

From the Hitler-Stalin Pact to 'Operation Barbarossa'

by Michael Liebig

Der Eisbrecher: Hitler in Stalins Kalkül

by Victor Suvorov

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The books previously authored by Victor Suvorov on the subject of the Soviet military intelligence service, the GRU, and on special *spetsnaz* commando units, have already made a valuable contribution to informing the broader Western public about the Soviet leadership's actual capabilities and intentions. This latest book, on Soviet Russia's political and military strategy during 1939-41, not only provides crucial new insights into that period, but also confronts us anew with the Soviet leadership's remarkable ability to successfully misinform the world about its true aims over a 50-year time-span—a circumstance which becomes all the more shocking, given that many of the essential facts which Suvorov presents in his book, must certainly have long been known by military historians in the West.

Thus it has come to pass, that the absurd myth of the "peace-loving" Soviet Union, which was "suddenly and treacherously" attacked by Hitler's Germany on June 22, 1941, has remained essentially intact over the intervening years. Today, the Soviet leadership, and its overt and covert friends in the West, are painfully aware that any breach in the prevailing historical fictions regarding Soviet policy from 1939 to 1941, would have a far-reaching significance. Gorbachov himself has drawn attention to this by his numerous public apologies for the Hitler-Stalin Pact and its aftermath.

The former Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, in a rare interview granted to the West German newsweekly *Der Spiegel*, took pains to deny the existence of any secret

protocol of the Hitler-Stalin Pact concerning the partition of Poland and the occupation of the Baltic nations. Such claims, he insisted, are based on anti-Soviet lies and falsifications. In West Germany, Suvorov's book has already provoked a series of Soviet articles, essays, and conference presentations on the 1939-41 period which betray extreme Soviet sensitivity on this point. *Der Spiegel* has printed an extensive, multi-paged review of Suvorov's book, in an unsuccessful attempt to undermine the author's arguments. It is also remarkable that, unlike Suvorov's previous books, this one has appeared only in German- and French-language editions, not in English.

The Hitler-Stalin Pact: gateway to the 'second imperialist war'

Suvorov proceeds from the assumption that the Soviet leadership under Stalin obviously did not believe in their own propaganda formula on the "peaceful construction" of "socialism in one country." They believed that Soviet Russia could only survive and secure a strengthened geopolitical position, as an outcome of a "second imperialist world war." Lenin himself repeatedly spoke about the "inevitability" of a new world war.

The precondition for such a new world war, in the Soviet view, was the so-called "inter-imperialist rivalries." In the wake of World War I, the "imperialist" powers became divided into a "saturated" grouping, consisting of Great Britain, France, the United States, and the small Eastern European states allied to them; and a "revisionist" grouping, consisting of Nazi Germany, Italy, and Japan. The aim of Soviet diplomacy was therefore systematically to encourage a sharpening of these "inter-imperialist contradictions" into actual war; in Stalin's words, the imperialists had to be induced to "bite each other like dogs."

In this respect, the crucial Soviet diplomatic breakthrough was attained with the signing of the Hitler-Stalin Pact on Aug. 23, 1939. With it, the Soviet leadership had cleared the way not only for the military liquidation of the Polish state in collusion with Nazi Germany, but also for the outbreak of the entire "second imperialist war." Therefore, World War II actually began on Aug. 23, 1939, even though it was not until Sept. 1 that German troops invaded Poland, with the Soviet troops following suit on Sept. 17. Hitler's remaining scruples over provoking war with France and Great Britain, both of whom had guaranteed Poland's integrity, had been swept aside through Stalin's political and military complicity.

At the same time, however, Nazi Germany had been maneuvered into the classic two-front situation of World War I: To the west lay France and Great Britain; and in the east, in the middle of partitioned Poland, Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany directly faced each other. Thus, Hitler's diplomatic "liberation strike" for the dismemberment of Poland ended with Nazi Germany totally surrounded geopolitically, and entirely dependent on the continued good graces of the Russians.

Nevertheless, the Soviet leadership was surprised in May 1940, and had to modify the time-frame of its agenda. They had not believed that Nazi Germany would be able to militarily crush France and Great Britain in continental Europe as quickly as they in fact did in May and June. Moscow had been counting on a replay of World War I, which would have allowed the Soviet Union to carefully await the time when an exhausted Nazi Germany, pinned down in the West, could be given the same treatment already meted out to Poland.

But even the German *Blitzkrieg* did not bring about a decisive turn in the overall strategic situation; it therefore did not alter the basic parameters of Soviet strategy. Nazi Germany was unable to conquer Great Britain militarily; it simply lacked enough sea and air power to undertake this. Furthermore, Germany's military resources were scattered across an area reaching from northern Norway, through France, and into Libya.

On the other hand, the Soviet leadership knew that the United States and Great Britain would not be able to intervene militarily on the continent until their armament efforts had reached a much higher level. During this span of time, therefore, a Soviet military victory over Nazi Germany would mean that there would be no world power which could successfully challenge Russia's total control over Western Europe to the Atlantic coast. Thus there was no time to lose in cranking up Soviet Russia's armaments efforts and preparing an offensive attack against Nazi Germany.

During the invasion of France in May-June 1940, the Soviet leadership began to systematically increase its pressure on Germany. The diplomatic climate between Berlin and Moscow noticeably worsened, and the rift became obvious during Molotov's visit to Berlin in November 1940. In

the summer of 1940, Lithuania, Romanian Bessarabia, and Bukovina were completely occupied by Russia; and it should be noted that neither the military occupation of Lithuania nor of Bukovina had been provided for in the Hitler-Stalin Pact. The major target of this Soviet pressure was clear: 1) Romania, with its oil at Ploesti, the sole important source of oil for Germany, and 2) the Balkans as a whole, especially Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and the Turkish sea straits. Moscow's second line of attack was against Finland, which was invaded by Soviet Russia in November 1939 and by March 1940 was forced to beg for a ceasefire.

This Soviet line of attack was, of course, aimed at the most vulnerable points of Germany's military-industrial complex. Romania was supplying two-thirds of the oil for the German war machine; coal gasification never covered more than 30% of its fuel requirements. After the occupation of Bessarabia, the Red Army was only 200 kilometers removed from the Ploesti oil fields—"Germany's weak point," in Marshal Zhukov's words. Yugoslavia was providing the bulk of the bauxite which was critical for German aircraft production. From Finland came nickel, which was critical to weapons production; Nazi Germany had no other accessible nickel reserves. After March 1940, as part of the spoils of the Finnish War, the region of Finland containing the nickel deposits was annexed by Russia. At the same time, Soviet control over Finland provided opportunities to attack German supplies of northern Swedish iron ore, which had to be transported via the Baltic or northern Norway.

Soviet Russian pressure on Nazi Germany was increased in parallel with intensive military and diplomatic efforts to eliminate Japan as an opponent of Russia. This effort succeeded in August 1939 with the surprise offensive of the Red Army under Zhukov in Outer Mongolia, in which Japan's Sixth Army was crushed. The Soviet victory at Khalkhin Gol demonstrated that Stalin's purges of the Red Army had by no means led to its paralysis, and that the army's initial failures in the invasion of Finland were by no means symptomatic of the overall condition of the Soviet armed forces.

Starting with the victory at Khalkhin Gol, Soviet diplomatic efforts were bent upon a non-aggression pact with Japan, which was in fact achieved in April 1941. Instrumental to this effort was the secret intelligence work of the Soviet spy group around Richard Sorge in Japan. Soviet Russia now had its rear flank secured, and could fully concentrate on the "Western Front" with Nazi Germany.

Beginning in the summer of 1940, the Soviet war mobilization was systematically escalated to gigantic proportions. In the second half of 1940, there were 11 new armies added to the already existing 17 armies. Eight armies were created by mobilizing the eight "interior" military districts; i.e., the military districts, along with their entire leadership, were transformed into armies. Ten of the newly formed armies were reallocated against Nazi Germany. In all, 13 armies were mustered in the immediate vicinity of the demarcation

line in Poland—i.e., directly confronting the Wehrmacht.

Among Soviet Russia's 28 armies, its 16 "shock armies" obviously had a special significance because of their high component of up to 1,000 tanks apiece. Of these 16 shock armies, three were exceptional: the Sixth, Ninth, and Tenth Shock Armies, each with up to 2,000 tanks, approximately one-third of which were of the types T-34 and KV. In June 1941 these three shock armies had twice as many tanks as the Wehrmacht's four "tank groups," which had a total of 3,200 tanks, many of which were by no means late models. The Tenth Shock Army was stationed in the immediate vicinity of the border with the German-occupied part of Poland in the Russian "front balcony" of Bialystok. The Sixth Attack Army was stationed in the Western Ukraine front balcony of Lvov (Lemberg). The Ninth (and largest) Shock Army was stationed in the Ukraine and Moldavia, right next to Romania; in addition to its large masses of tanks, it had large paratroop and mountain warfare divisions. Up to 1940, the Red Army had no mountain warfare divisions; they weren't that useful on the level plains of the Ukraine, but were perfectly suited for a rapid conquest of the Romanian Carpathian Mountains—the most direct path to the Ploesti oil fields.

The Red Army in offensive deployment

The manner in which this mass of Soviet armed forces was deployed on the "Western Front"—i.e., immediately on the frontier, demonstrates clearly and unequivocally that the concept behind this array was *not defensive*. There can be no doubt, that the Red Army, the manner of their deployment, was exclusively aimed at an *attack* against Nazi Germany, Romania, and Hungary. From the end of 1939 onward, the Soviet leadership systematically *dismantled* their extensive defensive installations in Byelorussia and the Ukraine (the "Stalin Line"). Comprehensive and well-prepared measures for the destruction of transit routes, mine blockades, and infrastructure for the conduct of partisan warfare in the event of an invasion of Soviet Russia—all these were removed or revoked. At the same time, attack divisions were sent in ever greater numbers, to crowd ever more closely on the border with Nazi Germany.

This strictly offensive movement of Soviet armed forces is eminently significant, when one considers that up to the present day, Soviet disinformation has vehemently insisted that the Hitler-Stalin Pact was merely a desperate emergency measure in order to expand its "glacis," its *defensive patrols*, for the protection of the Motherland as far westward as possible. In reality, between 1939 and 1941, not only was *no* defense system (in the sense of the "Stalin Line") created in the Russian-occupied zones of Poland, the Baltic states, and Romania, but even the existing defensive installations on the "old," pre-1939 frontier were systematically torn down.

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"Western Front" speak a language which can not be disputed or misunderstood: Stalin was in full-throttle preparations for an *attack* on Hitler Germany.

Russian vs. German tank capabilities

This should in no way downplay the significance of the Wehrmacht's fighting abilities; in their level of training, their operative leadership principles, and battle experience, they were certainly the best in the world in 1941. But when we consider the industrial base for arming them, we find that in 1941 it was significantly below the 1917 level. At the turn of the year in 1941, Germany was producing under 100 tanks per month—less than 10% of Russian production! True, the operative leadership and logistical organization of the German tank divisions was first class; but it would be irresponsible to speak of any general technical superiority of Germany's tank forces over those of the Red Army. This holds true not only for the T-34, some 1,200 of which had already been produced by June 1941, but also for the KV-I tank, which was available in much greater numbers and was more than a match for the German Mark III and Mark IV Panzer.

Although in the summer of 1941, the Red Army possessed more T-34s and KVs than all German tank forces combined, a great proportion of these were the BT-7 "fast tanks." The BT-7, a further development of the American Christie M tank of 1931, turned out to be completely unsuited for the Red Army's rearguard battles in Russia's interior. That is not so surprising, since the BT-7 was not designed for deployment in Russia's interior in the first place. Its peculiarity lay in its need for a well-developed road network within its sphere of action, in order for it to take advantage of its strength—i.e., high speed with light armor and artillery. It could do so by dismounting its treads and—assuming the existence of acceptable road conditions, or even highways—using its runner-wheels to achieve speeds of over 80 km per hour!

Soviet airborne assault forces

Aside from the sheer mass and quality of the Soviet tank contingents, the expansion of Soviet airborne troops between 1939 and 1941 is quite remarkable. Since the early 1930s, the Soviet Union had been the first and only country in the world to develop extensive airborne troop capabilities. By the mid-1930s, maneuvers were already being carried out with mass jumps of thousands of paratroopers, at a time when no paratroop divisions even existed outside Russia. Parachuting even turned into a "socialist mass sport," with hundreds of thousands of paramilitarily trained jumpers. Suvorov points out that by 1940-41, the Red Army had assembled an airborne troop corps, and that the production of manned gliders and the franchised production of the American DC-3/C-47 transport (*before* June 22, 1941!) was massively expanded. The restationing of these airborne troop divisions gave the Soviets the option of immediately deploy-

ing them, without further movements, into the hinterlands of the "Western Front."

Large paratroop divisions are assault forces *par excellence*; their deployment only makes sense in the context of surprise attack operations behind enemy lines. In defensive and rearguard operations, their usefulness dwindles to that of poorly armed infantry troops.

It should not be forgotten that, in 1941, the Soviet Union possessed by far the world's largest fleet of aircraft. Here we see a picture similar to that of the tanks, namely, the Soviets

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quite certainly possessed technologically modern fighter aircraft in 1941. The Soviet air forces' deployment doctrine was clearly not oriented toward air defense, but rather toward large-scale airborne assault operations. Sudden, large-scale assault operations, spearheaded by air assault divisions, paratroop divisions, and masses of tanks, constituted the core of all Soviet warfare doctrine, which assigned crucial significance to the "initial phase of warfare."

The central assertion of Suvorov's book, however, lies not in its characterization of Soviet military doctrine and Soviet Russia's military potential in materiel and personnel in 1939-41. Suvorov's primary concern is the Soviet Russian leadership's concrete intention, in 1941-42, to conquer Nazi Germany and to gain control of all continental Europe.

Spring 1941: two campaigns in the east

On the same day as the Hitler-Stalin Pact was signed, Aug. 23, 1939, the Soviet Union began its strategic preparations to wage war on Nazi Germany. On that same day, compulsory military service was instituted throughout the Soviet Union. Already on Aug. 19, *Pravda* had written: "Precisely in the interest of our own defense, the U.S.S.R. will be called on to launch broad assault operations against the enemy's territory."

The preparations initially began against Poland, the Baltic states, Finland, and Romania. Soviet armament efforts were set at full throttle, and its production of modern weapons far surpassed that of Nazi Germany. And yet, precautions for the defense of Soviet territory—of the Motherland itself—against German attack, were radically dismantled. Ever more Red Army assault divisions were positioned immediately on the Soviet Union's western frontier. During 1940-41, Russia's effective mobilization led to the constant creation of new armies from out of nothing. Beginning in the spring of 1941, the eight "interior" military districts were completely stripped of personnel and brought to the west in an extraordinary feat of militarized rail transport. Up to June 1941, the Red Army redeployed a huge number of troops from Lithuania on the Baltic, all the way to the Danube delta on the Black Sea. This Soviet redeployment far surpassed Nazi Germany's "Barbarossa" deployment, which was taking place in close geographic proximity at the very same time.

Suvorov proceeds from the assumption that in the spring of 1941, Moscow's general strategic preparations for an offensive war against Nazi Germany went over into concrete, operative preparations for the assault. Suvorov assumes that by April 1941—i.e., following the non-aggression treaty with Japan—the Soviet leadership had determined that the attack should take place in July 1941.

Stalin's secret speech

On May 5, 1941, Stalin gave a secret speech before the Soviet Union's military leaders. Soviet historians do not dispute the fact that he gave such a speech, that it was important, and that Stalin spoke of the inevitability of a war against Germany. But the text of the speech remains a state secret to the present day. Stalin delivered the speech following a secret emergency meeting of the Soviet political and military leadership, from which was issued a secret directive to the senior military commanders—a directive whose existence is not disputed, but whose contents have likewise never been made public.

On the following day, May 6, 1941, Stalin formally and officially—and for the first time in Soviet history—subsumed in his own person the sole leadership of both the party and the state. Shortly thereafter, the top functionaries of the CPSU all received military rank. In May 1941, Soviet propaganda was overhauled to the effect that the order of the day was to "be prepared for surprises and sharp turns in the situation." And as all this was happening, the Red Army's westward deployment grew ever more massive.

Suvorov clearly asserts that amid all these dramatic developments, Stalin by no means wanted to prepare for a surprise German attack. When that attack came, on June 22, 1941, he was taken totally unawares. On June 22 and in the following days, total chaos reigned among the Soviet military commanders, since they had received no instructions whatsoever for the eventuality of an attack from Nazi Germany.