

Letter from Red Square

from

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a cesc dispatch

Wednesday 8th January 2014

Letter from Red Square by William Shepherd

When Hitler invaded Poland in September 1939 he did so secure in the knowledge that while he might face war with Britain and France in the west his eastern flank was safeguarded by *Soviet Neutrality* in the form of a non-aggression pact agreed with Stalin on 23rd August 1939.

Stalin concluded this pact in return for a secret agreement guaranteeing a Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. Stalin's decision to do this deal on the eve of a new European war was a dramatic, last minute improvisation. Only a few days before, Stalin had been negotiating the terms of an alliance with Britain and France.

The first public inkling of the *German-Soviet Pact* of August 1939 was an announcement on 21st August 1939 that Joachim von Ribbentrop, the *German Foreign Minister*, was to fly to Moscow to negotiate a non-aggression treaty



with the USSR. Ribbentrop arrived in the Soviet capital on 23rd August 1939 and the deal was struck later that day.

On Thursday 24th August 1939 *Pravda* and *Izvestia* carried news of the pact, complete with the front-page picture of Soviet foreign commissar, Molotov, signing the treaty with a smiling Stalin looking on.

(left) Molotov, Ribbentrop and Stalin at the signing of the German-Soviet Pact in 1939

The *Man on the Clapham Omnibus*, brought up on a daily diet of disinformation from the British newspapers, now believed that war with Germany was inevitable.¹

Among the British inner circle the surprise was greater because they were aware that for the previous six months the Soviet Union had been negotiating an *anti-Hitler* alliance² with the British and French... negotiations that had begun in response to the German annexation of Czechoslovakia in March 1939 with the intent of forestalling a *German Invasion* of the *Danzig Corridor*, acquired by Poland in the *1919 Versailles Diktat*.

To the innermost circle of the *British Cabinet* the reaction was one of shock... and a sense of being outwitted. On the very day the Soviet Union's *Neutrality Pact* was announced in Moscow and Berlin, Neville Chamberlain, the British Prime Minister, and Lord Halifax, the Foreign Secretary,

had arranged for the Deputy German Führer, Hermann Göring, to fly to London to finalise a peace deal negotiated during a month of shuttle diplomacy between Berlin, London and Stockholm.³

After signing the *Nazi-Soviet Pact*, the most important question for the Soviet Union was what would happen to Poland. That question was answered by the stunning success of the *German Blitzkrieg* invasion of Poland. As early as Sunday 3rd September 1939 Ribbentrop was telling the Soviets that the Polish army would be beaten in a few weeks. The Soviets were more cautious and in notes from Molotov to Ribbentrop on 5th and 9th September the

¹ Between 1906 and 1926 the *London Times* delivered a daily dose of anti-German propaganda prepared by Lord Milner's cabal of *Boer War* veterans. Between 1926-1936, there was a newspaper propaganda war between several competing factions, including capitalist disinformation (*City of London*), foreign communist influence (USSR), fascist (German) influence, peacemonger editors & journalists (*Daily Herald*), warmonger editors & journalists (*Daily Mail*) and elitist class-based 'quality' media (*London Times* and *BBC Home Service*). See [Warmongers & Newspapers](#) by William Shepherd.

² In April 1939 the Soviets proposed a full-blown triple alliance between Britain, France and the USSR...a military coalition that would guarantee European security against further German expansion. By the end of July agreement had been reached on the political terms of the alliance and the negotiations moved into their final phase with the opening of military talks in Moscow.

³ See [Göring's Peace Mission](#) by William Shepherd.

Soviets merely confirmed that they would abide by the *Secret Protocol* to the German-Soviet pact of 23rd August 1939 and move the *Red Army* into Eastern Poland on Sunday 17th September 1939, agreeing that Soviet action was necessary but that premature intervention might injure our cause and promote unity among our opponents.

Stalin's thinking had been revealed at a meeting with Dimitrov, the leader of the *Communist International*, on 7th September 1939: 'A war is on between two groups of capitalist countries...for the redivision of the world, for the domination of the world! We see nothing wrong in their having a good hard fight and weakening each other. It would be fine if, at the hands of Germany, the position of the richest capitalist countries (especially England) were shaken.'⁴

(right) *Secret Protocol on the Division of Poland between Germany and the USSR*⁵

The *Red Army* crossed into Poland on Sunday 17th September 1939. In announcing the action, Molotov declared on the radio that the *German-Polish War* had demonstrated the bankruptcy of the *Polish State*. In these circumstances, said Molotov, the Soviet armed forces were entering the country to aid and protect Ukrainians and Belorussians living on Polish territory.

This patriotic rationale was reinforced by Soviet newspaper reports of Polish repression of Ukrainians and Belorussians and of the cheering welcome given to their *Red Army Liberators* from the east.

The Polish territories occupied by the *Red Army* were the western regions of the Ukraine and Belorussia east of the *Curzon Line*.⁶ The Soviet Union was set to reclaim the land taken from them by the March 1921 *Treaty of Riga*.

Underlying the Soviet Union's calculations was a fundamentalist vision of the inevitability of *Capitalist Crises* and *Imperialist Wars*. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s Stalin had warned that if the *Imperialists* attempted to resolve their internal difficulties by waging war on the



⁴ Stalin continued: 'Hitler, without understanding it or desiring it, is shaking and undermining the capitalist system. We can manoeuvre, pit one side against the other to set them fighting with each other as fiercely as possible. The *Non-Aggression Pact* is to a certain degree helping Germany. Next time we'll urge on the other side. Formerly the Polish state was a national state. Therefore revolutionaries defended it against partition and enslavement. Now Poland is a fascist state, oppressing the Ukrainians, Belorussians and so forth. The annihilation of that state under current conditions would mean one fewer bourgeois fascist state to contend with! What would be the harm if as a result of the rout of Poland we were to extend the socialist system onto new territories and populations?' These statements derive from Dimitrov's diary...the most important source of Stalin's private thinking during the war years. The occasion was the meeting for the announcement by Stalin of a change in the *Comintern's* political line, which since its *7th World Congress* in 1935 had been based on an anti-fascist front, including support for an alliance between the Soviet Union and the western bourgeois democracies. After the *German-Soviet Pact* the *Comintern* and its member parties continued with the popular non-aggressive treaty with Germany while continuing to advocate a war of national defence against fascist aggression. Stalin did not retrospectively repudiate the popular front policy, indeed Dimitrov also records Stalin saying that 'we preferred agreements with the so-called democratic countries and therefore conducted negotiations. But the English and the French wanted us for farmhands at no cost!' Circumstances have changed, however, and the war that has actually broken out is an inter-imperialist conflict and the 'division of capitalist states into fascist and democratic no longer makes sense'.

⁵ Source of maps: *Stalin's Wars* by Geoffrey Roberts (Yale University Press, 2006, 468 pages, ISBN 978-0-300-13622-7).

⁶ The *Curzon Line* was the ethnographical frontier between Russia and Poland drawn up by a commission of the *Paris Peace Conference* in 1919 and named after the *British Foreign Secretary* who chaired it. The commission's aim was to provide a basis for a ceasefire in the *Russo-Polish War* that had just broken out. The final border, however, was determined by Polish military successes in the war, which led to the Soviet Union ceding Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia to Poland.

Soviet Union, it would be their own downfall as they would be faced with working-class revolt and revolution in their own countries.

But Stalin was too much of a realist to base Soviet security on the hope of revolution abroad. Experience had taught him that the revolutionary movement in the advanced *Capitalist States* was very weak and not to be relied upon. Hence Stalin's political directives to Dimitrov after the outbreak of war were cautious and conservative.⁷ The *Communists* of Stalin's era were schooled in the belief that their first duty was to defend the USSR...especially in time of war when the very existence of the *Socialist State* could be under threat.

A second Soviet-German peace offensive began with a new round of meetings between Stalin and Ribbentrop on Wednesday 27th September 1939. Ribbentrop had flown to Moscow to discuss Soviet proposals for changes to the Soviet-German boundary in occupied Poland.

Stalin told Ribbentrop that the division of Poland should as far as possible be along ethnographic lines. That would entail the transfer of Polish territory from the Soviet to the German sphere of influence. In exchange Lithuania would be transferred to the Soviet sphere of influence in the Baltic.

In presenting this deal to Ribbentrop, Stalin emphasized that a demarcation line that separated ethnic Poland from the predominantly non-Polish ethnic areas bordering the USSR would pre-empt possible future nationalist agitation for a *United Poland*.

The upshot of these discussions was the *German-Soviet Boundary and Friendship Treaty* of 28th September 1939 that specified the new boundary in Poland and (in a secret protocol) transferred Lithuania to the Soviet sphere of influence. The same day the Soviet Union and Germany issued a joint statement calling for an end to the *European War* now that there was no longer a *Polish State*.⁸

The German conquest of Poland changed the balance of power in Europe and changed Soviet policy, which would now be to strengthen their strategic position in any way possible...short of being dragged into a *European War*. This meant close co-operation with the Germans and support for *German Peace Proposals*. However Stalin was reluctant to burn his bridges with Britain and France, preferring to balance his commitments to Hitler by keeping open the door to a reconstruction of Soviet relations with the western powers.

Although it was difficult to predict how long the new relationship between Germany and the Soviet Union would last, a long-term partnership was not out of the question. There was a precedent in the *1922 Treaty of Rapallo*, an agreement that re-established diplomatic relations between the two states after the *Brest-Litovsk Treaty*.⁹

The *Rapallo Relationship* had led to a decade of intensive economic, political and military co-operation and only broke down when the *German National Socialists* came to power in 1933 though there were intermittent efforts to restore a degree of co-operation, particularly in trade relations.¹⁰ The rise to power of the *National Socialists* posed a threat to the Soviets, forcing them to seek common cause with the *Western Democracies*.

⁷ At a meeting with Dimitrov on 25 October 1939, Stalin observed that 'during the first imperialist war the *Bolsheviks* overestimated the situation. We all got ahead of ourselves and made mistakes...there must be no copying now of the positions the *Bolsheviks* held then. It should also be remembered that the current situation is different. At that time there were no *Communists* in power. Now there is the Soviet Union'.

⁸ Rather more legalistically, the Germans and Soviets argued that the *French Guarantee* was to the *Polish State* and could no longer be invoked by France...or supported by the United Kingdom...in the absence of that state. The *Joint Statement* was followed by calls from Hitler for a negotiated peace, a demand echoed by Molotov in his speech to the *Supreme Soviet* at the end of October 1939, in which he blamed the British and French for the continuation of the war, arguing that their real motive was the defence of their *Colonial Possessions* and the ongoing inter-imperialist struggle for *World Supremacy*.

⁹ The *Treaty of Brest-Litovsk* was signed on March 3, 1918, between the new *Bolshevik* government of Russia and the *Central Powers* (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and Turkey), which ended Russia's participation in *World War I*. The treaty was signed at Brest in Belarus after two months of negotiations and was forced on the Soviet government by the threat of further advances by German and Austrian forces. By the treaty, Soviet Russia defaulted on *Imperial Russia's* debt repayments to the *Triple Entente* alliance. Russia ceded the Baltic States to Germany, recognized the independence of Ukraine, and agreed to pay six billion German gold marks in reparations. The *German General Staff* had formulated extraordinarily harsh terms that shocked even the German negotiator. Poland was not mentioned in the treaty, as the Germans refused to recognize the presence of any Polish representatives, which in turn led to Polish protests. When Germany later complained that the *Treaty of Versailles* of 1919 was too harsh on them, the *Allies* (and historians favourable to the *Allies*) responded that it was more benign than *Brest-Litovsk*. Under the treaty, the *Baltic States* were meant to become German vassal states under German princelings. The treaty was practically obsolete by November 1918, when Germany surrendered to the *Allies*. However it did provide some relief to the *Bolsheviks*, already fighting the *Russian Civil War*, as it removed from the negotiating table the Russian claims on Poland, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Belarus, Ukraine, and Lithuania.

¹⁰ In his discussions with Ribbentrop on 27 September 1939 Stalin emphasized the *Rapallo* precedent: 'Soviet foreign policy has always been based on belief in the possibility of co-operation between Germany and the Soviet Union. When the *Bolsheviks* came to power they were accused of being paid German agents. It was the *Bolsheviks* who concluded the *Rapallo Agreement*. It provided the basis for the expansion and deepening of mutual relations. When the *National Socialists* came to power in

But circumstances changed with the signing of the *German-Soviet Pact* of August 1939. Germany now represented an opportunity instead of a threat to the USSR. The Soviets knew this opportunity might become a threat at any time. But in the meantime they would make what gains they could from their *New Rapallo Treaty*.

During the 1920s the Soviet Union and Germany had been important trading partners. With the 1939 *German-Soviet Agreements* there was a significant revival of economic relations between the two states. Under the aegis of economic agreements...signed in August 1939, February 1940 and January 1941...Soviet-German exports and imports increased tenfold, returning to the levels in the early 1930s. The pattern of trade was similar.

The Germans provided the Russian with credits to buy machinery and manufactured goods and in return the Soviets exported raw materials to Germany. Between January 1940 and June 1941 the Soviet Union supplied Germany with 1.5 million tons of grain, 100,000 tons of cotton, 2 million tons of petroleum products, 1.5 million tons of timber, 140,000 tons of manganese and 26,000 tons of chromium. Grain, petroleum, manganese and chromium were vital ingredients of the German war economy, now facing a British naval blockade.¹¹ For their side of the deal the Soviets received an equivalent amount of machine tools, finished metals, chemical products and military equipment. In value terms the imports and exports balanced out at around 500 million marks each way.

The irony of the *German-Soviet Pact* was that Hitler became heavily dependent on Stalin for the resources he needed to attack the Soviet Union. It was no wonder that Hitler repeatedly insisted on Germany fulfilling the terms of its economic treaties. He could not conquer any Soviet territory until he first received enough Soviet raw materials. Without Soviet deliveries Germany could barely have attacked the Soviet Union, let alone come close to victory. Germany's stockpiles of oil, manganese and grain would have been completely exhausted by the late summer of 1941. And Germany's rubber supply would have run out six months earlier.

Stalin's co-operation with Hitler in the military sphere was more circumscribed but still valuable to the Germans. When German bombers attacked Poland on Sunday 1st September 1939, following several border skirmishes, they were aided by directional signals from a Soviet radio station.

This was followed by co-ordination of the Soviet and German armed forces after the *Red Army* invaded Poland on 17th September 1939. The Soviets opened their ports in the Arctic Sea to German ships requiring refuge and allowed the Germans to establish a secret U-boat base on Soviet territory near Murmansk...a base that remained operational until it became redundant after the German invasion of Norway in April 1940.

On the ideological front the Soviet press stopped its attacks on *Fascism* and *Nazism*, while in the cultural sphere a number of steps were taken to re-establish and develop links between Germany and the USSR. Geopolitically, while the *European War* continued, and while Hitler needed friendship with Stalin to protect his eastern flank, the Germans did not compete with the Soviets in their designated USSR sphere of influence in the Baltic.¹²

Until the fall of France in June 1940 the *German-Soviet Pact* served Stalin well. The deal with Hitler kept the USSR out of the *European War* for two years, averted the nightmare of a Soviet-German clash on the *Eastern Front* while Britain and France stood on the sidelines, and provided more time to prepare the country's defences. Political and territorial gains had been made in Poland and the Baltic States.

The revival of the *Rapallo Relationship* offered many economic benefits to the Soviet Union and Hitler's neutrality during the *Winter War* had been very welcome. It was by no means a one-sided balance sheet. Hitler made many

Germany, relations worsened as the German government deemed it necessary to give priority to internal political considerations. After a while this issue exhausted itself and the German government displayed the will to improve relations with the Soviet Union. Historically the Soviet Government never excluded the possibility of good relations with Germany. Hence it is with a clear conscience that the Soviet government begins the revival of collaboration with Germany. This collaboration represents a power that all other combinations must give way to.'

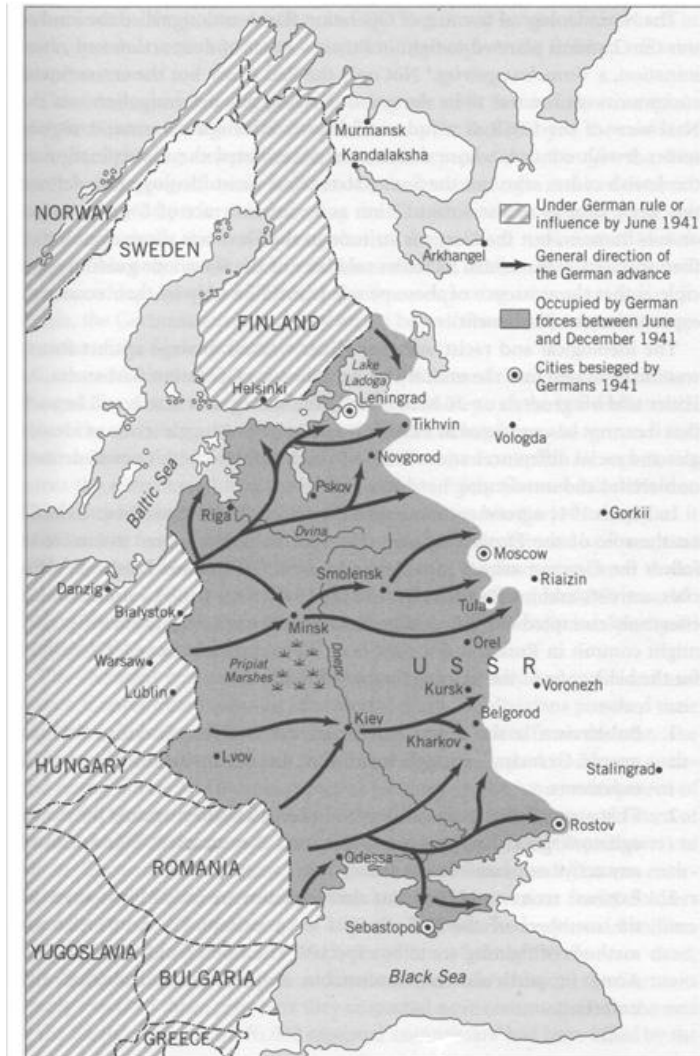
¹¹ The Soviets also signed a secret protocol with the Germans to act on their behalf as a third-party buyer and ship goods to Germany via the USSR. See *Charles Wilson's War* by George Crile for the manner in which this type of deal was deployed by the Americans against the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

¹² Soviet restraint in relation to the Baltic States was in sharp contrast to *Soviet Policy* in Western Belorussia and Western Ukraine. After the *Red Army's* occupation of these two territories in September 1939 the *Soviet Politburo* ordered an election campaign under the slogans of the establishment of Soviet power and the reunification of the eastern and western regions of Belorussia and the Ukraine. Instructions were also issued on the nationalization of big business, the takeover of the banking system and the collectivization of agriculture. Needless to say, the elections were rigged and in November these *People's Assemblies* voted unanimously for incorporation into the USSR. In pursuit of total political control the Soviet authorities were ruthless in their use of terror and in the encouragement of inter-ethnic communal violence and class war. A particularly repressive policy was pursued in relation to the Polish minority in Western Belorussia and Western Ukraine, who were seen as the most likely source of opposition to the new Soviet regime. Some 400,000 Poles (out of a total population of 12 million) were imprisoned, deported or, in many cases, executed. Among the victims were 20,000 high-ranking Polish *Prisoners of War* and *Political Prisoners*, shot in March-April 1940, most infamously in the Katyn forest near Smolensk.

gains, too, notably the freedom to attack Poland without fear of having to fight a major war on two fronts. The stunning success of the German *Blitzkrieg* in Western Europe upset that balance.

Another way to look at the benefits to the Soviet Union of the *German-Soviet Pact* of 23rd August 1939 is to see the situation with the benefit of hindsight...after the Germans had turned on Russia with *Operation Barbarossa* on Sunday 22nd June 1941.

Operation Barbarossa, June–December 1941



The Germans employed the same tactics they had used against Poland in 1939 and France in 1940. Concentrated columns of powerful armoured divisions punched their way through enemy defences and encircled Soviet forces from the rear. The German panzers were followed by infantry divisions tasked to destroy encircled enemy forces and to hold captured territory.

On *Day One* of the 1941 German invasion of Russia, the German *Luftwaffe* struck 66 enemy airfields, and destroyed 900 Soviet aircraft on the ground and another 300 in the air. Within days the Germans had complete air superiority across the entire breadth of the battle zone.

On 3rd July 1941 General Franz Halder, *Chief of the German Army General Staff*, noted in his diary: 'on my part it would not be too bold to assert that the campaign against Russia has been won in the space of two weeks.'

Within three weeks the Soviets suffered three quarters of a million casualties and lost 10,000 tanks and 4,000 aircraft. Within three months the Germans had captured Kiev, encircled Leningrad and reached the gates of Moscow.

In the June 1941 encirclement of Minsk the Germans took 400,000 Soviet prisoners. In July it was the turn of Smolensk (300,000 prisoners) to fall to German encirclement. In September it was Kiev (500,000 prisoners) and in October the Briansk and Viazma encirclements near Moscow netted another half-million Soviet soldiers.

By the end of 1941 the Germans had captured three million Soviet prisoners. Two months

later two million of those were dead, mainly from starvation, disease and malnutrition. In addition, the Germans executed those prisoners they suspected as *Communists*. By the end of the war on the *Eastern Front* 160,000 captured 'commissars' had been killed by the Germans.¹³

¹³ Notwithstanding their spectacular successes, the tide of war did not flow entirely in the Germans' direction. Not all Soviet defences crumbled. Some positions held and fought on for weeks. In the Brest fortress on the border with German-occupied Poland 3,000 Soviet soldiers fought almost to the last man, holding out for a week against an assault by 20,000 Germans. Odessa, the *Soviet Navy's* main port on the Black Sea, held out against an attack by the *4th Romanian Army* for nearly 10 weeks between August and October 1941. Its sister port of Sebastopol faced an even greater onslaught but did not fall until summer 1942. While millions of Soviet soldiers were taken prisoner, tens of thousands of others... individuals, small groups, platoons, battalions, brigades and whole divisions... fought their way out of encirclement to rejoin the main body of the *Red Army*. The Soviets launched numerous counter-attacks, forcing the Germans to retreat and regroup on many occasions. The Soviet defence of Kiev held up the German advance on Eastern Ukraine for nearly a month, while the battle in the Smolensk region in July-August 1941 held up the German advance on Moscow for two months. Fierce counter-attacks in the Leningrad area thwarted Hitler's aim to capture and raze to the ground the Soviet Union's second city. The ferocity of the fighting shook the Germans out of their initial complacency about an easy war. By 11 August 1941 General Halder was beginning to have his doubts. 'At the beginning of the war we calculated that there would be about 200 enemy divisions against us. But already we have counted 360. These divisions are not armed and equipped according to our understanding of these words and their tactical leadership is not very satisfactory. But they exist. If we destroy a dozen, the Russians present us with another dozen.' The price

The fate of the Soviet *Prisoners of War* was shared by many other Soviet citizens, particularly those of Jewish origin. About a million Soviet Jews were massacred by the Germans, mostly during 1941-42. The main instruments of this mass murder were the *SS Einsatzgruppen*.

The *Nazi* ideological framing of *Operation Barbarossa* signalled the kind of war the Germans planned to fight in Russia...a war of destruction and extermination, a *Vernichtungskrieg*. Not only the *Red Army*, but the entire *Soviet Communist Regime* was to be destroyed. Driving this determination was the *Nazi* view of the USSR as a *Judaeo-Bolshevik State*...a communist regime under Jewish control, whose destruction necessitated the extermination of the Jewish cadres who ran the Soviet state.

Nazi Racist Ideology also defined the Slavic peoples of the Soviet Union as an inferior race of *Untermenschen* or sub-humans...although the German attitude to the Slavs was more exploitative than genocidal. As Hitler said later of the Slavs, 'Our guiding principle is that the existence of these people is justified only by their economic exploitation for our benefit.' The ideological and racist war that Hitler wanted to wage against Russia was incorporated into the military preparations for *Operation Barbarossa*.¹⁴

On 13 May 1941 Hitler issued a decree which effectively exempted German soldiers from punishment for any atrocities they might commit in Russia. A few days later the *Wehrmacht* issued *Guidelines for the behaviour of the fighting forces in Russia*: (1) Bolshevism is the mortal enemy of the *National Socialist* German people. Germany's struggle is aimed at that disruptive ideology and its exponents; (2) That struggle demands ruthless and energetic action against *Bolshevik* agitators, guerrillas, saboteurs, Jews and the complete liquidation of any active or passive resistance; (3) Extreme reserve and the most alert vigilance are called for towards all the members of the *Red Army*...even prisoners...as treacherous methods of fighting are to be expected. The Asiatic soldiers of the *Red Army* in particular are inscrutable, unpredictable, insidious and unfeeling.

On 6th June 1941 the *Wehrmacht* issued *Guidelines on the treatment of commissars*. This was the infamous *Commissar Order*, which dealt with the fate of commissars...the political officers of the *Red Army*...who 'if captured in battle, or while resisting, are as a matter of principle to be finished off with weapons at once.'

The ideological framing of the coming Russian war helps to explain why the Germans imagined they could destroy the *Red Army* in a single, lightning campaign. German military planners thought the *Red Army* had been weakened by the pre-war purges and had not been impressed by its performance during the *Finnish War*.

But as important was their ideologically distorted perception of the political weakness of Stalin's regime. 'You only have to kick in the door and the whole rotten structure will come crashing down,' said Hitler. Far from expecting serious resistance in Russia, the Germans expected to be welcomed as liberators by the Soviet population.

Initially the *Einsatzgruppen* were tasked with killing able-bodied Jewish men. But in August 1941, Heinrich Himmler¹⁵ gave the order for the wholesale slaughter of entire Jewish communities...men and women, parents and children, old and young, the sick and the healthy. Illustrative of the change of policy was the shooting of 30,000 Jews at Babi Yar, a ravine outside Kiev, at the end of September 1941.¹⁶

In September 1941 the *Wehrmacht* issued orders that between 50 and 100 *Communists* should be killed for every German who fell victim to a partisan attack. There was an intimate connection between the *Wehrmacht's* anti-partisan tactics and the anti-Jewish campaign of the *SS*. The Babi Yar massacre, for example, was ostensibly in

the *Red Army* exacted for German victories was very high. In the first three weeks of war the Germans suffered 100,000 casualties and lost 1,700 tanks and assault weapons and 950 planes. By July they were suffering 7,000 casualties a day. By August total casualties were nearly 180,000. These were nothing compared to Soviet losses but were nevertheless far higher than the Germans were used to. During the course of the entire West European campaign of 1940, total German losses were only 156,000, including 30,000 dead.

¹⁴ On 30 March 1941 Hitler told his generals: 'The war against Russia will be such that it cannot be conducted in a knightly fashion; the struggle is one of ideologies and racial differences and will have to be conducted with unprecedented, unmercifully and unrelenting harshness. In March 1941 agreement was reached between the *Wehrmacht* and the *SS* on the role of the *Einsatzgruppen* - the special 'action teams' that were to follow the German armies into Russia to eliminate *Judaeo-Bolshevik* officials, activists and intellectuals.

¹⁵ See two essays by Hugh Thomas: *The Vengeful Chameleon* and *The SS State*; Chapters 2 & 3 in *The Unlikely Death of Heinrich Himmler*, (Fourth Estate, London, 2003, ISBN 1-84115-307-9) for a study of Himmler and the key role he played in the ideological development of the *Schutzstaffel* (*SS*) and its extermination programmes.

¹⁶ The reason for this transition from the selective killing of Jewish males to the mass murder of all Jews was closely related to the escalation of the Germans' anti-partisan tactics. Soviet partisan actions in the rear of the invading German armies began within days of the outbreak of the war, often initiated, inspired and aided by retreating *Red Army* units fighting their way out of encirclement. The German response...as in Greece, Yugoslavia and Poland...was to burn villages and execute those suspected of aiding the *Partisans*. All Jews were stigmatized as *Communists* and *Partisans*, and all *Partisans* branded *Jews*. 'The Jew is a Partisan. The Partisan is a Jew. A Jew is a Bolshevik is a Partisan'. These German slogans served the dual purpose of rationalising the mass murder of Soviet Jews and legitimizing the harsh and indiscriminate anti-partisan measures.

retaliation for the killing of a number of German officers, blown up by delayed-action time bombs left by the retreating *Red Army* in the centre of Kiev.

Crucially, despite its spectacular advance into Russia, the *Wehrmacht* failed to achieve its strategic objectives. Leningrad was besieged but did not fall. The German advance in the south reached Rostov-on-Don...the gateway to the Caucasus and the oil fields of Baku...but ran out of steam and was recaptured by the USSR in November 1941.

Hitler's last chance to win the war against the Soviets in a single campaign was to capture Moscow. The Germans launched their assault on the Soviet capital in October 1941, utilizing more than 70 divisions...a million men, with 1,700 tanks, 14,000 artillery pieces and almost 1,000 airplanes.

The attack brought *Army Group Centre* to within 20 miles of the Kremlin, but no further. On 5th December the *Red Army* launched a counter-offensive in front of Moscow, which pushed the Germans 40-50 miles back from the city. It was the *Wehrmacht's* first significant defeat of the *Second World War*. It signalled that *Operation Barbarossa* had failed and that the *German Wehrmacht* now faced a long war of attrition on the *Eastern Front*. The *1941 Russian Campaign* was a serious *strategic* defeat for the Germans.

By December 1941 the *European War* had been transformed into a global war...much to Churchill's delight. Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on 7th December 1941 the US was locked in combat with Germany's ally in the Far East. German's declaration of war on the USA four days later brought the US into the *European War*...and set the seal on the American-British-Soviet coalition that had been forming since the summer of 1941.

In the summer of 1939, the Soviets feared that London and Paris were manoeuvring to provoke a *Soviet-German War* that would allow them to stand aside while the *Nazis* and *Bolsheviks* slugged it out on the *Eastern Front*. The *German-Soviet Pact* was designed to turn the tables on the *Capitalist Powers* and give German freedom of manoeuvre in the coming war.

The *German-Soviet Pact* of August 1939 delayed by two years the Soviet Union's four year involvement in the *European War*¹⁷. Russia's *Great Patriotic War* had political consequences for the *Communist System*¹⁸ and catastrophic consequences for the Soviet people. 70,000 Soviet cities, towns and villages were laid waste; and 6 million houses, 98,000 farms, 32,000 factories, 82,000 schools, 43,000 libraries, 6,000 hospitals and thousands of miles of roads and railway track destroyed. The official Soviet casualty figure was 7 million fatalities.¹⁹

Nonetheless the two years of *Soviet Neutrality* prior to the German *Wehrmacht's Operation Barbarossa* was a calculated response by the *Soviet Politburo* to the threat from the *Capitalist Powers*. This was a very real threat in the context of the diplomatic realignments taking place in Europe and America in the 1930s following the collapse of the *1919 Treaty of Versailles*, the rise of *Russian Bolshevism*, the increasing dominance of *International Financial Capitalism* and a replacement of the *US Monroe Doctrine*²⁰ by a covert policy to destroy the power of the European colonial empires in the *US Pacific Sphere of Influence*.

¹⁷ War was declared on Germany by France and Britain on 3rd September 1939. The Soviet Union was at war from the time of Germany's invasion of Russia on 22 June 1941 to the taking of Berlin by the *Red Army* on 30 April 1945.

¹⁸ Soviet victory in *World War II* led to the spread of *Communism* to Eastern Europe and to other parts of the globe and provided new sources of legitimacy for the *Communist System*.

¹⁹ The official figure, during Stalin's lifetime, of 7 million war-deaths was later raised to 20 million and in the post-Soviet era went as high as 35 million deaths...two thirds of them civilians...from an estimated June 1941 population of two hundred million. This figure represents roughly one in eight of the population. The total number of military and civilian casualties in *World War One* was 37 million, with 17 million deaths and 20 million wounded...a total number that included 10 million military personnel and 7 million civilians. For every three French citizens drafted into the armed forces in *WWI*, one was killed, one was injured with only one emerging physically...though not emotionally...unscathed. The *Allies* lost about 6 million soldiers while the *Central Powers* lost about 4 million. At least 2 million died from diseases and 6 million went missing, presumed dead. Two-thirds of military deaths in *World War I* were in battle and a third from disease. In previous conflicts the majority of deaths were from disease. This change was due to the discovery of 'economic benefits' from mending casualties, and from the increased lethality of military weaponry.

²⁰ The *Monroe Doctrine* was a policy introduced on 2nd December 1823 stating that further efforts by European nations to colonize land or interfere with states in North or South America would be viewed as acts of aggression, requiring US intervention. At the same time, the doctrine noted that the US would not interfere with existing European colonies nor meddle in the internal concerns of European countries. President James Monroe first stated the doctrine during his seventh annual *State of the Union Address to Congress*. By the end of the 19th century, Monroe's declaration was seen as a defining moment in *US Foreign Policy*, which would be invoked by several US presidents, including Theodore Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson and Ronald Reagan. The doctrine was issued at a time when nearly all Latin American colonies of Spain and Portugal had achieved or were about to gain independence from the *Portuguese* and *Spanish Empires*. Peru consolidated her independence in 1824, and Bolivia would become independent in 1825, leaving only Cuba and Puerto Rico under Spanish rule. The US, working in agreement with Britain, sought to ensure that no European power would move in.