offensive plans in his book *Stalin's Lost Opportunity*, published in 2000. He is a historian connected with one of Russia's oldest archive/research institutes, VNIIDAD, on Cherkasskiy Square in Moscow.

APPENDIX 1

Stalin's Third Speech, May 5, 1941

“Permit me to make a correction. A peace policy keeps our nation at peace. A peace policy is a good thing. At one time or another we have followed a line based on defense. Up to now we have not re-equipped our army nor supplied it with modern weapons.

“But now that our army is undergoing reconstruction and we have become strong, it is necessary to shift from defense to offense.

“In providing the defense of our country, we must act in an offensivist [*nastupatel'nyy*] way. Our military policy must change from defense to waging offensive actions. We must endow our indoctrination, our propaganda and agitation, and our press with an offensivist spirit. The Red Army is a modern army—a modern army that is an offensivist army [*nastupatel'naya armiya*].”

NOTE

This is from A. N. Yakovlev, ed., *1941 god. Dokumenty* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodniy Fond “Demokratiya,” 1998), p. 162, my translation. The document's editor notes that pursuant to Stalin's speech before the graduates the Main Administration for Political Propaganda in the Red Army was ordered in the light of Stalin's remarks to reconstruct its indoctrination along the lines of Stalin's speeches. The new orders reproduced quotes from Lenin in which he emphasized the need for waging offensives. The editor further notes, following Stalin's speeches to the graduates, there were changes in administrators throughout the whole system of propaganda and indoctrination in which such

“hawkish” officials as A. A. Zhdanov and A. S. Shcherbakov were promoted in this area of party work. Stalin made Zhdanov his chief assistant in the Secretariat in charge of civilian and military propaganda. This was followed by a number of militant secret and public speeches by Zhdanov and Shcherbakov extolling offensivism.

APPENDIX 2

May 15, 1941, Memorandum

The following is an excerpt from the memorandum of the people’s commissar of defense and chief of the General Staff of the Red Army to the chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars, J. V. Stalin, “Considerations of the Plan for the Strategic Deployment of the Armed Forces of the Soviet Union in Case of War with Germany and Its Allies,” May 15, 1941:

“At the present time, according to data from the Intelligence Administration of the Red Army, Germany has deployed nearly 230 infantry divisions, 22 tank divisions, 20 motorized infantry divisions, 8 air divisions, and 4 cavalry divisions all totaling 284 divisions. . . .

“It is estimated that given the present political situation in today’s Germany, in the event of an attack on the USSR, Germany is able to deploy against us 137 infantry divisions, 19 tank divisions, 15 motorized infantry divisions, 4 cavalry divisions, and 5 paratroop divisions all totaling 180 divisions. . . .

“Taking into account the fact that at the present time Germany can maintain its army in mobilized readiness together with its deployed forces in the rear, it has the capability of preempting us in deploying and mounting a surprise strike.

“In order to prevent this from happening while destroying the German army, I consider it necessary that in no way should we yield the initiative to the German command.

“We should preempt [*upredit’*] the enemy by deploying and attacking the German Army at the very moment when it has reached the stage of deploying [in order to wage an attack] but has not yet organized itself into a front or concentrated all units of its armed forces along the front. . . .

"In order that the above may be carried out in the way indicated, it is necessary in timely fashion to take the following measures without which it will not be possible to deliver a surprise strike against the enemy both from the air as well as on the ground. [There follows a list of measures relating to the locations along the Western Front for deploying Red Army infantry, tank, etc., divisions and the number of days or weeks the various measures will take to execute the Red Army's "surprise strike."]

[signed] "USSR People's Commissar of Defense, S. Timoshenko Chief of the General Staff of the RKKA, G. Zhukov."

NOTE

This is from A. N. Yakovlev, ed., *1941 god. Dokumenty* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi Fond "Demokratiya," 1998), pp. 215–20, my translation.

APPENDIX 3

Stalin's Speech to the Politburo, August 19, 1939

The following is J. V. Stalin's secret speech to the Politburo of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, August 19, 1939:

"The question of war or peace has entered a critical phase for us. If we conclude a mutual assistance treaty with France and Great Britain, Germany will back off of Poland and seek a 'modus vivendi' with the Western Powers. War would thus be prevented but future events could take a serious turn for the USSR. If we accept Germany's proposal to conclude with it a nonaggression pact, Germany will then attack Poland and Europe will be thrown into serious acts of unrest and disorder. Under these circumstances we will have many chances of remaining out of the conflict while being able to hope for our own timely entrance into war.

"The experience of the past 20 years shows that in peacetime it is impossible to maintain a Communist movement throughout Europe that would be strong enough so that a Bolshevik party could seize power. A dictatorship by this party becomes possible only as the result of a big war. We are making our choice and it is clear. We must accept the German proposal and politely send the Anglo-French delegations back home. The first advantage we will get will be the destruction of Poland up to the very approaches to Warsaw, including Ukrainian Galicia.

"Germany has given us full leeway in the Baltic Countries and has no objection to returning Bessarabia to the USSR. Germany is also prepared to yield on giving us a sphere of influence in Rumania, Bulgaria, and Hungary. The question of Yugoslavia still remains open. . . . At the same time we must anticipate what will ensue from the destruction of Germany in war as well as from a German victory. If it is destroyed, the sovietization of Germany follows inevitably and a Communist government will be

established. We must not forget that a sovietized Germany would face great danger if such sovietization occurred after the defeat of Germany in a short war. England and France would be powerful enough to seize Berlin and destroy a Soviet Germany. We would not be able to come to the aid of our Bolshevik comrades in Germany.

"Therefore, our task consists in helping Germany wage war for as long as possible with the aim in view that England and France would be in no condition to defeat a sovietized Germany. While hewing to a policy of neutrality and while waiting for its hour to come, the USSR will lend aid to today's Germany and supply it with raw materials and foodstuffs. Of course, it follows that we will not allow such shipments to jeopardize our economy or weaken our armed might.

"At the same time we must conduct active Communist propaganda especially as directed at the Anglo-French bloc and primarily in France. We must be prepared for the fact that in France in wartime the Communist Party there must abandon legal activities and go underground. We realize that such work will require an enormous sacrifice in lives. However, we have no doubts about our French comrades. Above all their task will be to break up and demoralize the French army and police. If this preparatory work is completed in a satisfactory way, the security of Soviet Germany is assured. This will likewise ensure the sovietization of France.

"To realize these plans it is necessary that war last as long as possible and that all efforts should be made, whether in Western Europe or the Balkans, to see that this happens.

"Let us look now at the second possibility—namely, that Germany becomes the victor. Some propose that this turn of events would present us with a serious danger. There is some truth to this notion. But it would be erroneous to believe that such a danger is as near and as great as they assume. If Germany achieves victory in the war, it will emerge from it in such a depleted state that to start a conflict with the USSR will take at very least 10 years.

"Germany's main task would then be to keep a watch on the defeated England and France to prevent their restoration. On the other hand, a victorious Germany would have at its disposal a large territory. Over the course of many decades, Germany would be preoccupied with the 'exploitation' of these territories and establishing in them the German order. Obviously, Germany would be too preoccupied to move against us. There is still another factor that enhances our security. In the defeated France, the French Communist Party would be very strong. A Communist revolution would follow inevitably. We would exploit this in order to come to the aid of France and win it over as an ally. Later these peoples who fell under the "protection" of a victorious Germany likewise would become

our allies. We would have a large arena in which to develop the world revolution.

"Comrades! It is in the interests of the USSR, the Land of the Toilers, that war breaks out between the Reich and the capitalist Anglo-French bloc. Everything must be done so that the war lasts as long as possible in order that both sides become exhausted. Namely for this reason we must agree to the pact proposed by Germany and use it so that once this war is declared, it will last for a maximum amount of time. We must step up our propaganda within the combatant-countries so that they are prepared for that time when the war ends."

NOTE

This is from the central collection of Historical Documents of the former "Special Archive of the USSR," Folder 7, Set 1, Doc. 1223. It is reproduced from Dimitrov's diary in T. S. Bushuyev, "Proklinaya—Poprobuite Ponyat'" ("Curse It but Try to Understand"), review of two books by Viktor Suvorov, *Novyi Mir*, no. 12 (1994), pp. 232–33.