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**“Bolsheviks of Military Affairs”: Stalin’s High Commands, 1934-40**

**Robert E. Tarleton**

**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

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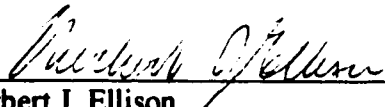
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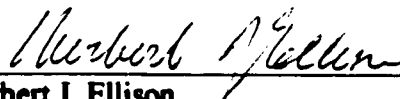
Robert E. Tarleton

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Abstract

**“Bolsheviks of Military Affairs”: Stalin’s High Commands, 1934-40**

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Changes in the structure and make-up of the Red Army high command during the interwar years were impelled by general political and ideological imperatives. In particular, the Stalin leadership’s oscillations between alternative approaches to building and defending socialism affected the high command as well as the military establishment as a whole.

The creation of the Main Military Council in 1938 was emblematic of the Red Army’s “Bolshevization”—realization and enforcement of the supremacy of Stalinist values—a cardinal aim of the military aspect of the Great Purges. This collegiate leadership body was constituted to give top Party authorities a direct and commanding voice in military affairs.

In conjunction with the consolidation of the Stalinist political system, the high command’s forced make-over in 1937-38 elevated political and ideological factors over professional and technical ones in its composition and decision-making. The reorientation of the border fortification program in 1939-40 exemplifies the instability and incoherence brought to the high command’s direction of the Red Army by its own Bolshevization. Ruinous military planning and policy decisions by Stalin and the revamped high command not only wrecked the integrity of all of the fixed defenses in the

western USSR in June 1941, but largely nullified Stalin's success in gaining a sizeable territorial buffer for his country on the eve of a cataclysmic war.

Finally, the pre-war history of the Red Army and its high command reveals deep fault-lines in the Soviet military enterprise. Certain central ends of the regime ultimately were at odds: for example, the Stalin leadership sought to make the command staff a disciplined arm of the Party, yet it also wished to have established, fit, and self-possessed professional commanders at its disposal. The fundamental nature of such intractable dilemmas of Soviet military development strongly suggests that the regime was incapable of fielding a combat-effective army before 1942-43, that is, until the specter of the socialist system's imminent demise had compelled Stalin to place the pursuit of military effectiveness above all else until victory was his.

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## GLOSSARY

- GUGB** *Glavnoe upravlenie gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti*: Main Directorate of State Security (created 1934) – the state security service and the NKVD's repressive core.
- GVS** *Glavnyi voennyi sovet*: Main Military Council (1938-1941) – the collegium of the Defense Commissariat (NKO).
- NKO** *Narodnyi komissariat oborony SSSR*: USSR People's Commissariat of Defense (created 1934) – the central military administration.
- NKVD** *Narodnyi komissariat vnutrennikh del SSSR*: USSR People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (created 1934) – the consolidated police apparatus whose chief component was the GUGB (until February 1941).
- NKVM** *Narodnyi komissariat po voennym i morskim delam SSSR*: USSR People's Commissariat of Military and Naval Affairs (1923-34) – the central military administration prior to establishment of the Defense Commissariat.
- OGPU** *Ob'edinennoe gosudarstvennoe politicheskoe upravlenie pri Sovete Narodnykh Komissarov SSSR*: Unified State Political Administration under the USSR Council of People's Commissars (1922-1934) – the state security service prior to creation of the GUGB and the NKVD.
- RKKA** *Raboche-Krest'ianskaia Krasnaia Armiia*: Worker-Peasant Red Army (created 1918) – the main part of the Soviet Armed Forces; includes ground, air, and air defense forces under (from 1934) the Defense Commissariat.

<b>RVS SSSR</b>	<b><i>Revoliutsionnyi voennyi sovet SSSR</i>: USSR Revolutionary Military Council (1923-34) – the collegium of the Commissariat of Military and Naval Affairs (NKVM).</b>
<b>Sovnarkom</b>	<b><i>Sovet Narodnykh Komissarov SSSR</i>: USSR Council of People’s Commissars (created 1923) – the highest executive organ of the federal government.</b>
<b>STO</b>	<b><i>Sovet truda i oborony</i>: Council of Labor and Defense (1920-37) – a coordinating body for economic and defense programs under the Sovnarkom.</b>

All translations are the author’s, unless otherwise indicated. For Russian words and all but well-known personal and place names (e.g., Tukhachevsky, Beria, Yalta), the Library of Congress transliteration system has been used.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I received assistance, encouragement, and inspiration from many people and institutions. I am especially grateful to the following ones. Herbert Ellison guided me as a mentor and friend throughout the long course of my doctoral work. Generous with her time, Glennys Young made many valuable suggestions on successive drafts. Stephen Hanson furnished crucial ideas and was an important sounding-board. Barbara Keys provided highly useful criticism and pointed out many errors I had overlooked. (Any remaining errors of fact or interpretation are, of course, solely my responsibility.) Ann Eastwood kindly drew and produced the map. David Murphy, William Spahr, and David Thomas, old colleagues and friends, supplied countless insights and enthusiasm. Donald Treadgold tutored me in Russian history directly and indirectly, although, sadly, he did not live to see my dissertation completed. Lastly, Gael Tarleton, my wife, was unwavering in her support for the entire project, from conception to completion. As for institutions, a fellowship from the Henry M. Jackson Foundation enabled me to begin my studies at the University of Washington, generosity for which I remain thankful.

**To Gael**

## Introduction

Talking candidly with writer Konstantin Simonov in the mid-1960s, Marshal of the Soviet Union Georgii K. Zhukov recalled the limits to his ability, as the new chief of the General Staff, to persuade Stalin to place the western border military districts on a war footing in June 1941. Zhukov remarked that one had to recognize what it would have meant to challenge Stalin's assessment of the situation:

The memory of recent years still remained with everyone, and to state aloud that Stalin was not right, that he was mistaken, at that time would have meant, to put it bluntly, that without even leaving the building, you would already be on your way to drink coffee with Beria.<sup>1</sup>

At a meeting of the Politburo attended by Zhukov and Defense Commissar Semen K. Timoshenko, Zhukov described the alarming situation on the western border and the Red Army's lack of preparedness to repel a German attack. Interrupting the briefing, Stalin angrily demanded to know if Zhukov was trying to frighten them or if he wanted war because he had too few decorations or desired a higher rank. Shaken, Zhukov left the room. Stalin then turned on Marshal Timoshenko, who had replaced Kliment E. Voroshilov, the Stalin crony discredited by the Red Army's indifferent performance in the conflict with Finland. Stalin declared that Timoshenko was trying to provoke war and ought to have been shot, but that he had known from the time of the Civil War that Timoshenko was a good soldier. (They had met at Tsaritsyn in 1918.) "Timoshenko is healthy and has a large head," Stalin blustered, "but his brain, evidently, is small." Thrusting his pock-marked face forward, Stalin warned Timoshenko that "heads would fly" if he "teased" the Germans by moving troops to the border without permission, and

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<sup>1</sup>K. M. Simonov, *Glazami cheloveka moego pokoleniia: Razmyshleniia o I. V. Staline*. (Moscow: "Kniga," 1990), 315.

stalked out of the room. Relating this episode to a fellow general during the 1960s, Timoshenko plaintively asked: “Well, what could you have done in that situation?”<sup>2</sup> By leaving their listeners with a sense of the deadly consequences of crossing Stalin even verbally, Zhukov’s reference to Beria, Stalin’s hangman, and Timoshenko’s rhetorical question were intended to exculpate their seeming passivity in the face of disaster.<sup>3</sup>

Despite copious intelligence reporting and Stalin’s long-standing expectation of “imperialist aggression,” Hitler’s irruption stunned the dictator and came as a shattering surprise to the country, which had been lulled into a false sense of security by official pronouncements.<sup>4</sup> The defeats suffered by the Red Army in 1941 constituted, to use a formal taxonomy of military disaster, a catastrophic failure—a compound of three simple failures experienced simultaneously or consecutively: the high command’s failure to learn

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<sup>2</sup>Nikolai G. Liashchenko, “O vystuplenii I. V. Stalina v Kremle 5 maia 1941 goda,” 17 November 1988, Dmitrii A. Volkogonov Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress [hereafter cited as Volkogonov Papers], reel 8, frames 127-28. Unfortunately, it is not possible to date this meeting precisely. According to Liashchenko, Timoshenko said it occurred “somewhere in the middle of June.” The log of visitors to Stalin’s office shows that Timoshenko and Zhukov were present there simultaneously on 3, 6, 7, 9, 11, 18, 21, and, of course, 22 June 1941. (*1941 god*, comp. L. E. Reshin et al., vol. 2 [Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond “Demokratia,” 1998], 298-301.) Based on the list of attendees for the meeting on the 7th, Timoshenko might have referred to it as a Politburo session; the meeting on the evening of the 21st was a Politburo session, but Stalin finally did authorize Soviet forces to be put in a combat-ready state. In his memoir of the war years, Zhukov describes a disagreeable June meeting involving himself, Timoshenko, and Stalin that is similar in some respects to the Liashchenko account; however, Zhukov implies that he and Timoshenko met privately with Stalin. (G. K. Zhukov, *Vospominaniia i razmyshleniia*, 11th ed., vol. 1 [Moscow: Izdatel’stvo “Novosti,” 1992], 383-85.) Zhukov, Timoshenko, and Nikolai F. Vatutin, the first deputy chief of the General Staff, saw Stalin by themselves for an hour on the 9th.

<sup>3</sup>The NKVD’s blows to the Red Army before the war were carried out mainly under Nikolai I. Ezhov, Stalin’s maniacal commissar for internal affairs from September 1936 to November 1938, but they were sustained by Lavrentii P. Beria, whom Stalin brought to Moscow from Georgia to supersede Ezhov. Whereas Ezhov was shot in 1940, Beria remained people’s commissar/minister for internal affairs until his arrest in June 1953. Stalin’s generals had ample reason to hate and fear Beria even before the war with Germany. (Michael Parrish, “Beria Takes Over,” in *The Lesser Terror: Soviet State Security, 1939-1953* [Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1996], 1-51.) During the war itself, nearly a million (994,000) Soviet soldiers were sentenced by military tribunals, of whom 157,000 received death sentences—a number roughly equating to fifteen full-strength divisions. More than half were sentenced in 1941-42. (Aleksandr N. Iakovlev, *Po moshcham i elei* [Moscow: Izdatel’stvo “Evrasiia,” 1995], 139.)

<sup>4</sup>A recent official collection of declassified reporting by Soviet foreign intelligence in the months leading up to the German attack lauds its performance in providing timely, accurate warning of the impending invasion. But its compilers essentially absolve Stalin of personal responsibility for the 1941 catastrophe by emphasizing the sophistication and extent of the Nazi deception campaign. They even praise “the Soviet leadership” (the preface neglects to mention Stalin) for its restraint in not reacting to supposed German efforts to provoke it into actions which would have enabled Germany to portray itself as a victim of aggression and deprived the Soviet Union of allies! (*Sekrety Gitlera na stole u Stalina*, comp. V. K. Vinogradov et al. [Moscow: Izdatel’stvo ob’edineniia “Mosgorarkhiv,” 1995], 3-17.)

from the recent experience of the Wehrmacht's campaigns against Poland and France; Stalin's failure to anticipate events; and the failure of the Soviet command as a whole to adapt to the disastrous course of operations until national defeat was perilously close.<sup>5</sup> My central argument is that the 1941 catastrophe also was a systemic one: some of its most important causes are embedded in the nature of the political regime that the Red Army's high command served and that assumed its essential form from 1936 to 1938. Tracing the high command's transformation during the 1930s, I examine Stalin's methods and motives in rendering his control of the military establishment complete and absolute, and show how the preeminence of Stalinist marshals and Party officials in uniform from 1938 to 1940 helped to foster an incoherent and disaster-prone force posture in 1941.

The political system consolidated by the Great Purges was distinguished by Stalin's absolute personal dictatorship, his extreme arbitrariness and suspicion, and the ever-present threat that force could be turned against even his chief lieutenants. Stalin's political superiority over other top Party and government leaders after 1938 was so pronounced that he "could decide anything he wished to decide regardless of the views of his fellow leaders...."<sup>6</sup> He even possessed the power to kill peremptorily the highest

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<sup>5</sup>Eliot A. Cohen and John Gooch, *Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 25-26.

<sup>6</sup>Graeme Gill, *Stalinism*, 2d ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 55. Gill's conceptual division of the complex phenomenon of Stalinism into four "faces"—economic, social, cultural, and political—is analytically useful. As Gill notes, these four aspects of Stalinism were not static, nor did they emerge simultaneously. They existed in their mature (albeit not invariable) form *simultaneously* only from the end of the 1930s, that is, after the Great Purges consolidated the emerging Stalinist political system, whose key feature was a personal dictatorship supported by the use (or threat of use) of terror as an instrument of rule. Consequently, I use the term "full-blown" or "full-fledged" Stalinist system to refer to the Stalinist phenomenon as it existed after 1938 (when wanton, mass purging ended) until Stalin's death. In addition to the overview cited above, see Graeme Gill, *The Origins of the Stalinist Political System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 4-14. Among the multitude of works that analyze Stalinism from different perspectives, I consider three especially important: Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, vol. 3, *The Breakdown*, trans. P. S. Falla (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978); Martin Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917-1991* (New York: Free Press, 1994); and Andrzej Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995). In contrast to most historians, Kolakowski, Malia, and Walicki argue that ideology (specifically, the aspiration to create and defend socialism, which in practice entailed suppression of the market, profit, and private property under the Party's monopoly of power) was central to the development and operation of the Stalinist system and the Soviet system generally. Biographies of Stalin are, of course, not a substitute for studies of how his regime functioned, but they provide essential background and context. I find the following ones useful: Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above, 1928-1941* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), the second part of the author's painstaking effort to trace the development of Stalin's (continued next page)

officials of the Party and government—and six members of the Politburo actually died at his direction from 1938 to 1940.<sup>7</sup> Equally important, Stalin was the sole and infallible source of ideological orthodoxy in an ideological dictatorship, “for a quarter of a century...the greatest Marxist theoretician.”<sup>8</sup> In combination with the Zeus-like image he acquired during the mid-1930s, this monopoly of interpretive power gave his every utterance the authority of scripture in the official discourse.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, Marxism-Leninism’s pretensions to be “an all-embracing and universally binding ‘scientific ideology’” automatically made Stalin the supreme authority in whatever field or sphere of activity in which he chose to intervene or on which he merely commented.<sup>10</sup>

Unlike Hitler, a contemporary dictator of comparable power and stature, Stalin immersed himself in the smallest details of Party and government administration on a daily basis, year after year. Indeed, as he strengthened his position atop the Party, he effectively concentrated political power within the regime in the Politburo by means of the vast range of questions in whose resolution he chose to become involved personally.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, ostensibly important Party and state institutions (e.g., the Central Committee, the Council of People’s Commissars, the Central Executive

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persona; Robert Conquest, *Stalin: Breaker of Nations* (New York: Viking, 1991), a popular treatment full of shrewd insights; and Dmitrii Volkogonov, *Triumfi tragediia: Politicheskii portret I. V. Stalina* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Agentstva pechati Novosti, 1989), a work that is a political as well as a historiographical landmark.

<sup>7</sup>T. H. Rigby, “Was Stalin a Disloyal Patron?,” *Soviet Studies* 38, no. 3 (July 1986): 318-19.

<sup>8</sup>Kolakowski, *Breakdown*, 16. Kolakowski notes that this statement is not only true but is a tautology, as “the Marxism of those days can hardly be defined except in relation to [Stalin’s] authority.” For the case that Stalin was a serious, original Marxist thinker, see Stephen E. Hanson, “The Socioeconomic Cycle: From Stalin to the ‘Era of Stagnation,’” in *Time and Revolution: Marxism and the Design of Soviet Institutions* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 129-79. Hanson relates Stalin’s revolutionary socio-economic policies to his theoretical innovations.

<sup>9</sup>However, individual expressions of hostility toward the official glorification of Stalin and even toward Stalin himself were not uncommon. They were sedulously sought out and catalogued by local organs of the Party and the state security service. (Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin’s Russia* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997], 170-77.)

<sup>10</sup>Walicki, *Marxism*, 453.

<sup>11</sup>Michael David-Fox and David Hoffmann, “The Politburo Protocols, 1919-1940,” *The Russian Review* 55, no. 1 (1996): 101-02, report that the Politburo “drowned itself in minor matters.... Throughout the 1920s and 1930s the Politburo had to approve the renaming of every town and factory, the erection of every major monument, the award of every Order of Lenin, the construction of every palace of culture. It discussed snow removal in Moscow, the distribution of flax seeds in Kirovskii krai, and the castration of bulls on collective farms.”

Committee) lost or failed to develop organizational coherence and integrity, much less autonomy. They were transformed “into the instruments of Stalin personally rather than of the political leadership more generally,” a process crowned by the Great Purges.<sup>12</sup> By about 1936 Stalin was relying on his personal secretariat, Politburo special commissions, the state security service, and a compliant judiciary as the prime instruments of his personal dictatorship. Leading Party and state institutions were deprived of any role other than in relation to Stalin himself.

As political historians of the Stalin era have broadened their focus from the dictator to the development and operation of his system of power, fresh insight has been gained into the organizational mechanisms that characterized it.<sup>13</sup> Yet relatively little attention has been given to one of the Stalinist political system’s most salient qualities: its congenital ineptitude in decision-making (even when the measure of effectiveness is the regime’s own aims), especially its trouble filtering, evaluating, presenting, and disseminating information.<sup>14</sup> High-level policy decisions, virtually regardless of subject, were liable to be wasteful, misguided, ineffective, or destructive.<sup>15</sup> In addition, they often were barbaric, a quality due to the Party leadership’s ideological zeal, ruthlessness,

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<sup>12</sup>Gill, *Origins*, 5.

<sup>13</sup>Examples of probes into the “guts” of Stalin’s regime include O. V. Khlevniuk, *Politbiuro. Mekhanizmy politicheskoi vlasti v 30-e gody*. (Moscow: “Rossiiskaia politicheskaiia entsiklopediia” [ROSSPEN], 1996); Derek Watson, *Molotov and Soviet Government: Sovnarkom, 1930-41* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996); Robert Conquest, *Inside Stalin’s Secret Police, NKVD Politics, 1936-39* (London: Macmillan, 1985); and Niels Erik Rosenfeldt, *Knowledge and Power. The Role of Stalin’s Secret Chancellery in the Soviet System of Government* (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1978).

<sup>14</sup>For example, Davies, *Popular Opinion*, 13, discusses Party and state security summaries of popular opinion during the 1930s: “Distortion occurred...in the manner in which material was selected and analysed. The selection of material was clearly influenced by considerations of what informants and the compilers of reports imagined their superiors wanted to hear at any particular moment.” This phenomenon probably was typical of a wide range of official reporting and information sent forward through Party and government channels. According to David E. Murphy, Sergei A. Kondrashev, and George Bailey, *Battleground Berlin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 26, it was true of intelligence reporting on Berlin during the Cold War (see n. 16 below). The authors had access to an extensive series of reports by Soviet foreign intelligence, which form the basis for much of their uniquely authoritative study of the intelligence war inside the Cold War.

<sup>15</sup>One notable example is the decision taken in 1930 to complete the coercive and rapid collectivization of agriculture even though the horrific consequences of proceeding were obvious by then; a postwar instance is Stalin’s gamble in 1948 that a blockade of West Berlin would force the Western allies to abandon their positions in the city. The blockade backfired by convincing the United States and its allies that they must redress the military imbalance in central Europe; one result was the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty in April 1949.

and, in Stalin's case, cruelty and vindictiveness. Accounts by Khrushchev, Molotov, and Kaganovich, however self-serving, and by lower-level officials (e.g., ex-diplomat Alexander Barmine) whom Stalin consulted during policy discussions, confirm that decision-making in Stalin's Politburo was hypercentralized, hurried, fickle, and peremptory. Faulty diagnoses and mistaken judgments were endemic. Stalin often ignored or misinterpreted the information Soviet foreign and military intelligence collected in such abundance—that is, when it was reported to him. Although they churned out reams of reports, Soviet intelligence officers tended to withhold information they knew would annoy the irascible tyrant.<sup>16</sup>

The pathology of decision-making at the summit of Stalin's regime was not a haphazard or transitory phenomenon; instead, it was an inherent feature of the Stalinist political system. The roots of the regime's acute decision-making malady lie in the Bolshevik world-view, the personal characteristics of Stalin and his cohorts, and the course and consequences of the Great Purges. Contributing factors include the combative, threat-filled language and concepts of Party discourse (e.g., "class struggle," "class enemies");<sup>17</sup> restrictions on information due to political and security prohibitions; Stalin's Russian chauvinism; his intellectual narrowness and ignorance of the West; and his inability to anticipate events or foresee the consequences of his decisions on weighty issues affecting the country's security or the welfare of its people. Key precipitating factors (i.e., ones originating in the Great Purges themselves) include the regime's categorical elevation of *partiinosť* ("Party spirit" or "Party-mindedness") and revolutionary élan over professional qualifications and technical competence as well as the atmosphere of anxiety, intimidation, and uncertainty prevailing in Soviet officialdom

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<sup>16</sup>See, for example, Alexander Barmine, *One Who Survived*, 5th ed. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1945), 211-14, 218-23; and Murphy, Kondrashev, and Bailey, *Battleground Berlin*, 62-63, 67, 148, 480 n. 12.

<sup>17</sup>E. A. Rees, "Stalinism: The Primacy of Politics," in John Channon, ed., *Politics, Society and Stalinism in the USSR* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 47. On the centrality of the Russian language's Bolshevization to Stalinist constructs of social identity, see Stephen Kotkin, "Speaking Bolshevik," in *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 198-237.

after the mid-1930s. Collectively, these elements compromised debate and disoriented policy decisions and their fulfillment, especially after 1936, when imprisonment or death became a common sanction for political offenses even for Party members.

This baleful environment flourished after Stalin and his cohorts exhorted Party officials in early 1937 to undertake an all-out search for hidden “enemies,” thereby sharpening the class struggle against “remnants of the defeated exploiting classes.”<sup>18</sup> The manic crusade that ensued consumed the Party machine, the parallel state administration, the armed forces, the state security service, and, to a lesser extent, the public, which were conditioned to attribute accidents, mistakes, and often simple differences of view to treachery and sabotage by agents of subversive Trotskyite “centers.” There is evidence to show that this massive operation was Stalin’s way of propelling the Party and state bureaucracies forward, after an unwarranted respite, on the path from socialism to full communism: he used the prodigious repressive power of the state to stoke putative class conflict and smash the internal restraints to progress that emerged. In Stalin’s view, the Great Purges signified the opening of a momentous new phase in the socio-economic offensive launched in 1928.<sup>19</sup> But they also secured his personal power by erasing any conceivable internal threat to topple the regime. The state security service that formed the NKVD’s core, itself purged heavily, was given license to probe wherever its bosses chose and, subject to Stalin’s express approval in the case of leading officials, the power to arrest and shoot anyone. Consequently, Stalin made the standing of those in his entourage wholly dependent on their ability to retain his favor; yet by liquidating so many top officials who were Old Bolsheviks, he also solidified the positions of his henchmen against potential challengers and critics. Stalin allowed these few to run

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<sup>18</sup>I. V. Stalin, “O nedostatках partiinoi raboty i merakh likvidatsii trotskistskikh i inykh dvurushnikov. Doklad na Plenum TsK VKP(b) 3 marta 1937 g.,” in idem, *Sochineniia*, vol. 1 (14), ed. Robert H. McNeal (Stanford: Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, 1967), 213. This is the text of Stalin’s address at the Central Committee plenum of February-March 1937, which paved the way politically and ideologically for the NKVD’s depredations.

<sup>19</sup>Hanson, *Time and Revolution*, 168-69; Rees, “Stalinism,” 59.

personal fiefdoms allotted them from the Party organization and the state administration, which were stocked anew with complaisant officials. As a model of perverted legality, the Great Purges were a proper, if extravagant, representation of the claustrophobic, insecure despotism that launched and steered them.<sup>20</sup>

The Red Army and its high command were among the institutions buffeted most severely by the political storms called forth by Kirov's murder in December 1934. Soviet military development during the 1930s has much in common with hyperindustrialization and coercive, mass collectivization, the hallmarks of Stalin's forced-march program of "socialist construction": a seemingly impressive result was obtained, but failures, weaknesses, misjudgments, ineptitude, and political zealotry—all of which, in the military field, came to the fore during the late 1930s—undermined the achievement. Ruinous faults in planning, organization, training, and logistics were laid bare when the Red Army was hurled against Poland and Finland in 1939, exposing it to quite different stresses from those present in its sealed Soviet milieu. But heedless, continued expansion of the force structure and the lingering effects of the arbitrary arrests and killings combined to remove any possibility that the corrections, adjustments, and innovations adopted hurriedly in 1940 could boost the Red Army's fighting power.

## I

My usage of the term "high command" requires comment, especially as it is central to this study. What the term is meant to connote, in relation to the Red Army of the 1930s, is not obvious: there was no formally constituted leadership body or command group bearing a title such as *Stavka Glavnogo Komandovaniia* until 23 June 1941.

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<sup>20</sup> An ex-KGB officer who at one point in his career had access to the dossiers compiled by NKVD investigators on their victims has observed: "The majority of authors writing about those troubled years...depict the 1930s as a period of total lawlessness organized by the NKVD and Stalin personally. In fact, the whole tragedy of those years consists in the very fact that all the arrests were carried out in strict accordance with laws that are still in (continued next page)"

Moreover, with the exception of Voroshilov, the long-standing Stalinist stalwart who headed the Red Army from 1925 to 1940, both the institutional and personal dimensions of the Red Army's top leadership became increasingly unsettled, especially after the internal political environment turned threatening and alarmist. Major structural changes in military command and control were effected in 1934-35 and again in 1937-38; turbulence in the Red Army's leadership commenced with the launch of the NKVD's full-fledged assault on the military in 1937 and continued, after slackening somewhat in 1939, through the winter of 1940-41.

Consequently, the Red Army's high command cannot be defined in neat institutional terms for even the period of Voroshilov's long tenure as military chief. At the top of the Stalinist political system, Stalin's rule was a highly personalized one, and the members of his retinue generally held leading positions in the Party and state hierarchies alike, which otherwise maintained separate identities. At the apex of the regime, lines of authority among Party and state bodies (the former monitoring the latter) were less significant than Stalin's relationship with the individuals in charge of them. Stalin's man within the military elite was Voroshilov, who personified the "iron" Stalinist leader of the time. Voroshilov chaired the Revolutionary Military Council of the USSR—the Red Army's high command while it existed—from late 1925 until mid-1934, when he acquired additional powers as defense commissar and the Council was abolished. Its other leading figure, until 1937, was Mikhail N. Tukhachevsky, appointed chief of the Red Army Staff in 1925. Whereas Voroshilov was obviously a political soldier, for more than a decade Tukhachevsky was the Red Army's most prominent and accomplished professional commander. Although he left Moscow under strained circumstances in 1928, his continued bombardment of Voroshilov with proposals and ideas, followed by his return to an influential central position in 1931, shows that he remained a functional member of the high command even during a prolonged absence from the capital.

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force today." (Ilya Dzhirkvelov, *Secret Servant: My Life with the KGB and the Soviet Élite* [New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989], 94.)

After the dissolution of the Revolutionary Military Council, its principals (Voroshilov, Tukhachevsky, Aleksandr I. Egorov, and Ian B. Gamarnik, the head of the Red Army's Political Administration) acquired greater authority and stature. This was reflected in the reappointment of Tukhachevsky and Gamarnik as Voroshilov's deputies in 1934 and the conferring of marshal's rank on Voroshilov, Tukhachevsky, and Egorov in 1935. Joining them in the pre-purge high command were the two other marshals minted in 1935: Vasili K. Bliukher, who commanded the Special Red Banner Far Eastern Army, and Semen M. Budenny, a swaggering Civil War cavalry hero and longtime Stalin supporter. Just below these military barons, all of whom were seated on the Central Committee in 1934, were Iona E. Iakir and Ieronim P. Uborevich, commanding the Ukrainian and Belorussian Military Districts, respectively.

The onset of the wanton state violence which marks the Great Purges was heralded by the sudden arrest and execution of Tukhachevsky, Iakir, and Uborevich, among others, in May-June 1937. Stalin and Voroshilov used the NKVD's state security directorate to decimate the top command group that had coalesced by 1934. The reconstituted high command took the form of the Main Military Council, a nine-man board created in March 1938 to put the Defense Commissariat and Red Army under an implacable, expanded Stalinist command group. In addition to Stalin himself, Voroshilov (its chairman), and Budenny, the group included Lev Z. Mekhlis and Efim A. Shchadenko, both odious commissar-intriguers. Dominated as never before by unalloyed Stalinists yet facing intractable practical tasks, Stalin's post-purge high command was much less stable, qualified, and functional than its predecessors.

Accordingly, I use "high command" as a term of convenience to refer narrowly to the handful of professional officers and Party officials in uniform who ran the Defense Commissariat and commanded the Red Army. During the 1930s this group consisted of the defense commissar; his deputies; the chief of the General Staff (the Red Army Staff before 1935); the head of the Political Administration; usually one or more of the

commanders of the military districts based in Kiev, Minsk, Moscow, as well as Soviet forces in the Far East; and a top captain or two whose lofty place derived from shared Civil War experience with Stalin and Voroshilov. It will be seen that the high commands over which Voroshilov presided from 1925 to 1940 were characteristically Soviet in their combination of Communist professional officers and Party officials but increasingly Stalinist: ruthless Stalin partisans with Party (rather than military) backgrounds held sway after 1937.

## II

How did terror affect the command staff and the high command itself?

Concerning the latter, I have alluded already to a consequence that was manifest in the weeks before the German onslaught: the unwillingness of Zhukov and Timoshenko to insist on the need for Stalin to permit Soviet forces to take prudent precautionary measures even though intelligence showed that the Wehrmacht could attack at any time. In fact, on 10 June Zhukov emphatically rebuked the commanding general of the Kiev Special Military District after he deployed troops in forward defensive positions without Moscow's permission, an action for which Zhukov himself was upbraided after Stalin learned about it from Beria, to whom NKVD border troops reported the move immediately.<sup>21</sup> Zhukov attributed his failure to act decisively, as was his wont, to the mixture of trust and trepidation Stalin aroused in him.<sup>22</sup> As for Stalin, his paralysis during the final weeks of peace are indicative of a willful and perverse failure to anticipate an attack even foreign observers thought imminent.

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<sup>21</sup> V. A. Anfilov, *Doroga k tragedii sorok pervogo goda* (Moscow: Akopov, 1997), 204. I. Kh. Bagramian, *Tak nachinalas' voina* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1971), 68, 76, provides a firsthand account of the incident. For Zhukov's countermanding order and demand for the name of the officer who authorized the forward deployment, see "Direktiva nachal'nika Genshtaba Krasnoi Armii Voennomu Sovetu KOVO (v kopii – zamestiteliu narkoma vnutrennikh del SSSR Maslennikovu)," 10 June 1941, in *1941 god*, 2:341.

<sup>22</sup> Simonov, *Glazami*, 315.

Less palpable but no less real were the purge's pernicious effects on the Red Army's broader preparation and readiness for war with Germany. The 503 members of the higher (i.e., brigade commander through marshal of the Soviet Union) command staff of the Red Army and Navy who were "repressed" from 1937 to 1941, most of them shot in 1937-38, embodied a vast store of experience and ability.<sup>23</sup> Their loss could not but add to the disarray roiling the central military administration, the military districts, and the fleets from 1937 to 1941; in particular, their absence lessened the command staff's ability to cope with the daunting practical tasks stemming from the Red Army's unbridled growth and the redeployment of its armies into the territories annexed in 1939-40. Ranking officers who escaped execution were badly shaken. (Some, such as Konstantin K. Rokossovskii, endured arrest, torture, and imprisonment before release and restoration to responsible positions.)<sup>24</sup> All officers must have been aware of the ever-vigilant *osobisty* (from *osobyi otdel*, i.e., "special department" operatives) of state security, who continued to be attached to military units so as to sniff out disloyalty on the spot. They had kept officers and soldiers under close surveillance, recruited secret informants, compiled incriminating "evidence," and seized their prey with few, if any, restraints in 1937-38. In the realm of military thought, the liquidation of Marshals Tukhachevsky and Egorov (aged forty-four and fifty-five, respectively), together with their networks of capable associates, extirpated the pockets of intellectual depth,

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<sup>23</sup>O. F. Suvenirov, *Tragediia RKKA, 1937-1938* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "TERRA," 1998), 315. There were, according to Suvenirov, 767 members of the higher command staff in 1936, men whom a top Soviet general and war veteran called "the best of the best." (S. P. Ivanov, *Shtab armeiskii, shtab frontovoi* [Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo, 1990], 27.) According to a summary prepared by the Defense Commissariat's directorate for officer personnel in March 1939, 377 of 490 members of the Red Army's higher command staff who were expelled from the Red Army in 1937-38 had been arrested. ("Spravka ob uvolennom komnachsostave v 1937 i 1938 godakh (bez politsoštava i vosstanovlennykh)," 2 March 1939, in "Statistika antiarmeiskogo terrora," *Voennno-istoricheskii arkhiv. Vypusk 2*. [Moscow, 1997], 113.) The great majority of these men undoubtedly were shot. The 490 expulsions probably include several that were due to chronic drunkenness, theft, and other non-political offenses. It should be borne in mind that officers in the internal and border troops (also parts of the armed forces) were victimized too, but figures comparable to those provided above are not available.

<sup>24</sup>See, for example, A. V. Gorbatov, *Gody i voiny*, 2d ed. (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo, 1989). Expelled from the Red Army and arrested in October 1938, the author was freed from prison and reinstated in the military in March 1941. At a meeting with Defense Commissar Timoshenko following his release, Gorbatov reported that he had just returned from "a long and dangerous assignment." (Ibid., 162.) According to Chief Marshal of Artillery Nikolai N. Voronov, "uncertainty about tomorrow" on the part of commanders "immediately affected the quality of their daily work...." (N. N. Voronov, "Na sluzhbe voennoi," *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 1991, no. 6: 66.)

creativity, and independence which had developed within the military establishment before 1937. The visible face of Soviet military strategy became a set of bombastic propaganda slogans.

Apart from the direct losses they caused, the Great Purges immersed a retooled, Stalinized high command in the poisonous milieu of the Stalinist political system, which prized *partiinost*, “class vigilance,” and forceful, often harsh, action. Mekhlis, Stalin’s arch-military commissar and watchdog, was an intolerant ideologue who saw treachery or lack of will in every failure. His brazen and haphazard meddling helped to stamp out any sphere of military or technical autonomy. And, after the carnage of 1937-38, Stalin’s own, sometimes peculiar, military ideas were accepted readily by a subservient high command: no one would dare to object once he had expressed a view.<sup>25</sup> Stalin’s favorable recollection about a 107-mm field gun of the Civil War was decisive in the decision, in early 1941, to proceed with a dubious project to mass-produce a 107-mm tank gun over the opposition of the commissar for the defense industry.<sup>26</sup> It was Stalin who proposed the Siberian cold-weather hat as a replacement for the cloth military cap during a December 1939 discussion about outfitting the troops arrayed against Finland—a sensible idea, it would seem, but Stalin’s involvement in this question and snap decision reveals his all-encompassing grasp and inordinate self-assurance.<sup>27</sup> And it was Stalin who suddenly ordered the center of gravity of the Red Army’s disposition to be shifted from Belorussia to the Ukraine during a review of its war plan in 1940, a command which

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<sup>25</sup> These pre-war consequences of the Great Purges are discussed briefly in Bernd Bonwetsch, “Stalin, the Red Army, and the ‘Great Patriotic War,’” in *Stalinism and Nazism: Dictatorships in Comparison*, ed. Ian Kershaw and Moshe Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 193-95.

<sup>26</sup> B. L. Vannikov, “Zapiski narkoma,” *Znamia*, 1988, no. 1: 140-41.

<sup>27</sup> Voronov, “Na sluzhbe voennoi,” 71. Stalin telephoned the secretary of the Novosibirsk oblast’ Party committee (*obkom*) to place an urgent order for one hundred fifty to two hundred thousand hats. A. I. Shakhurin, *Kryl’ia pobedy*, 3d. ed. (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1990), 58-59, provides some corroboration for Voronov’s account. At the time Shakhurin was the secretary of the Gor’kii *obkom*. He describes an urgent call “from the [Central Committee]” on 31 December 1939 in which he was asked to determine immediately how many tens of thousands of cold-weather hats could be produced in Gor’kii oblast’. Shakhurin provided his answer to Moscow at 0300 on 1 January 1940.

threw the General Staff's planners into a paroxysm of revision.<sup>28</sup> The June 1941 Zhukov-Timoshenko episode cited above shows how Stalin's colossal authority and supposed political acumen combined with the atmosphere of intimidation and hesitation which enveloped the high command's professional soldiers to inhibit candid strategic assessment and effective decision-making. If the forceful Zhukov muffled his appeals to Stalin concerning the nightmarish possibility of an imminent, massive German attack against unprepared and exposed Soviet forces due to the personal risk involved, less forthright generals and defense-industrialists surely kept their heads down as they dealt with more routine, but still significant, problems.<sup>29</sup>

The corollary to the lost talents and experience of Tukhachevsky, Egorov, and their associates was the poor quality or inexperience of their replacements. In a number of pivotal cases—and Zhukov's, by his own admission, is one—the men Stalin promoted or left in place to lead the Red Army and to direct its continuing modernization and accelerating growth left much to be desired professionally.<sup>30</sup> As John Erickson has noted, “with the exception of [Chief of the General Staff Boris M.] Shaposhnikov, the new high command was stamped either by mediocrity or lack of experience.”<sup>31</sup> Stalin's mad illusion that he himself possessed special insight into military affairs probably explains in part the indifferent quality of the post-purge high command. He was, for example, fond of telling military audiences that “history” had shown that “artillery decides the course of war.”<sup>32</sup> In May 1937, that is, as the Tukhachevsky case was about

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<sup>28</sup> A. M. Vasilevskii, *Delo vsei zhizni*, 4th ed. (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1983), 95-96.

<sup>29</sup> Vannikov, “Zapiski narkoma,” 149. Vannikov, a leading defense-industrialist under Stalin, admits that he and his colleagues were not steadfast in opposing orders they considered harmful due in part to their “striving to avoid repression.”

<sup>30</sup> Simonov, *Glazami*, 308. Zhukov told the author that he was “insufficiently experienced and trained” to be named chief of the General Staff in January 1941.

<sup>31</sup> John Erickson, *The Soviet High Command: A Military-Political History, 1918-1941* (London: St Martin's Press, 1962), 502.

<sup>32</sup> “Proidet desiatok let, i eti vstrechi ne vosstanovish' uzhe v pamiati,” *Vestnik Arkhiva Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, supplement to *Istochnik*, 1997, no. 5: 106-07. This is a diary kept by Viacheslav A. Malyshev, who was appointed commissar for heavy machine-building in 1939. Vannikov, “Zapiski narkoma,” 138, attests to Stalin's “special affinity” for artillery, which he liked to call “the god of war.”

to be detonated, Stalin placed the Red Army's artillery arm under the bungling Grigorii I. Kulik, who had led Red artillery in 1918-19 at Tsaritsyn. Kulik not only was left unscathed by the purge, but Stalin gave him even more authority in 1939 and made him a marshal in 1940. Dmitrii G. Pavlov, a hapless scapegoat for the 1941 calamity, vaulted from the command of a tank brigade in Spain in 1936-37 to that of the Western Special Military District, which fronted on the German-occupied remnant of Poland, in 1940. In the interim, he headed the Red Army's Automotive-Armored Directorate, from which he contributed to the untimely, incomplete reorganization of the tank fleet in 1939 and to the scheme's abrupt reversal in 1940.<sup>33</sup>

Meanwhile, below the Red Army's apex, its personnel system fell further behind as it strained to fill thousands of vacant positions each year, the vast majority of them due to the frenetic expansion of the force structure from 1938 to 1941. The Red Army grew from 1.5 million men at the start of 1938 to 3.9 million on 1 January 1941, a spectacular increase given the army's already massive size in 1938.<sup>34</sup> Few of the military *vydvizhentsy*—and new evidence shows that Stalin plainly intended the military purge to advance those he hailed as “men without names”—had the training or experience to match their new ranks or the more responsible positions into which they were thrust.<sup>35</sup> Mikhail P. Kirponos, for example, was appointed commanding general of the Kiev Special Military District, within which fifty-eight divisions were stationed when the war began, in February 1941; he had commanded a rifle division as recently as a year earlier,

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<sup>33</sup>*Sovetskaia Voennaia Entsiklopediia*, s.v. “Kulik” and “Pavlov”; A. Ryzhakov, “K voprosu o stroitel'stve bronetankovykh voisk Krasnoi Armii v 30-e gody,” *Voenna-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1968, no. 8: 109-10.

<sup>34</sup>K. F. Skorobogatkin et al., *50 let Vooruzhennykh Sil SSSR* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1968), 198, 234. As the Red Army was authorized 885,000 personnel in 1933, its size in 1938 already had entailed quite rapid growth.

<sup>35</sup>“Nevol'niki v rukakh germanskogo reikhsvera.” Rech' I. V. Stalina v Narkomate oborony., ed. Iurii Murin, *Istochnik*, 1994, no. 3: 83. This is the unedited transcript of Stalin's speech on 2 June 1937 to an expanded session of the Defense Commissariat's Military Council, which convened in the Kremlin from 1 to 4 June in connection with the Tukhachevsky case.

during the conflict with Finland.<sup>36</sup> Tactical-level leadership remained, as before, a grave weakness, one steadily worsened by the continuing mass “production” of new units from the flow of weapons and manpower directed to the Red Army. In thousands of rifle platoons, raw junior lieutenants struggled to teach masses of poorly-educated peasants and first-generation workers to perform basic military tasks. The invidious combination of relentless purge and headlong growth brought turbulence, inexperience, and lack of cohesion to the Red Army’s combat units and their superior headquarters.<sup>37</sup>

In his remarkable *Soviet High Command* (1962), Erickson judged that the Great Purges inflicted “grievous” damage on the Red Army, “left terrible scars,” and remained “a reality” long after they slackened.<sup>38</sup> In contrast, Roger A. Reese recently has argued that historians have seized on the Great Purges to blame Stalin for crucial military deficiencies whose real causes are structural and are to be found in the Red Army’s overly rapid expansion from 1936 to 1941.<sup>39</sup> In an otherwise illuminating work on the Red Army’s social history, Reese has written that “the only certain effects of the *Ezhovshchina* on the officer corps...were the destruction of trained cadres and the degradation of morale....” Reese does not try to account for the harmful influence exerted by the continued presence in military units of state security agents, but he concedes that “the loss of experienced men hindered the implementation of the army’s measures for

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<sup>36</sup> *Sovetskaia Voennaia Entsiklopediia*, s.v. “Kirponos”; Iurii Aleksandrovich Gor’kov, *Kremli’: Stavka. Genshtab*. (Tver’: “RIF LTD,” 1995), 75.

<sup>37</sup> Roger R. Reese, *Stalin’s Reluctant Soldiers: A Social History of the Red Army, 1925-1941* (Lawrence, Kans.: University Press of Kansas, 1996), 115, 160, 163-64.

<sup>38</sup> Erickson, *High Command*, 506-07, 559.

<sup>39</sup> Reese shows that the Red Army’s precipitous growth from 1936 to 1941, in combination with chronically inadequate officer recruitment and retention, left it “swamped” by a huge influx of conscripts who (like their junior officers) could be trained only poorly. (Reese, *Stalin’s Reluctant Soldiers*, ix.) In other words, the regime’s effort to create a massive, modern army was undermined by the inadequacies of its military manpower pool. In essence, Reese extends Moshe Lewin’s thesis that the predominantly peasant (i.e., “backward”) character of Russia overwhelmed the young Soviet regime and its modernization plans. (See, for example, Moshe Lewin, “Grappling with Stalinism,” in *The Making of the Soviet System* [New York: Pantheon Books, 1985], 296-300, 310-14; and Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 4-5, for a critical perspective.) Reese focuses mainly on the lower levels of the officer corps, whereas I concentrate on the high command, that is, on the highest level of military leadership. Hence the present study complements Reese’s investigation of the pre-war Red Army’s structure and composition.

coping with the effects of continuing large-scale growth.”<sup>40</sup> In fact, this is a point of fundamental importance: the inexperience or incompetence of the newcomers to the gutted high command is *the* key problem for evaluation of the purge’s most consequential and lasting effects on the Red Army.<sup>41</sup> It is precisely this question which the present work explores by focusing on the high command’s development during the 1930s, particularly its forced make-over. I investigate the means by which Stalin gradually gained complete and absolute control of the military establishment, an opportunistic (yet relentless) process which had its violent culmination in 1937-38, and analyze the political and ideological basis of the military portion of the Great Purges. I then use a case study of a major military program to elucidate aspects of the connection between the high command’s “Bolshevization”—a cardinal aim of the military purge entailing realization and enforcement of the supremacy of Stalinist values—and the Red Army’s defective posture and preparation for war with Germany.

In my view, the high command’s domination by Stalin, his cronies, and Party functionaries after 1937 contributed materially to the incoherence and dangerous imprudence of the Red Army’s force posture in 1941. My focus is not on what Tukhachevsky or Egorov probably would have done had they lived (an approach which would be highly speculative), but on the pernicious interaction between the offensive creed to which Soviet military thought subscribed, comforting (yet outmoded) assumptions about how war would begin, and the dogmatic Stalinist complexion of the revamped high command from 1938 to 1940. The specific topic I examine in detail from this perspective is the immense (but little-known) border fortification program, which went utterly to waste after the occupation and annexation of eastern Poland in late 1939.

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<sup>40</sup> Reese, *Stalin’s Reluctant Soldiers*, 161-62. Elsewhere, Reese merely notes that “the higher ranks of the army officer corps literally were decimated and a great deal of experience was lost.” (Roger R. Reese, “The Red Army and the Great Purges,” in *Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives*, ed. J. Arch Getty and Roberta T. Manning [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993], 213.)

<sup>41</sup> Stephen Kotkin, too, sees this as “the key issue” for assessment of the military purge. (Stephen Kotkin, “1991 and the Russian Revolution: Sources, Conceptual Categories, Analytical Frameworks,” *Journal of Modern History* 70, no. 2 [1998]: 388 n. 12.)

Thereafter, Stalin and the high command decided to move the bulk of the ground and air forces in the western USSR into the annexed lands and to undertake a crash effort to fortify the new frontier. This misguided decision caused the fortified belt built during the 1930s inside the original border to be disarmed and abandoned. Although this portion of my study is narrowly focused, the fortification effort embodies the failings of strategic conception and war planning behind the 1941 debacle.<sup>42</sup> These defects were symptoms of primary failures (à la Cohen and Gooch) to learn and to anticipate by Stalin, the high command, and the General Staff. Such a comprehensive breakdown in a sphere so critical to the USSR's security attests to the existence of a ruinous system of power and policy-making, one incapable of preparing the country and its army properly for the very contingency—an “imperialist” attack—that ostensibly had warranted breakneck industrialization and purgative terror.

### III

The straightforward thesis that the speedy liquidation of most ranking Soviet officers retarded growth of the Red Army's middling fighting power for some years does not necessarily mean, of course, that it would have held the Wehrmacht at bay if only Stalin had resisted his compulsion to overturn most of the military elite in 1937-38, nor do I believe that would have been the case. Even though Reese has little to say about the purge's effects, immediate or persisting, he rightly has highlighted fundamental structural and human weaknesses in the pre-war Red Army that either antedated the Great Purges or were, strictly speaking, unrelated to them, and has stressed their role in impairing the Red Army's ability to organize, equip, and train itself to fight effectively. They

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<sup>42</sup>Due to time constraints, I was able to examine only the fortification program in detail. However, I strongly suspect that examination of other major pre-war military programs and activities (e.g., weapon development and procurement) would yield findings broadly similar to those set forth in Chapter 6. Among many recent works on pre-war Soviet military thought, the Red Army's 1941 war plan, and Stalinist military doctrine, see, in particular, Cynthia A. Roberts, “Planning for War: The Red Army and the Catastrophe of 1941,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 47, no. 8 (1995): 1293-1326; and V. A. Nevezhin, *Sindrom nastupatel'noi voyny. Sovetskaia propaganda v predverii “sviashchennykh boev”, 1939-1941 gg.* (Moscow: “AIRO-XX,” 1997).

originated in the regime's adoption in 1929 of an enduring approach to military development which, as in industry, focused mainly on extensive (rather than intensive) growth, manifested in the accumulation of gigantic stocks of weapons at a rate outstripping the ability of commanders to employ them effectively. And, in any case, the Stalin leadership's decisions to quicken, from 1938 to 1941, the already brisk pace at which the force structure had been expanding would have greatly exacerbated the serious deficiencies Reese identifies in the competence, cohesion, and number of Soviet commanders, particularly at lower levels. Given the Red Army's exorbitant growth from 1938 to 1941, the command staff, especially junior and mid-level commanders, would have been hard pressed even if the military purge's swath through the command elite had not been so broad and lethal. And a general dearth of such ordinary yet essential items as spare parts and communications gear would have degraded the battlefield effectiveness of Soviet units regardless of how well their commanders and soldiers performed.

Nevertheless, the Red Army's institutional capacity to cope with—if only by muddling through—the spurt in its growth from 1938 to 1941 was reduced by the swift destruction of most of the command staff's upper echelon in 1937-38. Whether the abilities and experience of the murdered generals would have kept the Red Army from being driven to the brink of complete defeat by the Wehrmacht is doubtful. But the staggering costs of the war's opening phase for the Soviet Union can hardly have been any greater than they actually were, and they probably would have been less, perhaps a great deal less, had the military purge not depleted the higher command staff so deeply and saddled the army with a high command in which Stalinist orthodoxy and personal loyalty trumped all other considerations.

In discussing the damaging effects of the Great Purges on the Red Army, historians and retired Soviet generals alike have tended to speak of the Red Army's

“decapitation.”<sup>43</sup> Although this bloody metaphor underscores the speed and sweeping extent of the military purge, it is not entirely apt: the ranking officers who were killed were replaced sooner or later, as were those replacements who themselves succumbed to state security. It also presumes “that the pre-purge army must have been a more effective instrument,” a questionable assumption.<sup>44</sup> In my view, the purge’s most substantial and durable effects were at the top of the Red Army: Egorov’s and Tukhachevsky’s successors were hamstrung by Stalin’s boundless authority, his underlying contempt for specialists, his “conviction that he had mastered military affairs,” and his autocratic decision-making style.<sup>45</sup> Shaposhnikov, the bloodless but able military technocrat who succeeded Egorov as chief of the General Staff in 1937, died naturally in 1945, in part, because he took great care not to provoke Stalin. In its decision-making on war plans, force structure, and military infrastructure, Stalin’s new high command showed its crippling infirmity as it moved to confront a deadly enemy.

#### IV

Memoirs and documents that were considered secret or too sensitive for publication prior to the late 1980s have provided fresh insights into these and other important facets of Stalin’s military policy and the state of the Red Army prior to the German invasion. Used in conjunction with older Soviet sources, the new ones enable a fuller and more nuanced picture of the USSR’s hobbled army to be drawn, one with sufficient detail for hitherto hidden or less conspicuous dimensions of the high command’s pre-war performance to be elaborated. Accordingly, this study relies primarily on memoirs published in the Soviet Union and Russia from the 1960s through the 1990s; published military and Party documents, especially those appearing since the

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<sup>43</sup>See, for example, Anfilov, *Doroga*, 58; Ivanov, *Shtab*, 27.

<sup>44</sup>Richard Overy, *Russia’s War: Blood Upon the Snow* (New York: TV Books, 1997), 50.

<sup>45</sup>Conquest, *Stalin*, 240.

late 1980s; the extensive collection of once-secret documents from Soviet archives assembled by Dmitrii A. Volkogonov and resident in the Library of Congress; the vast Soviet historical literature on military subjects; and recent studies by Russian historians. The purposes for which a Soviet-era memoir or document may have been written mandate that such sources be used with great care: for example, Khrushchev's memoirs, despite their revelations, are "full of anti-Stalin inventions."<sup>46</sup> Yet the sources enumerated above constitute a rich and variegated lode, one supplemented by non-Soviet works on the Red Army, Stalin, and the Stalinist system. In general, the bounty of sources on the Stalin period permits current historical research to rest on a much wider range of evidence and, in particular, on more meaningful and varied documentary evidence than ever before. Using this new evidence, the present study correlates structural change in the military establishment with broader regime imperatives; details the political and ideological underpinnings of the terror campaign; probes the veiled preparatory phase of the military purge in 1936-37; and relates the purge's effects on the high command to the miscarriage of military policy and plans in 1939-40. Further, this examination casts grave doubt on the viability of the Stalinist military project as conceived and implemented before the war with Nazi Germany.

Although this study's six chapters span the period from the mid-1920s to 1941, they concentrate on the years 1934-40, which were crucial to the formation of the modern Soviet (and Russian) military system. Chapters I and II concern the evolution of the high command's structure and composition through the mid-1930s. Chapters III and IV examine key aspects of the military element of the Great Purges, namely, its genesis, relationship to the larger political process, and purposes. The Stalinist high command of 1938-40, whose organizational embodiment was the Main Military Council, is the subject of Chapter V. The fortification program is the centerpiece of Chapter VI, especially its misdirection after 1938. In the conclusion, I explore certain central dilemmas of the

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<sup>46</sup>Kotkin, "1991 and the Russian Revolution," 416.

**Soviet military enterprise: these sapped the Red Army's fighting power and strongly suggest that Stalin's regime was incapable of fielding an effective army before 1942-43.**

## Chapter 1

### The Red Army and its High Command During Stalin's Rise to Political Supremacy

In order to defend its existence, a country should have a qualified army.

Stalin, addressing a conference of Party propagandists, 1 October 1938

Between 1925 and 1935 the Red Army and its commanders experienced a dazzling reversal of fortune: a poorly armed, shabby troop led in part by men who had soldiered for the hated *ancien régime* yielded to a substantial, modernizing force commanded by a rising new elite. The catalysts for the Red Army's transformation were the five-year plans for the national economy inaugurated in 1928 and 1933. In addition to achieving a fully state-owned industrial sector and suppressing the market, private property, and wage labor, the aim of the five-year plans was to develop heavy and defense industries able to produce huge quantities of weapons and military equipment as well as the fuels, ammunition, and other supplies needed to sustain them. Many more military units and new types of them were required to field the thousands of tanks, artillery pieces, and aircraft being delivered annually to the Red Army; in turn, tens of thousands of trained, technically literate, and politically reliable officers were needed to command them. In response to the new demands and problems posed by rapid military modernization and expansion, Stalin and his cohorts shaped Party and government

policies to support the “regular, trained, qualified army” a great socialist state required under conditions of “capitalist encirclement.”<sup>1</sup>

Despite the disarray produced by the regime’s fanciful early industrialization plans and the harmful effects of forced collectivization on military readiness, its initiatives between 1929 and 1935 did greatly raise the country’s military potential. They were intended to provide the Red Army with an array of “first-class” weapons and equipment, consistent with Stalin’s view that “technology decides everything” in military affairs.<sup>2</sup> Hence the Red Army truly was “the supreme industrial creation of Soviet Russia.”<sup>3</sup> This chapter begins by outlining Stalin’s economic programs, whose military significance and cost were so pronounced that they were evident even to foreign observers of the Red Army at the time.

Less conspicuous but no less potent in their effect than Stalin’s industrialization drive were his steps to gain firm control of the military establishment and defense policy generally in the decade after Lenin’s death. Most political histories of the Stalin era discuss the growth of Stalin’s power over the Red Army only briefly, though the military became, together with the state security service and the Party *apparatus*, one of the regime’s main props. Yet Stalin paid close attention to the composition of the high command, to the development and effectiveness of weapons and military equipment, and to the structure of military administration. Moreover, at the end of 1930, amid a worsening economic crisis, he took time to effect a major change in the machinery of defense policy-making that made such decisions the preserve of an exclusive Politburo subcommittee he controlled.

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<sup>1</sup>“I. V. Stalin o ‘Kratkom kurse istorii VKP(b).’ Stenogramma vystupleniia na soveshchanii propagandistov Moskvyy i Leningrada. 1938 g.,” ed. N. N. Maslov, *Istoricheskii arkhiv*, 1994, no. 5: 22. This is the text of a previously unpublished Stalin speech on 1 October 1938.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Curzio Malaparte, *The Volga Rises in Europe*, trans. David Moore (London: Alvin Redman, 1957), 60.

Stalin's inroads into the military establishment after 1924 were gradual and opportunistic, but they also were relentless. Nevertheless, his subjugation of the military was not complete until 1937-38, when his power over the high command and the Red Army, exercised through a coterie of dedicated Stalinists headed by Voroshilov, his long-serving military chief, became unequivocally absolute. The second part of the chapter describes the genesis of the high command of the mid-1930s, whose forerunner was the supreme military council originally chaired by Trotsky, which itself dated to the time of the Civil War. The group of Red commanders that coalesced against Trotsky and led the Red Army well into the 1930s is the subject of the final portion of the chapter. This elite group proved surprisingly durable given the dissimilarity and even incompatibility of its members' backgrounds, outlooks, and interests. But these gave the high command of the mid-1930s, whose nucleus remained the same beneficiaries of Trotsky's downfall, an uneven and brittle quality. Since its flaws—as seen by Stalin and Voroshilov—were a key factor in its eventual destruction, their nature are explored in detail.

## I

The years 1934-35 were decisive ones in the Red Army's evolution from a patchwork infantry army consisting largely of territorial-militia divisions to a seemingly imposing standing force bristling with tanks, aircraft, and artillery. They saw several fundamental developments in Soviet military organization and policy: the establishment of a defense commissariat headed by an executive with ministerial powers rather than a council; the formation of a general staff; the decision to do away with the hybrid system of manning that relied heavily on part-time soldiers; the introduction of military ranks carried by individuals rather than the positions they held; and the effort to assimilate modern weapons into the force structure as well as military thought and practice. These initiatives sought to rationalize and professionalize the everyday conduct of military affairs and, more important, to form a basis for greatly enhancing the Red Army's effectiveness in wartime. Effected shortly after the end of the formerly fruitful secret

collaboration with the Reichswehr in 1933, they embodied a new phase in the Red Army's development marked by self-reliance, confidence, and steadiness.<sup>4</sup> These measures also reflected larger processes of stabilization, bureaucratization, and growth of the Party *apparatus* and state administration during the Second Five-Year Plan after the frenetic initial round of industrialization and disorderly extension of state control over all of the country's resources.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the "progressive normalisation" of the Soviet military establishment that the initiatives of 1934-35 represented, the Red Army's revolutionary identity and sensitive station in the regime made it subject, as before, to distinctively Soviet tensions and pressures. These included the overarching requirement for ideological conformity on the part of officers and conscripts; Stalin's mandate that the Red Army remain removed from the final phase of his drive for supreme power; and, finally, the regime's need to use the army actively as an instrument for advancing its purposes.<sup>6</sup> Beyond simple survival and self-defense, foremost among the latter was the revolutionary transformation of Soviet society, a process in which the army would act both as "a school of socialism" and, in conjunction with state security, as an instrument of coercion in the internal "class

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<sup>4</sup> Manfred Zeidler, *Reichswehr und Rote Armee, 1920-1933* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1993) is a recent, comprehensive account of German-Soviet military collaboration. See also *Fashistskii mekh kovalsia v SSSR: Krasnaia Armia i reikhsver. Tainoe sotrudnichestvo. 1922-1933. Neizvestnye dokumenty.*, comp. Iu. L. D'iakov and T. S. Bushueva (Moscow: "Sovetskaia Rossiia," 1992).

<sup>5</sup> On the bureaucratization of the state and Party during the 1930s, see Moshe Lewin, "Bureaucracy and the Stalinist State," in *Stalinism and Nazism*, 53-74.

<sup>6</sup> Erickson, *High Command*, 367-69, 387. In Soviet military parlance, two terms refer collectively to officers. *Komandnyi sostav*, translated here as "command staff," was used narrowly to refer to personnel holding command positions in line units, their deputies, or those whose positions required previous experience as troop commanders. The "higher" (*vysshii*) command staff consisted of men holding the ranks of brigade commander and above after the introduction of personal military ranks in 1935; previously, the higher group consisted of the top four military position categories of the thirteen established by a 1924 statute. The command staff was part of the *nachal'stviushchii sostav*, translated here as "commanding personnel." *Nachal'stviushchii sostav* referred to personnel holding responsible positions in military units and establishments for which professional military or other specialized training was required. Accordingly, the *nachal'stviushchii sostav* consisted of command, political, technical, logistic, administrative, medical, veterinary, and judicial components. When "officers" or "officer corps" are used here, their meaning is the broader sense associated with *nachal'stviushchii sostav*. See V. F. Loboda, *Komandnye kadry i zakonodatel'stvo o kadrakh v razvitii Vooruzhennykh Sil SSSR* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva oborony Soiuzna SSR, 1960), 51, 56; and *Sovetskaia Voennaia Entsiklopediia*, s.v. "komandnyi sostav" and "nachal'stviushchii sostav."

struggle.”<sup>7</sup> These conditions formed the backdrop for a series of sharp, long-standing personal animosities and struggles at the Red Army’s apex which were resolved violently in 1937-38, only to be replaced by a fresh set of strains within the high command. Nevertheless, Stalin’s absolute control of the military leadership was cemented once and for all by the Great Purges; the cowed survivors of the bloodletting were aware that practically any remark or action could have fearsome consequences.

In view of the killing of most of the top military leadership and the subsequent destruction of the entire pre-war force itself in 1941-42, it is jarring to recall that the Red Army’s prospects had seemed bright just a few years earlier. After enduring the lean years of the 1920s as a ragged assembly of weak rifle and cavalry divisions, the Red Army became the chief beneficiary of the First and Second Five-Year Plans, which were centered on the development of heavy and defense industries. By 1934, with series production of up-to-date models of weapons underway in Soviet plants, thousands of tanks, artillery pieces, and aircraft were being manufactured annually.<sup>8</sup> Though some of the Red Army’s top leaders were uniformed Party functionaries of limited ability, others were competent, energetic innovators who undertook the myriad tasks associated with modernization and expansion with zest and insight. The latter were busily engaged in developing and applying ambitious new concepts for employing the Red Army’s increasingly large stocks of new weapons to defeat Poland, Germany, and Japan, the “imperialist” powers that threatened Soviet territory directly. Self-assured, the Red Army’s leading commanders looked optimistically to the future. As a group, the

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<sup>7</sup>Mark von Hagen, “Militarization and Sovietization: Political Culture in the Postreform Army,” in *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship: The Red Army and the Soviet Socialist State, 1917-1930* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990), 271-94.

<sup>8</sup>N. S. Simonov, *Voенно-promyshlennyi kompleks SSSR v 1920-1950-e gody: tempy ekonomicheskogo rosta, struktura, organizatsiia proizvodstva i upravlenie* (Moscow: “Rossiiskaia politicheskaiia entsiklopediia” [ROSSPEN], 1996), 91, 99. The First Five-Year Plan (1928-32) established the metallurgical, machine-building, chemical, instrument, fuel, and other industries needed to manufacture a variety of modern weapons, some of which (e.g., tanks, bombers, heavy artillery for coastal defense) had never been produced in Russia. Soviet arms plants did not begin to turn out up-to-date models in large quantities (in contrast to smaller quantities of obsolescent models) until 1933-34, the first years of the Second Five-Year Plan. The mid-1930s also saw the development of (continued next page)

command staff seemed to enjoy the Party's trust and favor, and was being rewarded for its fidelity and service in tangible ways. Finally, despite the disaffection engendered by collectivization among its conscripts, the Red Army had not buckled, as its tsarist predecessor had after the traumas of war, defeat, and revolution. In short, to all appearances, by 1935 the military command had emerged alongside the Party and state security as a bulwark of Stalin's regime.

Naturally, it was the Politburo which established the political and economic basis for the Red Army's revival; its defense decisions were linked directly with the First Five-Year Plan's rationale and priorities. Above all, the First Five-Year Plan was intended to provide, as quickly as possible, the metallurgical, machine-building, automotive, chemical, and other industrial plants needed to feed the nascent defense industry with materials and components for the manufacture of modern weapons and military equipment in quantity.<sup>9</sup> Thus, at the Party's Fifteenth Congress in December 1927, a few months after the war scare with Britain, Military and Naval Commissar Voroshilov declared that the five-year plan should proceed from the inevitability of aggression against the USSR and the need to muster the resources to support a military capability that would ensure the enemy coalition's defeat. Industrialization, in Voroshilov's view, would determine the nature and extent of Soviet military power.<sup>10</sup>

Planning for the Red Army's development proceeded in tandem with the First Five-Year Plan, and military programs received regular attention from the Party leadership. A series of Politburo meetings in July 1929 on defense matters culminated in a resolution of 15 July entitled "On the State of the USSR's Defense" that set forth

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an extensive infrastructure for weapons research, development, and testing—a crucial aspect of the regime's commitment to the long-term growth of Soviet military power. (Ibid., 83, 98-99.)

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 71-72.

<sup>10</sup>K. E. Voroshilov, "Voprosy oborony i piatiletka," in *Stat'i i rechi* (Moscow: Partizdat TsK VKP[b], 1936), 210. These were among the conclusions of Voroshilov's speech at the Party's Fifteenth Congress on 13 December 1927. Earlier he had stated that the Soviet government's readiness for war was a question which had (continued next page)

guidelines for the Red Army's first multi-year development plan. In general, they called for the acquisition of a wide range of modern weapons and the Red Army's placement on a much higher technical plane. The resolution directed the USSR People's Commissariat of Military and Naval Affairs (*Narodnyi komissariat po voennym i morskim delam SSSR*, abbreviated *NKVM*) to structure the Red Army so that it was not numerically inferior to the enemy coalition in the main (i.e., Western) theater of war. Concerning armament, the Politburo stipulated that the Red Army be "stronger than the enemy in two or three decisive kinds of weapons, specifically, in the air force, artillery, and tanks."<sup>11</sup> To facilitate modernization, in November 1929 the position of chief of armaments was established in the NKVM's central administration to direct and coordinate weapon programs for the Red Army's ground, air, and naval components; initially, it was headed by Uborevich, a young, practical, and highly competent innovator.<sup>12</sup> In June 1931 Stalin recalled Tukhachevsky to Moscow from the Leningrad Military District to fill the position and simultaneously serve as a deputy military and naval commissar. The Red Army's leading proponent of technical and operational modernization, Tukhachevsky was to supply much of the intellectual and bureaucratic propulsion for the Red Army's make-over. Tukhachevsky's appointment signified that the professionalization of the Soviet military would proceed in earnest.<sup>13</sup>

The July 1929 Politburo resolution was momentous: it laid the foundation for a prodigious, hydra-headed military-industrial complex and for armed forces that deployed heavy, medium, and light versions of practically every weapon in their inventory. The

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become "pressing" only since the previous spring, when Britain began "clearly to threaten the USSR." (Ibid., 196.)

<sup>11</sup> Cited in N. S. Simonov, *Voенно-promyshlennyi kompleks SSSR*, 68. A January 1931 amendment stipulated that the Red Army possess numerical superiority in troops as well. (G. A. Deborin et al., eds., *Zarozhdenie voiny. Bor'ba progressivnykh sil za sokhranenie mira*, vol. 1 of *Istoriia vtoroi mirovoi voiny, 1939-1945*, ed. A. A. Grechko et al. [Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1973], 258.)

<sup>12</sup> Skorobogatkin et al., *50 let*, 196. A Directorate of Mechanization and Motorization also was founded in November 1929. (*Sovetskaia Voennaia Entsiklopediia*, s.v. "tankovye voiska.")

<sup>13</sup> Raymond L. Garthoff, *Soviet Military Policy: A Historical Analysis* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), 34.

resolution's guidelines governed the size of the productive capacity that the defense industry was supposed to attain during the First Five-Year Plan, as well as that inherent in the metallurgical, chemical, and machine-building branches. In addition, the resolution set the Red Army on a course which placed a premium on the accumulation of very large stocks of modern weapons for land warfare, which were not acquired until the Second Five-Year Plan (1933-37) put industrial planning on a more stable and rational basis than its absurdly extravagant predecessor. Although Soviet plants were plagued by persistent problems with quality and wasteful manufacturing practices, the number of tanks they produced grew from 170 in 1929 and part of 1930 to 3,565 in 1934; artillery pieces, from 952 to 4,123; and aircraft, from 899 to 3,109. Equally important, up-to-date models of weapons entered series production in 1933-34, replacing the obsolescent models being manufactured at the beginning of the decade.<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, in January 1934 Voroshilov proclaimed that "the fundamental tasks of the army's technical reconstruction" had been resolved.<sup>15</sup> This was an overstatement, but the foundation for the Red Army's technical and organizational metamorphosis had indeed been established by the First Five-Year Plan and its more sober successor.

As a result of the prodigious productive capacity of the Commissariat of Heavy Industry, in 1935 the Red Army possessed 7,633 tanks (most of them light models), 13,837 guns (76-millimeter caliber and larger), and 6,672 aircraft—immense quantities of arms, indeed, far more than Soviet commanders were then able to employ effectively in accordance with their evolving "operational art" (*operativnoe iskusstvo*, the term denoting the conduct of front- and army-level operations).<sup>16</sup> Soviet superiority in such weapons

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<sup>14</sup>N. S. Simonov, *Voенно-promyshlennyi kompleks SSSR*, 68, 70, 84, 91, 93-94, 99. Quality control in the manufacture of weapons was such a serious and intractable problem that Voroshilov addressed it in "an open letter to the workers of heavy industry" in February 1935. (Voroshilov, "Otkrytoe pis'mo k rabotnikam tiazheloi promyshlennosti," in *Stat'i i rechi*, 627-29.)

<sup>15</sup>Voroshilov, "Eshche sil'nee budet krepit' oboronu Sovetskoi strany," in *Stat'i i rechi*, 602. Voroshilov gave this speech at the Party's Seventeenth Congress on 30 January 1934.

<sup>16</sup>Deborin et al., *Zarozhdenie voiny*, 270.

(to be achieved from 1933 to 1937) was supposed “to give the USSR the ability to repel an attack by a coalition of imperialist governments, to mount a whole series of simultaneous and sequential shattering blows, and to inflict defeat on the enemy.” And the Red Army was to be able to conduct operations “against aggression from the west, east, and south” simultaneously, that is, in all potential theaters of military operations—a prescription for unrelenting exertions to preserve military superiority over a potential enemy coalition.<sup>17</sup> Whereas Soviet military strategy during the 1920s was constrained by the Red Army’s technical backwardness and the need for it to avoid defeat against superior opponents, the Red Army of the mid-1930s was being equipped, organized, and trained to conduct high-tempo operations-in-depth on the enemy’s territory from the outset of a future war.

This machine-age vision of successive, deeply penetrating offensives by hard-hitting, combined-arms armies reflected the theoretical dominance of Tukhachevsky and the like-minded, articulate military theorists who were in their prime between the late 1920s and the mid-1930s. Their views were codified in the *Provisional Field Regulation* of 1936, which made the operation-in-depth and its tactical variant, deep battle, established principles of Soviet military art.<sup>18</sup> Frunze and Tukhachevsky, in particular, regarded the offensive as the most decisive type of strategic operation and the one best suited for a revolutionary state: as Tukhachevsky wrote in 1926, lands occupied by the Red Army would become “Soviet territory, where workers’ and peasants’ power would be established,” thereby “expanding not only our base for war, but the socialist base in general.”<sup>19</sup> He and Vladimir K. Triandafillov, head of the Red Army Staff’s Operations

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<sup>17</sup>R. A. Savushkin, *Razvitie Sovetskikh voennoy sil i voennogo iskusstva v mezhoennoy period (1921-1941 gg.)* (Moscow: Lenin Military-Political Academy, 1989), 11, 40.

<sup>18</sup>I. A. Korotkov, *Istoriia Sovetskoi voennoi mysli (Kratkii ocherk. 1921-iiun' 1941)* (Moscow: Nauka, 1980), 152, 158-59; David M. Glantz, *Soviet Military Operational Art: In Pursuit of Deep Battle* (London: Frank Cass, 1991), 24. *Voennoe iskusstvo* encompasses military strategy, operational art, and tactics.

<sup>19</sup>M. N. Tukhachevsky, “Voprosy sovremennoi strategii,” in *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, vol. 1, 1919-1927 gg. (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1964), 258-59. Confronted with this disconcertingly direct expression of Soviet intent, the editors of this 1964 collection of Tukhachevsky's (continued next page)

Directorate prior to his 1931 death in a plane crash, envisioned a titanic war of sweeping maneuver and relentless attack and pursuit. The “future great war,” Tukhachevsky believed, would require a mass army with substantial mobility and a muscular offensive capability.<sup>20</sup> The necessary quantities of modern weapons (Tukhachevsky’s internal memoranda of 1930 speak of the production of tens of thousands of aircraft and tanks) could be supplied only by an expansive defense industry with a large surplus capacity for wartime production.<sup>21</sup>

Consequently, Tukhachevsky reveled in the operational horizons opened by the First Five-Year Plan and the politically aware, technically-minded peasantry he thought collectivization would produce.<sup>22</sup> In a 1934 article he advocated the formation of “forward armies” brimming with tanks, self-propelled artillery, and infantry transporters that would be hurled across the border “immediately upon the declaration of war.” Such

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writings felt compelled to state: “This proposition of the author is mistaken in principle. The forced Sovietization of liberated territories, as is well known, did not happen and could not have happened during the Great Patriotic War.” [!] In a 1921 article, Mikhail V. Frunze, Tukhachevsky’s predecessor as chief of the Red Army Staff, wrote of “the necessity of training our army in the spirit of the greatest dynamism, of preparing it for the completion of the Revolution’s task through energetic, decisive, and boldly-executed offensive operations.” (M. V. Frunze, “Edinaia voennaia doktrina i Krasnaia Armiia,” in *Izbrannye proizvedeniia* [Moscow: Voennoe izdatel’stvo Ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1965], 52.) Aleksandr A. Svechin, an erudite military historian, theorist, and graduate of the Imperial General Staff Academy, was a conspicuous dissenter to the offensive strategic orthodoxy of the 1920s and 1930s. Svechin’s principal work was *Strategiia*, published in two editions in 1926-27. In it he argued that a strategy of attrition, which implied an initial posture of strategic defense, was the approach best suited to a protracted war given the USSR’s limited resources and geopolitical isolation. In a memorandum to Voroshilov apparently written in 1931 or 1932, he stated that Soviet strategy should not rely on an assumption of qualitative or quantitative superiority in weaponry over the “imperialist coalition” for the next fifteen years. He decried the “technological ‘hat-tossing’ so evident in Triandafilov’s book [a reference to *Kharakter operatsii sovremennykh armii*, published in 1929] and Tukhachevsky’s speeches.” (Cited in A. A. Kokoshin, *Armiia i politika. Sovetskaia voenno-politicheskaia i voenno-strategicheskaia mysl’, 1918-1991 gody* [Moscow: “Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia,” 1995], 97.) Svechin’s views were ridiculed and discredited by Tukhachevsky, who attacked him in (among other venues) the venomous lead article of a 1931 book entitled *Protiv reaktsionnykh teorii na voenno-nauchnom fronte*. (Korotkov, *Istoriia Sovetskoi voennoi mysli*, 87; Aleksei Khorev, “Vozvrashchenie Svechina,” *Krasnaia zvezda*, 5 December 1992.)

<sup>20</sup>Quoted in Lennart Samuelson, “Mikhail Tukhachevsky and War-Economic Planning: Reconsiderations on the Pre-War Soviet Military Build-Up,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 9, no. 4 (1996): 825.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 825-34.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 823. In a long, highly contentious paper on the Red Army’s modernization that he submitted to Voroshilov in January 1930, Tukhachevsky wrote approvingly of “the destruction of the kulaks as a class and the socialization of the production weapon in the regions of complete collectivization,” programs he thought would enable “the peasant mass” to be put to better military use. He also saw definite military benefits in “the (continued next page)

a forceful, early blow was supposed to disrupt the Polish army's mobilization and thereby shake the enemy coalition, in which a hostile Poland was expected to play a central part. In fact, in Tukhachevsky's final piece of strategic analysis, written in prison just weeks before his execution in June 1937, he argued that planning for "incursion operations" upon the outbreak of war should remain in effect because such plans would "carry military operations onto enemy territory immediately."<sup>23</sup> And, of course, an offensive strategy would promote "revolution from without"—a chapter title in Tukhachevsky's booklet about the failed 1920 campaign to overrun Poland.<sup>24</sup>

By the mid-1930s, then, the Red Army possessed an advanced concept for its employment in offensive operations; it also was acquiring rapidly an enormous inventory of tanks, artillery, and aircraft with which to implement the new ways of land warfare. Substantial as the conceptual accomplishments of Soviet military theory were in providing an exit to the dead-end of positional warfare, it was a stupendous—albeit stupendously costly—national achievement for the country to develop such an extensive defense industry so quickly. In just a few years the Soviet economy had undergone the "planned militarization" in peacetime that Tukhachevsky had highlighted in 1926 as one of the enduring strategic advantages central planning afforded the USSR.<sup>25</sup> As R. W. Davies has stated, "the armaments industry of the 1930s was the most outstanding success of the pre-war Soviet economy." Moreover, the defense industry itself required a substantial industrial base: arms plants and their products (e.g., aircraft and tanks)

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mechanization of agriculture." (Tukhachevsky to Voroshilov, [date illegible] January 1930, Volkogonov Papers, reel 4, frames 17-18.)

<sup>23</sup>M. N. Tukhachevsky, "Kharakter pograniichnykh operatsii," in *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, vol. 2, 1928-1937 gg. (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1964), 212-21; "1937. Pokazaniia marshala Tukhachevskogo," ed. V. K. Vinogradov, pts. 1 and 2, *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1991, no. 8: 52-53; no. 9: 61.

<sup>24</sup>M. N. Tukhachevsky, "Revoliutsiia izvne," in *Pokhod za Vislu, in Pilsudskii protiv Tukhachevskogo: Sbornik*. (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo, 1991), 44-46. The booklet was published in 1923. This chapter was simply omitted from the work when it was republished in 1964.

<sup>25</sup>Tukhachevsky, "Voprosy sovremennoi strategii," 1:259.

gobbled high-quality fuels and steel, non-ferrous metals, and sophisticated machine tools, all of which neither Russian nor Soviet industry ever had produced.<sup>26</sup>

Organizationally, the Red Army was about to remake itself from a force consisting mostly of poorly trained part-time soldiers (“territorial forces” in Soviet military parlance) to one manned exclusively by full-time officers and conscripts (“the cadre system”). The territorial forces had two main advantages over a standing army of full-time soldiers: they were inexpensive to maintain and enabled the part-timers, who trained on a full-time basis for no more than a few months annually, to work at their civilian occupations for most of the year. These considerations were paramount for the regime during the 1920s, as it sought to restore the country’s devastated economy. However, training part-time soldiers dispersed among the towns and villages of a particular district was an inherently cumbersome undertaking for a unit’s small permanent staff.<sup>27</sup> Equally important, territorial manning was not conducive to the introduction and mastery of new military technology on a large scale, which required continuity in training. The system was most compatible with a “low-tech” infantry and cavalry army, but was not well suited to a heterogeneous mix of infantry, cavalry, armor, artillery, and aviation, that is, to the type of combined-arms force structure the Red Army was embracing during the 1930s. Zhukov’s exceedingly poor opinion of the territorials’ readiness for combat probably was common among professional officers:

Our territorial divisions were wretchedly prepared. The manpower with which they were brought to full strength was trained poorly, and lacked a conception of modern battle as well as experience in coordinating with artillery and tanks. Our territorial units could not hold a candle to the cadre ones in their degree of preparedness. I happened to run across one such territorial division, the 82d, at Khalkhin-Gol [a Mongolian river that was the site of a series of fierce battles between Soviet and Japanese forces

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<sup>26</sup>R. W. Davies, “Industry,” in *The Economic Transformation of the Soviet Union, 1913-1945*, ed. R. W. Davies, Mark Harrison, and S. G. Wheatcroft (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 145-46.

<sup>27</sup>Reese, *Stalin's Reluctant Soldiers*, 28.

in 1939]. A few Japanese artillery salvos caused it to run. It abandoned all of its small arms....<sup>28</sup>

Hence, in addition to facilitating the fielding of large quantities of new arms and equipment, a peacetime force consisting only of full-time officers and soldiers would be far better prepared and positioned geographically for early commitment—an important factor in any war against the large armies of Poland and Germany. In short, “this system,” Tukhachevsky stated in January 1936, “is the most modern from the standpoint of mobilization as well as combat training.”<sup>29</sup> Against these benefits, the conversion of territorial divisions into cadre ones carried an unavoidable and burdensome cost: thousands of additional officers were needed to fill positions in the converted units—men which the Red Army’s officer recruitment system strained to supply.<sup>30</sup>

The year 1935 was the first of the four-year transition from the mixed system of territorial and cadre manning to an exclusively cadre one. Nominally, much was accomplished quickly: whereas three of every four Red Army divisions were territorial prior to 1935, by the end of the year only one in four is said to have remained so.<sup>31</sup> As a result of the change (probably completed only in 1939), “the mobilization and combat readiness of Soviet forces” supposedly “increased sharply.”<sup>32</sup> In fact, the official

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<sup>28</sup>K. M. Simonov, *Glazami*, 282.

<sup>29</sup>“Rech’ tov. M. N. Tukhachevskogo,” *Pravda*, 16 January 1936.

<sup>30</sup>According to Reese, *Stalin’s Reluctant Soldiers*, 33, the Red Army “needed roughly one hundred additional officers for every territorial regiment turned regular.” In addition, of course, the men were no longer available for employment in industry or agriculture at a time of a general labor shortage.

<sup>31</sup>“Rech’ tov. M. N. Tukhachevskogo.” A planning document shows a far slower pace of transition from the mixed territorial-cadre system of manning to an exclusively cadre one. A plan submitted to Stalin in late 1937 on the Red Army’s development through 1942 projected the number of rifle divisions of various types that would exist at the beginning of 1938. The number of cadre and “mixed” (*smeshannye*, meaning that some units are cadre and others are territorial) rifle divisions was given as fifty-two; the number of mountain rifle divisions, ten; and the number of territorial divisions, thirty-four. (“Doklad narkoma oborony SSSR i nachal’nika Genshtaba RKKA v TsK VKP[b] – I. V. Stalinu – o plane razvitiia i reorganizatsii RKKA v 1938-1942 gg.,” undated, but not later than 29 November 1937, in *1941 god*, 2:532.)

<sup>32</sup>Iu. I. Korablev and M. I. Loginov, eds., *KPSS i stroitel’stvo Vooruzhennykh Sil SSSR (1918-iiun’ 1941)* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel’stvo Ministerstva oborony Soiuza SSR, 1959), 337. As units were no longer tied to a nearby pool of manpower, the new system of manning entailed an overhaul of the machinery for conscription and reserve call-ups. In June 1938 a nationwide system of military commissariats (*voennye komissariaty*) was (continued next page)

penchant for distortion and statistical manipulation makes it doubtful that the short-term increase in readiness was nearly as large as this Soviet statement implies, but it does reflect the high command's view that the Red Army needed to be able to deploy more combat-ready divisions rapidly against Poland, Germany, and Japan than the territorial system would have permitted. In January 1936 Tukhachevsky noted that the move to cadre manning had enabled rifle, cavalry, and mechanized formations to be stationed in more suitable operational positions than previously, as they no longer needed to be near their sources of manpower. This, together with higher division manning levels and the "vigorous development of aviation," according to Tukhachevsky, "was creating exceptional operational possibilities."<sup>33</sup>

In a closely related development, Soviet military strategy deliberately decoupled the Western and Far Eastern theaters of war. The change was alluded to publicly by Tukhachevsky in January 1935 and again a year later. In speeches published on the front page of *Pravda*, he declared that the concurrent appearance of threats in Europe and Asia and the ten thousand-kilometer distance between the two theaters meant that the Red Army must be prepared to conduct "simultaneous, fully independent" operations in each one.<sup>34</sup> In other words, forces would not be diverted from the main theater of war in the west in the event of military hostilities with Japan. Consequently, the Far East would have to be defended by its own "complete system of separate units of aviation, tanks, and artillery, and other formations."<sup>35</sup> The steady build-up of Bliukher's Far Eastern

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established, replacing the patchwork of corps and division mobilization districts associated with the territorial manning system. Subordinate to a particular corps or division, a mobilization district encompassed the administrative districts (*raiony*) or even provinces (*oblasti*) that comprised the manpower pool for the given formation. (A. S. Bakhov et al., *Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i pravo nakanune i v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine (1936-1945 gg.)*, vol. 3 of *Istoriia Sovetskogo gosudarstva i prava*, ed. A. P. Kositsyn [Moscow: "Nauka," 1985], 195.)

<sup>33</sup>"Rech' tov. M. N. Tukhachevskogo."

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>"Krasnaia Armiia sil'na, kak nikogda. Rech' tov. Tukhachevskogo.," *Pravda*, 31 January 1935.

Army reflected this fundamental strategic decision, which helped spur the Red Army's dramatic growth.

In addition to changing the principle by which the Red Army was manned, its force structure was being transformed by the infusion of weapons and equipment from the burgeoning defense industry, whose production surged each year from 1930 to 1933. A key aspect of the Red Army's quickening development was the emergence of new branches (e.g., armor, airborne troops) in a process which combined study of foreign experience, internal discussion and debate, field trials, and plain trial and error. Indeed, the optimal organization of Soviet armor was a matter on which official views grew disastrously fluid during the late 1930s. Nevertheless, the regime's commitment to the acquisition of what was to become a gigantic tank force was underscored by the presence in the force structure of two mechanized corps, six mechanized brigades, six tank regiments, and dozens of tank and mechanized units in rifle and cavalry divisions as early as January 1934.<sup>36</sup> By the end of the Second Five-Year Plan (1937) the Red Army possessed fifteen thousand tanks of all types—an amazing number, especially considering that they were products of a brand-new automotive industry.<sup>37</sup> In 1933 the first airborne units were established and integrated into the war plans of their parent military districts.<sup>38</sup> New weapons leavened the humble rifle division, still the bedrock of Soviet military capability. As the war-authorized strength of the rifle division increased by only 200 men from 1929 to 1935 (from 12,800 to 13,000), the gain in its fighting power was due entirely to increases in the number of guns, mortars, and machine-guns in the division's inventory, as well as the addition of an integral tank battalion.<sup>39</sup> Augmenting a division's complement of weapons or equipment generated major orders

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<sup>36</sup>N. S. Simonov, *Voенно-promyshlennyi kompleks SSSR*, 84; Ryzhakov, "K voprosu o stroitel'stve bronetankovykh voisk," 108. These units had major manning shortfalls, however.

<sup>37</sup>Skorobogatkin et al., *50 let*, 202.

<sup>38</sup>D. S. Sukhorukov et al., *Sovetskie vozdušno-desantnye: Voенно-istoricheskii ocherk* (Moscow: Voенnoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1980), 35.

<sup>39</sup>I. G. Pavlovskii, *Sukhoputnye voiska SSSR* (Moscow: Voенnoe izdatel'stvo, 1985), 49.

for the defense industry due to the large number of divisions in the force structure. Not all ground force programs involved items that could be driven, pulled, or carried, however; belts of fortifications were built in border regions to shield the Red Army's deployment and act as springboards for early offensives into enemy territory.<sup>40</sup>

Like the ground forces, the air forces soon benefited from the establishment of a broad-based, indigenous defense industry. The new aircraft plants already were producing a domestically-designed fighter, a reconnaissance plane, and a giant four-motor bomber by 1933.<sup>41</sup> The number of aircraft in service in the air forces climbed from 3,165 in 1933 to 5,893 in 1935, and then leapt to 8,043 in 1936. About half were bombers and strike aircraft of various types, that is, aircraft designed for offensive action, either independently or as part of the operation-in-depth.<sup>42</sup>

The proliferation of modern weapons and equipment required many more units as well as new types of them (e.g., field fuel depots) to operate, maintain, repair, and supply the new machines. By choosing to amass immense peacetime stocks of relatively complex weapons and to establish strong force groupings in several far-flung border

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<sup>40</sup>Robert E. Tarleton, "What Really Happened to the Stalin Line?," pt. 1, *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 5, no. 2 (1992): 187-219.

<sup>41</sup>A. S. Iakovlev, *Sovetskie samolety*, 4th ed. (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," 1982), 26-27.

<sup>42</sup>V. S. Shumikhin, *Sovetskaia voennaia aviatsiia 1917-1941* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," 1986), 183-84. In a 1934 letter to Voroshilov, Tukhachevsky practically demanded that "a decisive leap" in the number of Soviet aircraft suitable for military use occur in 1934-35. He called for some fifteen thousand machines—a tremendous number, but one indicative of his view that vast stocks of weapons for land warfare would provide the basis for military superiority. (Tukhachevsky to Voroshilov, [no date] 1934, Volkogonov Papers, reel 14, frame 96.) Naval forces fared less well than ground and air forces in the military build-up associated with the First and Second Five-Year Plans. Most of the military leadership regarded the navy's principal mission as coastal defense. Consequently, until the end of 1935 (when Stalin's naval policy suddenly shifted to favor the construction of an ocean-going navy featuring capital ships) Soviet naval programs aimed to increase the size and capabilities of the submarine, torpedo boat, and land-based naval aviation forces. From 1933 to 1937 the navy received 137 submarines, 137 torpedo boats, and 25 other surface vessels from Soviet shipyards. The heavy emphasis on submarine construction gave the USSR the world's largest submarine force, but did not change the essentially defensive character of planning for naval operations (as opposed to ship construction) during this period. The vast majority of Soviet submarines were small and medium boats intended for use in coastal waters. In conjunction with torpedo boats and torpedo aircraft, they were supposed to defeat enemy attacks from the sea. (A. V. Basov, *Flot v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 (Opyt operativno-strategicheskogo primeneniia)* [Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," 1980], 26-28; V. I. Dmitriev, *Sovetskoe podvodnoe korablestroenie* [Moscow: (continued next page)

regions, Stalin and the high command had placed the Red Army on an accelerating course of growth that saw its authorized strength swell from 617,000 in 1928 to 885,000 in 1933; to 930,000 in 1935; and then bulge to 1.5 million by the beginning of 1938.<sup>43</sup>

As it acquired bulk, the Red Army became a distinctly variegated force: amid the mass of infantry, mechanized hammers were fabricated from the newly-fielded tanks and trucks, giving “the steam-roller...a more powerful engine and a greater capacity to crush.”<sup>44</sup> But its development was unbalanced in a critical respect. The Stalin leadership’s focus on the production of vast quantities of the raw material of military power—tanks, artillery, and aircraft—caused the manufacture of essential support equipment and spare parts to recede to a position of secondary importance. This disparity between, on the one hand, the production and deployment of major weapons and, on the other, the equipment and spares needed to support and employ them effectively mirrored the lopsided development of the Stalinist economy, which neglected light industry, services, and housing. What Jacques Sapir has termed “technical imbalances” in the force structure were rooted in the regime’s determination to achieve and sustain very high peacetime production levels for weapons, the need for which reflected Tukhachevsky’s vision of a future war as a colossal collision of massive, machine-laden armies. The consequent under-investment in radios, trucks, artillery tractors, and equipment for combat engineering, fuel transport, and technical repair, that is, on military assets that were far less visible than the tanks and guns paraded on Red Square, had adverse operational implications which were not appreciated at the time. The imbalance between the Red Army’s giant stocks of arms and its sparse inventories of such mundane items as mobile workshops and spare tank parts would have limited

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Voennoe izdatel'stvo, 1990], 132, 169-70; Jurgen Rohwer and Mikhail Monakov, “The Soviet Union’s Ocean-Going Fleet, 1935-1956,” *International History Review* 18, no. 4 [1996]: 841-57, 865.)

<sup>43</sup>Deborin et al., *Zarozhdenie voiny*, 270; Skorobogatkin et al., *50 let*, 198.

<sup>44</sup>Erickson, *High Command*, 406.

severely its commanders' ability to implement the tenets of deep battle and the operation-in-depth even had the war with Germany not begun so calamitously.<sup>45</sup>

As this review shows, there was nothing inherently socialist or proletarian about the force structure or modes of operations the Red Army embraced during the 1930s, however forward-looking aspects of them were. Faced with the operational opportunities and technical requirements presented by the tank, truck, bomber, and radio, the Party leadership and the high command conceded, in effect, that the Red Army had to organize, train, and fight like the armies of prospective enemies. What *was* distinctive about the Red Army was its integrated apparatus of Party control and the revolutionary aims for which it would be employed abroad: as Tukhachevsky put it in a 1928 article, the Red Army would “suffuse the occupied territories of bourgeois governments with its influence and organize the dictatorship of the proletariat in them.....” It was precisely such an “expansion of the socialist base for war,” Tukhachevsky concluded, that defined “the present-day wars of the proletariat against the imperialists.”<sup>46</sup>

Other elements of Soviet military power received high-level attention during the early and mid-1930s as well. The large “industrialized army” supposedly created by the First and Second Five-Year Plans required not only many more leaders but better ones. An abysmal 4.5 percent of the Red Army's officers had a higher education in 1929; 57.3 percent had a secondary education. At the very least, the gulf between the low educational level of most Soviet officers, especially in such fields as mathematics and physics, and the regime's intention to command an “army of technology” had to be

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<sup>45</sup>Jacques Sapir, “The Economics of War in the Soviet Union during World War II,” in *Stalinism and Nazism*, 215; B. I. Zverev et al., eds., *Surovye ispytania*, vol. 1 of *Velikaia Otechestvennaia voina 1941-1945 gg. Voенно-istoricheskie ocherki*, ed. V. K. Volkov et al. (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo “Biblioteka” and “Mosgorarkhiv,” 1995), 65.

<sup>46</sup>M. N. Tukhachevsky, “Voина kak problema vooruzhennoi bor'by,” in *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 2:22.

narrowed.<sup>47</sup> But improving the quality of the officer corps was a long-term project from which results would come more slowly than, say, the time needed to build an automotive industry. A 1931 Central Committee resolution warned impatiently that the professional knowledge of officers remained “clearly deficient” in view of the growing demands of the Red Army’s technical make-over.<sup>48</sup>

Still, expansion of the network of military schools and the variety of policies and incentives to which the regime resorted to recruit and retain officers consistently failed to meet the Red Army’s mounting needs. They did result in improvements in the social status, appearance, and living conditions of officers beginning in 1935, when a concerted effort was made to boost them in response to worsening officer shortfalls. Despite the regime’s remedial efforts, what was a serious difficulty by 1935 became a severe, chronic one due to the accelerated formation of new units and the mass expulsions and arrests of 1937-38. Remarkably, from 1928 to 1937 more men left the ground forces (67,670) than were produced by military schools in the same years (67,487).<sup>49</sup> Moreover, Soviet officers engaged in irresponsible and often criminal behavior to an extent which is astoundingly high by Western standards. This phenomenon probably reflected the large number of officers “fresh from peasant or from first-generation working-class families” and the prevalence of graft, thievery, and drunkenness in Soviet society in general.<sup>50</sup>

The problem of recruiting, developing, and retaining capable, responsible officers was one largely of the regime’s own making. In practice, the officer corps proved to be a

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<sup>47</sup> Voroshilov, “Eshche sil’nee,” 605; D. A. Voropaev and A. M. Iovlev, *Bor’ba KPSS za sozdanie voennykh kadrov*, 2d ed. (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel’stvo Ministerstva oborony Soiuz SSSR, 1960), 126.

<sup>48</sup> “O komandom i politicheskome sostave RKKA. Postanovlenie TsK VKP(b) 5 iunija 1931 g.,” in *KPSS o Vooruzhennykh Silakh Sovetskogo Soiuz. Sbornik dokumentov 1917-1958*, comp. V. N. Malin and V. P. Moskovskii (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1958), 325-26.

<sup>49</sup> “O nakoplenii nachal’stvuiushchego sostava i popolnenii im Raboche-Krest’ianskoi Krasnoi Armii. Iz spravki-doklada nachal’nika Upravleniia po nachal’stvuiushchemu sostavu RKKA Narkomata Oborony SSSR E. A. Shchadenko. 20 marta 1940 g.,” *Izvestiia TsK KPSS*, 1990, no. 1: 178; Reese, *Stalin’s Reluctant Soldiers*, 122.

<sup>50</sup> Reese, *Stalin’s Reluctant Soldiers*, 116-19.

secondary priority relative to the acquisition of new weapons and a large, ostensibly modern force structure. This was so partly because creation of skilled, technically qualified officers was a social task not amenable to the *shturmovshchina* of the five-year plans. Numbers carried more weight than did quality. Recruitment standards were lowered or waived to alleviate the persistent officer shortage. However, industrialization had opened up all sorts of new employment possibilities (especially in cities), and the Red Army lost a stream of men who rightly regarded civilian life as less arduous than that which they had experienced in garrisons that often were remote, dilapidated, and poorly supplied. Finally, until 1936 Party policy dictated that the Red Army be manned “strictly in accordance with the class principle.”<sup>51</sup> Consequently, men of middle class or “kulak” origin, as well as most Cossacks, were prohibited from performing military service with weapons. These blanket exclusions automatically deprived the military of the services of a social group that was relatively well educated and another that had a long martial tradition.<sup>52</sup> They show that ideological considerations—notably the regime’s congenital fear of subversion and sabotage by “class enemies”—remained more important than the straightforward enhancement of military effectiveness. During the Party membership purge of 1933-34, for example, 555 men were ejected from military Party organizations for “Trotskyism and counter-revolutionary agitation,” of which some 400 were dismissed immediately from the Red Army as well.<sup>53</sup> These figures are not large absolutely or proportionally, but they demonstrate that political and ideological rectitude was a categorical requisite for service in the Red Army despite its acute need for officers.

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<sup>51</sup>Bakhov et al., *Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i pravo*, 190. “The class principle” connoted the recruitment and conscription of men exclusively from “the laboring classes; non-laboring elements, representatives of overthrown classes, persons employing hired labor, and disfranchised persons were not allowed to perform military service involving access to weapons.” This statement implies that men from the latter social categories could be conscripted for manual labor as construction troops.

<sup>52</sup>Reese, *Stalin’s Reluctant Soldiers*, 101.

<sup>53</sup>“M. N. Tukhachevskii i ‘voenno-fashistskii zagovor’ – Plenum TsK VKP(b). 23 fevralia-5 marta 1937 g.: Stenograficheskii otchet” (hereafter cited as “Plenum: Stenograficheskii otchet”), *Voennye arkhivy Rossii*, 1993, no. 1: 22. This is the official text of Voroshilov’s report to the Central Committee plenum of February-March 1937.

Nevertheless, although the rewards the Party bestowed on officers beginning in 1935 were motivated by the utilitarian need to make a military career more attractive, they also must have reflected the Party's contentment with an officer corps which had been heavily communized. A Central Committee resolution of 25 February 1929 had noted that even "the non-Party commanding personnel of the Red Army have proven their devotion to Soviet power, and at present are pursuing actively their daily work for strengthening the Red Army's combat capability."<sup>54</sup> The reports by Voroshilov and Tukhachevsky to Party and government congresses from 1934 to 1936 highlighted the Party's large inroads among military personnel and the officer corps in particular. By July 1933 two-thirds of the command staff were Party members or candidates. The Red Army Political Administration evidently was satisfied that military Party members (the bulk of them officers) were, by and large, politically reliable and sufficiently diligent: Voroshilov boasted that (as of January 1934) only 6.7 percent of military Party members had been expelled or reduced to candidate's status during the 1933-34 purge, whereas the corresponding figure for members of civil Party organizations was 23.3 percent.<sup>55</sup> Accordingly, it was said that "the purge showed that the army Party organization was one of the most ideologically mature and strong detachments of the Communist Party."<sup>56</sup> It now was rare for a higher command position to be held by an officer who was not a Communist: the overwhelming majority of division, corps, and military district commanders were Party members in 1933.<sup>57</sup> Accordingly, by the mid-1930s the Red Army—and especially its commanders—seemingly had become a bastion of *partiinost'*.

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<sup>54</sup>"O komandnom i politicheskom sostave RKKK. Postanovlenie TsK VKP(b) 25 fevralia 1929 g.," in *KPSS o Vooruzhennykh Silakh*, 312-13.

<sup>55</sup>Voroshilov, "Eshche sil'nee," 611-12. In a January 1935 speech Tukhachevsky stated that slightly more than two-thirds of the officer corps (rather than just the command staff) were affiliated with the Party or the Komsomol. ("Krasnaia Armia sil'na, kak nikogda.")

<sup>56</sup>Korablev and Loginov, *KPSS i stroitel'stvo Vooruzhennykh Sil*, 361-62.

<sup>57</sup>Voroshilov, "15 let Krasnoi Armii," in *Stat'i i rechi*, 575.

In summary, the Red Army of 1934-35 was a force in the throes of a technical, organizational, and operational upheaval. It was a transformation occurring so rapidly that the Red Army was being infused with more tanks, guns, and aircraft than its commanders would be able to employ effectively en masse until 1943-44. In addition to maintaining and upgrading a large force structure laden with rifle and cavalry divisions, the Party leadership and the high command were committed to the continued expansion of tank, artillery, and aviation forces which already were of substantial size in 1935. Apart from the problem of manning, equipping, and training scores of new units each year, and reorganizing and upgrading existing ones, the rapid influx of so much modern weaponry and military equipment had far-reaching operational and social implications for Soviet military policy. In the realm of military art, Tukhachevsky and his colleagues had developed innovative concepts and techniques for bringing the Red Army's new capabilities to bear in central Europe and the Far East. They were designed to sunder enemy defenses quickly, deeply, and completely. However, they required Soviet commanders to possess levels of acumen, initiative, responsibility, and technical knowledge which the mid- and lower levels of the command staff, as a group, still lacked; they also rested on maintenance and repair, supply, and command and control capabilities the Red Army only had begun to develop. Still, having profited from the five-year plans in striking and abrupt fashion, the Red Army's prospects at mid-decade appeared decidedly positive, especially when viewed against the dismal backdrop of the 1920s. Lastly, the Party leadership apparently had come to regard the command staff, including its non-Party component, as loyal and trustworthy, rather than as an incubator of sedition.

It was not far-fetched, then, for Voroshilov to tell the Party's Seventeenth Congress in January 1934 that the Red Army was "fundamentally different" from the one on which he had reported at the Party's previous congress in 1930.<sup>58</sup> At the Seventh

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<sup>58</sup>Voroshilov, "Eshche sil'nee," 601.

All-Union Congress of Soviets in January 1935, Tukhachevsky repeated the claim, albeit in more precise terms, asserting that the technical level of the Red Army was “totally different” from that of 1931, when the last such congress had met. Despite Tukhachevsky’s self-congratulatory tone and his false praise for Voroshilov’s “iron leadership” and Stalin’s “brilliant perspicacity,” his assertions about the Red Army’s modernization ring true.<sup>59</sup>

## II

Like the Red Army as a whole, the high command underwent a transformation of its own between the mid-1920s and the mid-1930s. It was one influenced by Stalin’s struggle for political supremacy as well as the need for sustained, high-level attention to the interplay between the Red Army’s requirements for arms and matériel, military and economic mobilization plans, and the productive capacities of industry. In general, there was a tremendous increase in the number of questions requiring top-level decision in the burgeoning command economy, and many—perhaps most—of these decisions affected the Red Army or industry in some way.<sup>60</sup> The expansive defense effort associated with the First and Second Five-Year Plans required frequent intervention in response to myriad unforeseen snarls in production and transportation. In the emerging Stalinist system, any adjustment of plan targets and schedules increasingly was subject to Stalin’s personal decision or, at the very least, review by the small knot of top Party and government leaders who consulted and briefed him regularly. This development reflected Stalin’s unrelenting concentration of power in his personal machine and, in particular, the narrowing of the circle of key policy-makers to a handful of Politburo members in his entourage, each of whom was given broad responsibilities for particular sectors of the government or economy. It was accompanied by the progressive atrophying of the

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<sup>59</sup>“Krasnaia Armiia sil’na, kak nikogda.”

<sup>60</sup>J. Arch Getty, review of *Molotov and Soviet Government: Sovmarkom, 1930-41*, by Derek Watson, *Slavic Review* 56, no. 2 (1997): 372.

system's political institutions, which ultimately became "the instruments of Stalin personally rather than of the political leadership more generally."<sup>61</sup>

The general trend evident in Soviet governance during the 1930s had definite manifestations in the military sphere. The elimination of the USSR Revolutionary Military Council (*Revoliutsionnyi voennyi sovet SSSR*, abbreviated *RVS SSSR*, hereafter simply *RVS*) in 1934, nominally the supreme military authority, codified the shift from the collective form of military leadership characteristic of the revolutionary and NEP years to one in which authority was concentrated in a powerful defense commissar—and specifically in Voroshilov—who was assisted by two deputies and supposedly "advised" by a large assembly of ranking officers. This was a break with past Bolshevik practice in the management of military affairs, which rested on the institution of the military council as a means of Party control. However, the principals affected by the change provided continuity with the past: the members of the hierarchical, defense commissar-centered high command of the mid-1930s were drawn entirely from the *RVS*, on which most had served since Trotsky's forced separation from military affairs in 1925. Indeed, Voroshilov, Budenny, Egorov, and Tukhachevsky (as well as Sergei S. Kamenev, the regime's senior professional commander for most of the Civil War) all had met or known of each other no later than 1920, as each had held important command or leadership positions in the campaigns against the Whites and Poland.

### III

The *RVS* was a "collegiate organ of supreme military power" established in August 1923 to replace the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic, which had

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<sup>61</sup>Gill, *Origins*, 5. Further: "This [Stalin's personal dictatorship] does not, of course, mean that Stalin personally resolved all questions that arose. However, he did decide whatever questions he chose to decide, and whenever he intervened in an issue, that intervention was decisive. In this sense, all decision-making power ultimately was concentrated in his hands."

directed military operations during the Civil War.<sup>62</sup> This development was prompted by the approval of the first constitution of the USSR by the standing legislature (then called the Central Executive Committee) and the formation of the NKVM in July 1923. The NKVM was one of five unified, centralized all-union agencies provided for in the 1924 Constitution (ratified in January 1924 by the Second All-Union Congress of Soviets), which established a system of all-union, union-republic, and republic people's commissariats.<sup>63</sup>

Unlike later constitutions, that of 1924 mandated that each people's commissariat was to have a collegium chaired by the people's commissar and prescribed their relationship. Collegium members were to be named by the USSR Council of People's Commissars (acronym *Sovnarkom*), the executive organ of the Central Executive Committee that served as the federal government. A commissar had the power to decide personally all matters within his commissariat's jurisdiction, but he was obliged to report on them to the collegium of the commissariat. If the collegium or its individual members (which could number as many as a few dozen) disagreed with a decision of the commissar, they were given the right to appeal it to the Sovnarkom. Consequently, the collegium operated as the governing board of the commissariat, and could act, at least in theory, to restrain the commissar. Hence a so-called collegiate system of management was created for each commissariat.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *Sovetskaia Voennaia Entsiklopediia*, s.v. "Revoliutsionnyi Voennyi Sovet SSSR."

<sup>63</sup> T. P. Korzhikhina, *Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i ego uchrezhdeniia: noiabr' 1917 g.-dekabr' 1991 g.*, 2d ed. (Moscow: Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi gumanitarnyi universitet, 1994), 112, 131, 170; Harold J. Berman and Miroslav Kerner, *Soviet Military Law and Administration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), 173-74.

<sup>64</sup> I. N. Ananov, *Ministerstva v SSSR* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo iuridicheskoi literatury, 1960), 155-57; Berman and Kerner, *Soviet Military Law*, 173-74; Watson, *Molotov*, 101-2. In practice, collegium members rarely used their right of appeal, and there is no recorded case of a collegium taking a decision contrary to that of the commissar.

The RVS functioned as the NKVM's collegium, which placed it at the apex of the fledgling military establishment.<sup>65</sup> According to the 1923 statute governing the NKVM's responsibilities and structure, all major components of the military were subordinated directly to the RVS. Among others, these included the Red Army Staff, the Political Administration, and the commanders and revolutionary military councils of military districts, fronts, separate armies, and fleets. The responsibilities of the RVS were extremely broad; practically any matter concerning military planning, organization, training, logistics, and political education could fall under its purview.<sup>66</sup> In fact, the RVS was so central to the management of the NKVM that the general directives of the people's commissar for military and naval affairs were required to be issued as RVS orders. As noted above, the commanders and revolutionary military councils of the military districts—the commands through which ground forces were controlled, trained, armed, and supplied—answered to the RVS “in all respects” rather than to the commissar.<sup>67</sup>

Although the RVS was preeminent in the military-technical sphere, there was one very important limit to its authority. Its power over the Political Administration, entrusted with the task of indoctrinating soldiers in Soviet values, existed only briefly. As a battlefield in the struggle with Trotsky, the Political Administration was brought under the Central Committee's direct control in 1924-25 with regard to Party and political education matters.<sup>68</sup> This early redrawing of the lines of authority, Erickson

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<sup>65</sup> Skorobogatkin et al., *50 let*, 198.

<sup>66</sup> *Sovetskaia Voennaia Entsiklopediia*, s.v. “Revoliutsionnyi Voennyi Sovet SSSR.” The RVS's development of the territorial-militia system in 1924-25 exemplifies its leading role in military policy and administration during the 1920s. See, for instance, I. B. Berkhin, *Voennaia reforma v SSSR (1924-1925 gg.)* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva oborony Soiuz SSSR, 1958), 92-145.

<sup>67</sup> Berkhin, *Voennaia reforma*, 152.

<sup>68</sup> “Direktiva PU RKKa ob osnovakh reorganizatsii partiino-politicheskogo apparata Krasnoi Armii v sviazi s provedeniem voennoi reformy,” 7 April 1924, in *Partiino-politicheskaia rabota v Krasnoi Armii: Dokumenty. 1921-1929 gg.*, comp. T. F. Kariaeva et al. (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1981), 202-03; Iu. P. Petrov, *Partiinoe stroitel'stvo v Sovetskoi Armii i Flote* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1964), 204-05. On 28 March 1924 the Political Administration of the RVS of the USSR (abbreviation *PU RVS SSSR*) was redesignated the Political Administration of the Worker-Peasant Red (continued next page)

observed, was the means by which Party leaders secured an “all-powerful, centralised machinery of political control—*independent of the military*”—throughout the military establishment.<sup>69</sup>

The RVS was headed by the military and naval commissar, who acted as a board chairman; its deputy chairman was the deputy commissar. It numbered no more than a dozen or so members named by the Sovnarkom. Naturally, this supreme military council consisted of the Red Army’s leading figures: it included the chiefs of the Red Army Staff, the Political Administration, Red Army Supply, the air forces, and the navy; three top regional commanders; a senior Central Committee member and Stalin ally with substantial military experience (Ordzhonikidze); and several ex-Civil War commissars with positions or experience in outlying parts of the new union.<sup>70</sup> Hence the RVS was never a purely military body: it always included men for whom Party affairs and, in particular, the priorities and concerns of the Party’s leaders were paramount.

The RVS convened regularly, averaging at least two meetings a month during the late 1920s. Expanded sessions would be organized to review such matters as the past training year; these meetings would include military district commanders, members of district revolutionary military councils, and the chiefs of directorates in the NKVM’s central administration. Meetings were highly structured: topics for discussion and decision generally were introduced with a 30-minute main report followed by the presentation of any supplementary material in ten minutes and an eight-minute period for commentary. The RVS had its own staff to prepare the agenda and materials for meetings and to monitor the execution of its decisions. A three-man standing commission

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Army (*PU RKA*), which was indicative of the loosening of the RVS’s control. As an element of the NKVM’s central bureaucracy, the Political Administration remained subordinate to the RVS in administrative respects.

<sup>69</sup>Erickson, *High Command*, 191. Erickson’s emphasis.

<sup>70</sup>M. V. Zakharov, *General’nyi shtab v predvoennye gody* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel’stvo, 1989), 32. A complete list of RVS members during the Civil War and the 1920s appears in *Deiateli SSSR i revoliutsionnogo dvizheniia Rossii: Entsiklopedicheskii slovar’ Granat* (1926-29; reprint, 2 vols. in 1, Moscow: “Sovetskaia entsiklopediia,” 1989), 829-30.

consisting of the first deputy commissar and deputy RVS chairman, the second deputy commissar and deputy RVS chairman, and the chief of the Political Administration had considerable power over RVS operations. This commission reviewed potential agenda items and decided, subject to approval by the commissar, which would be discussed by the RVS itself. Other RVS commissions were established as required.<sup>71</sup> Such descriptions of the RVS's structure and role in administering the NKVM may be deceptively tidy; the reality of managing the NKVM during the 1920s must have been far different: the central military administration then suffered from organizational bloat, blurred lines of authority, and unnecessary parallelism. Consequently, the decade saw "numbingly repetitious and repeatedly ineffective attempts" to prune and revamp it.<sup>72</sup>

The RVS's composition and, in particular, the political allegiances of its members were a major concern for Stalin and his allies during the mid-1920s. Indeed, the determination of the Stalin-Zinoviev-Kamenev triumvirate to remove Trotsky from his leadership positions in the NKVM and to eradicate his remaining influence over the Red Army was critical to the RVS's evolution at this time. Packing the RVS with Stalinists or, at least, with leading Red commanders (such as Frunze) who resented Trotsky and his protective attitude toward the ex-Imperial career officers in Bolshevik service was the means the triumvirs used to pull the Red Army into their grasp.<sup>73</sup> Selection for membership was not only a function of position (e.g., chief of the Red Army Staff); political commitment against Trotsky and personal ties to Stalin evidently were decisive in 1924-25. Stalin's hand is especially evident in the roles played by Voroshilov and Ordzhonikidze, both seasoned Old Bolsheviks who had gained all of their military

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<sup>71</sup> V. Danilov, "Stroitel'stvo tsentral'nogo voennogo apparata v 1924-1928 gg.," *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1972, no. 6: 85-86.

<sup>72</sup> David Stone, "Tukhachevsky in Leningrad: Military Politics and Exile, 1928-31," *Europe-Asia Studies* 48, no. 8 (1996): 1368.

<sup>73</sup> The Trotsky-led RVS is said to have failed to pursue a policy of gradually displacing the older ex-Imperial officers with the most promising Red commanders, many of whom were demobilized after the Civil War. Within the Red Army Staff, for example, there remained only nine men who had finished the General Staff Academy after the Bolshevik seizure of power. (Danilov, "Stroitel'stvo tsentral'nogo voennogo apparata," 84.)

experience during the Civil War. Their installation on the RVS is an early example of Stalin's practice of using his chief lieutenants, who themselves often were rivals, to monitor and supervise the regime's key institutions on his behalf. Voroshilov remained atop the military establishment until 1940, but Ordzhonikidze's stay on the RVS was relatively brief—just three years (February 1924 to February 1927). Ordzhonikidze's appointment was calculated to deepen the RVS's anti-Trotsky complexion and to ensure that its policies reflected those of the ruling triumvirate in the struggle for power after Lenin's death.<sup>74</sup>

Stalin's takeover of the RVS began in earnest on 3 March 1924, when the Politburo ousted Efraim M. Sklianskii, its deputy chairman since October 1918. Sklianskii was a Trotsky associate whose leadership during Trotsky's self-imposed withdrawal from an active role in NKVM affairs had been criticized by the special military commission formed by the Central Committee in January 1924.<sup>75</sup> According to Trotsky, Sklianskii's fall had been presaged by the assignment to the NKVM some months earlier of an "ambitious and talentless intriguer," Iosif F. Unshlikht, to undermine Sklianskii and Trotsky himself. Unshlikht must have been well suited for the assignment, as he was the state security service's first deputy chairman until 1923.<sup>76</sup>

Frunze, already earmarked to displace Trotsky as people's commissar for military and naval affairs, succeeded Sklianskii as RVS deputy chairman; he also was named

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<sup>74</sup>*Deiateli SSSR*, 830. Ordzhonikidze was added to the RVS in March 1924 "in order to strengthen Party leadership of the Soviet Armed Forces"—a euphemism for the scheme to oust Trotsky from the NKVM. (*Sovetskaia Voennaia Entsiklopediia*, s.v. "Ordzhonikidze.")

<sup>75</sup>N. F. Kuz'min, *Na strazhe mirnogo truda (1921-1940 gg.)* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva oborony Soiuzna SSR, 1959), 24-25; Berkhin, *Voennaia reforma*, 60. Trotsky himself admitted that his interest in military affairs had waned since 1921, that is, with the end of the Civil War and demobilization. To Trotsky, these developments meant that "military work had entered a bureaucratic channel." (L. D. Trotsky, *Moia zhizn': Opyt avtobiografii* [Moscow: Panorama, 1991], 492.)

<sup>76</sup>Trotsky, *Moia zhizn'*, 485-86. A Central Committee delegation that included Frunze traveled to Sukhumi to coordinate personnel changes in the NKVM with Trotsky; this evidently was when Trotsky was informed of Sklianskii's dismissal. Trotsky thought the delegation was a farce, as personnel moves in the NKVM had been going on behind his back for quite some time.

deputy people's commissar. On 25 March 1924 the Sovnarkom approved a new slate of members for the RVS, which remained nominally under Trotsky.<sup>77</sup> In addition to Frunze and Ordzhonikidze, the revamped RVS included Voroshilov and Budenny, the most prominent (other than Stalin) of the Civil War defenders of Tsaritsyn who were to attain a commanding position over the Red Army during the late 1930s. Also named to the RVS was Andrei S. Bubnov, the new chief of the Political Administration "under [whose] leadership the military department's Trotskyite elements were purged," according to his biographer.<sup>78</sup>

These personnel moves effectively deprived Trotsky of control of the NKVM, though the triumvirs were helped immeasurably by Trotsky's aversion to actions to shore up his position.<sup>79</sup> His own removal as people's commissar and RVS chairman in January 1925 and replacement by Frunze was largely a formality. In fact, the NKVM already was being run by Frunze, the able architect of the military reform of 1924-26. When he died on 31 October 1925 during a bungled operation, Stalin was able to have Voroshilov replace him. Hitherto Voroshilov had been serving as Frunze's deputy and simultaneously commander of the Moscow Military District—a position from which he is said to have delivered "the command and political staffs of the capital district from Trotskyites and other factionalists."<sup>80</sup> Voroshilov's short stint (1924-25) as Moscow Military District commander set the pattern for his entire military career: the quintessential Soviet political general, Voroshilov's first allegiance always was to Stalin, the patron on whom his exalted position and eventually his very existence depended.

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<sup>77</sup> Lev Trotsky, *Stalin*, vol. 2 (Moscow: "Terra"—Politizdat, 1990), 60, provides a complete list of the RVS members named on 25 March 1924.

<sup>78</sup> A. M. Rodin, *A. S. Bubnov: Voенно-politicheskaia deiatel'nost'* (Moscow: Voенnoe izdatel'stvo, 1988), 91. Bubnov served on the revolutionary military council of the First Cavalry Army, commanded by Budenny, briefly in 1921. At the time Voroshilov also was on the military council of this formation.

<sup>79</sup> Trotsky's autobiography shows that he was well aware that he was losing control of the NKVM. Yet he remained strangely passive during this critical period, apparently more concerned with defending his reputation with polemical writings rather than his political position by action.

<sup>80</sup> V. S. Akshinskii, *Kliment Efremovich Voroshilov. Biograficheskii ocherk*. (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1974), 133.

Voroshilov's appointment as people's commissar for military and naval affairs and RVS chairman on 6 November 1925 was pivotal in the creeping extension of Stalin's control over the Red Army. Stalin and his military supporters and allies were not yet completely successful, however; Zinoviev had his adherents among the military elite. Indeed, on the 11th the Central Committee named Mikhail M. Lashevich, Zinoviev's close friend and advocate, first deputy people's commissar for military and naval affairs. This action supposedly was intended to appease Zinoviev over Voroshilov's appointment as commissar.<sup>81</sup> After Zinoviev made common cause with Trotsky in April 1926, forming the flimsy United [i.e., Trotskyite-Zinovievite] Opposition with his former adversary, Zinoviev's top military supporters were swiftly removed from their positions. The Central Committee plenum of July 1926 deprived Lashevich of his post as a deputy chairman of the RVS. Similarly, the other RVS member who supported Zinoviev, Navy Chief Viacheslav I. Zof, was replaced in August. Both are said to have been "active participants in factional activity" on behalf of the United Opposition.<sup>82</sup>

Following Voroshilov's appointment, on 21 November 1925 the Sovnarkom approved the RVS's new membership, which gave the council the more compact form it was to retain until its abolition in 1934. The RVS was streamlined by the exclusion of the several former commissars with military responsibilities in the non-Russian parts of the union who had been added to it in 1924. In addition to Voroshilov and the two deputy chairmen, Lashevich and Unshlikht, the RVS now included Air Forces Chief Petr I. Baranov; Political Administration Chief Bubnov; Cavalry Inspector Budenny; Aleksandr I. Egorov, commander of forces in the Ukraine and Crimea; Navy Chief Zof; Chief Inspector Sergei S. Kamenev; Central Committee member Ordzhonikidze; and Chief of

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<sup>81</sup>Boris Souvarine, *Stalin*, trans. C. L. R. James (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1939), 398; *Deiateli SSSR*, 489, 829. Voroshilov's second deputy was none other than Unshlikht, who had attained the position of deputy people's commissar and RVS chairman upon Frunze's appointment as people's commissar and RVS chairman. (*Deiateli SSSR*, 733, 829.) Lashevich, as the first deputy people's commissar, ostensibly had seniority.

<sup>82</sup>Petrov, *Partiinoe stroitel'stvo*, 239.

Staff Tukhachevsky, who had been admitted in February 1925.<sup>83</sup> By no means were all Stalin's men, but the conditions had been established for Stalin and Voroshilov to steer military policy and dictate military appointments. After Lashevich and Zof were ousted, the RVS was largely under Stalin's control. Voroshilov, Unshlikht, and Bubnov, all Party functionaries in uniform, held the top positions in the NKVM and the RVS that possessed a major political aspect: they ensured that all further manifestations of dissent inside the military—such as the “intra-army opposition” of 1928—were suppressed vigorously.

#### IV

Voroshilov, Budenny, Tukhachevsky, Egorov, and Kamenev constituted the original nucleus of the post-Frunze high command—one which proved quite durable given its underlying instability. The group was split by differences in background, political allegiance, and outlook on the character of modern warfare; competing ambitions and institutional interests; and personal animosities, some the caustic residue of the Civil War. All of these men had gained senior command experience and distinguished reputations during the campaigns against the White armies and Poland, been promoted to the top of the Red Army by the mid-1920s, and were members of the RVS from at least 1925 through 1934. But they had little else in common (not even Party membership, in Kamenev's case, until 1930), and much pulled them apart. The malignant duo of Voroshilov and Budenny aside, lasting factions within this small central group do not seem to have been established: as the tempestuous politics of the leadership struggle, industrialization, and collectivization altered the political terrain around the high command, it is likely that new alliances congealed as ones formed previously on different issues dissolved. Such transient combinations would have drawn in the second-tier members of the high command, who were added to the RVS as they were promoted to

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<sup>83</sup>Berkhin, *Voennaia reforma*, 159.

key military district commands and other top positions. But, as Mikhail I. Mel'tiukhov has observed, the presence, identification, and influence of such groupings within the military leadership is a question awaiting detailed study. Still, it is fair to say that Voroshilov and Tukhachevsky represented opposite poles within the high command in important respects.<sup>84</sup>

“A true proletarian,”<sup>85</sup> Voroshilov came to the high command as a poorly educated, ex-partisan commander whose “extreme narrowness was common knowledge within the Party.”<sup>86</sup> Like Stalin, Voroshilov had been extremely hostile toward the former Imperial officers on whom Lenin and Trotsky had relied as well as their efforts to create a regular standing army. In fact, at the Party’s Eighth Congress in 1919, Lenin was so exasperated by Voroshilov’s impudence that he openly denounced him for *partizanshchina*—a pejorative term implying a general absence of military discipline and orderly procedures.<sup>87</sup> Decades later Khrushchev dismissed the country’s longest-serving military chief as “the biggest bag of shit in the army” and “a total loss.”<sup>88</sup> Voroshilov was “incapable of understanding modern warfare,” Marshal Ivan S. Konev tartly observed to a foreigner in 1944. Budenny was similar in some ways: a former non-commissioned officer in the Imperial Army, he “never knew much, and he never studied anything,” in Konev’s view.<sup>89</sup> Described as “a jester...and a simpleton” by Brezhnev’s niece, Budenny was fond of horses, drink, and women.<sup>90</sup> Bluff, barely literate, and

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<sup>84</sup>M. I. Mel'tiukhov, “Repressii v Krasnoi Armii: itogi noveishikh issledovaniĭ,” *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, 1997, no. 5: 112.

<sup>85</sup>William J. Spahr, *Stalin's Lieutenants: A Study in Command Under Duress* (Novato, Calif.: Presidio, 1997), 19.

<sup>86</sup>Boris Bazhanov, *Vospominaniia byvshevo sekretaria Stalina* (France: Izdatel'stvo “Tret'ia volna,” 1980), 142.

<sup>87</sup>Spahr, *Stalin's Lieutenants*, 28-29, 34-35.

<sup>88</sup>Nikita S. Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers: The Glasnost Tapes*, trans. and ed. Jerrold L. Schecter with Vyacheslav V. Luchkov (Boston: Little, Brown & Co.: 1990), 52, 64.

<sup>89</sup>Milovan Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, trans. Michael B. Petrovich (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1962), 55.

<sup>90</sup>Luba Brezhneva, *The World I Left Behind*, trans. Geoffrey Polk (New York: Random House, 1995), 244. An NKVD veteran wrote that Budenny was “an ignorant man, devoid of ideals, known for his drinking sprees and (continued next page)

cunning, he became Voroshilov's protégé. Budenny was so obviously incapable and politically supine that Stalin allowed him to remain a marshal and ornamental figure throughout the tumult of the Great Purges and Second World War.

Both Voroshilov and Budenny were men of action whose bravery in battle was never in doubt. Away from the smoke of the battlefield, they were followers. They came to regard Stalin as their "political patron and guide" during the Civil War,<sup>91</sup> when he was one of a half-dozen troubleshooting "supercommissars" sent from Moscow to the field.<sup>92</sup> Sharing a taste for wielding emergency power and a thirst for recognition, Stalin, Voroshilov, and Budenny begrudged superiors and rivals who had credentials they lacked—namely, advanced education, training, and imagination. It was natural for this resentful trio, who found themselves together at Tsaritsyn in 1918, to coalesce against Trotsky and his policy of placing ex-Imperial career officers in command, staff, and administrative positions throughout the Red Army.<sup>93</sup> Tukhachevsky became the target of "a sort of instinctive hostility, largely social in origin" on their part during the Polish campaign of 1920, when Stalin had obstructed the timely reinforcement of Tukhachevsky's Western Front before Warsaw with the First Cavalry Army, led by Budenny and Voroshilov.<sup>94</sup> The cavalymen were driving on their own objective (Lwow, as the city was then called) under Egorov's South-Western Front. Recriminations over responsibility for the ensuing rout of the Western Front continued for years afterward; great sensitivities were involved, especially after Voroshilov created a glorious Civil War

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propensity to rape his secretaries. Stalin was neither ashamed nor afraid of him." (Alexander Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes* [London: Jarrolds Publishers, 1954], 245.)

<sup>91</sup>Roy Medvedev, *All Stalin's Men* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1985), 1.

<sup>92</sup>Erickson, *High Command*, 80.

<sup>93</sup>The Civil War-era term "military specialist" (often *voenspets*) refers to an ex-Imperial Army officer of the command staff who entered the Red Army voluntarily or under compulsion and was supervised by a Party functionary (the military commissar or *voenkom*). Above all, the term applies to career officers and generals of the pre-1914 Imperial Army. But more than three-fourths of the approximately 75,000 military specialists serving in the Red Army at the end of the Civil War were wartime (i.e., 1914-17) officers in the Imperial Army, rather than career officers. (A. G. Kavtaradze, *Voennye spetsialisty na sluzhbe Respubliki Sovetov 1917-1920 gg.* [Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," 1988], 12-13, 222.)

<sup>94</sup>Nikolaus Basseches, *Stalin*, trans. E. W. Dickes (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1952), 81.

biography for Stalin which many other veterans knew was a string of outlandish lies.<sup>95</sup> In some respects, then, the poisonous military politics of the 1920s and 1930s had their origins in personal loyalties and cliques molded by revolution and civil war. Indeed, Marshal Vasilii K. Bliukher confided to his wife following Tukhachevsky's execution: "After twenty years, Tukhachevsky evidently has paid for Poland."<sup>96</sup>

In contrast to Stalin's two leading military disciples, Tukhachevsky, Egorov, and Kamenev were capable, accomplished career officers who had received professional military educations prior to the First World War. Committing themselves to the Bolsheviks in 1918, they had cut their own paths in the Red Army, not been closely associated with any of the contenders for power after Lenin's death, and remained essentially aloof from the struggle once Trotsky was deposed from the NKVM. Whereas Voroshilov's and Budenny's place atop the Red Army after the Civil War was secured primarily by their symbiotic relationship with Stalin, Tukhachevsky, Egorov, and Kamenev ascended during the 1920s due to their merits as military commanders, planners, administrators, and theoreticians, that is, as versatile, experienced professionals. This difference was at the root of what was to prove a crucial fissure in the high command, that between the "revolutionaries and guerrilla fighters," on the one hand, and the seasoned career officers who had served honorably in the Imperial Army, on the other.<sup>97</sup> But it was the latter on whom Voroshilov had to call for professional advice owing to his lack of military training or other formal qualifications, which occasionally was painfully evident.

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<sup>95</sup>Voroshilov, "Stalin i Krasnaia armia," in *Stat'i i rechi*, 346-64, was published in *Pravda* on 21 December 1929 to mark Stalin's fiftieth birthday. The article made celebration of Stalin's supposed military genius virtually compulsory for military historians.

<sup>96</sup>Cited in V. O. Daines, "Mikhail Nikolaevich Tukhachevskii," *Voprosy istorii*, 1989, no. 10: 48. Bliukher's wife related her husband's remark to Daines.

<sup>97</sup>Garthoff, *Soviet Military Policy*, 34.

Much younger and less experienced than Kamenev or Egorov, Tukhachevsky, in particular, was a wholehearted convert to Bolshevism and a bellicose enthusiast of revolutionary war.<sup>98</sup> Tukhachevsky's volte-face is especially notable, as he was from an aristocratic family and had chosen assignment, after finishing first in his military school class in 1914, to a venerable Guards regiment in which his grandfather had fought against Napoleon.<sup>99</sup> Despite serious blunders in his conduct of the Polish campaign in 1920, Tukhachevsky did establish himself as the most gifted leader and thinker among the Red Army's younger top commanders. In 1921 Lenin and Trotsky dispatched him to suppress the Kronstadt mutiny and then the peasant uprising in Tambov Province, operations probably entailing more cold-blooded slaughter than actual combat. During the latter campaign, the twenty-eight-year-old militant ordered his subordinates to shoot hostages if key bridges were attacked; he also threatened (and was authorized) to use poison gas to drive guerrillas from their forest refuges.<sup>100</sup> In November 1925, Tukhachevsky was recognized as the Red Army's preeminent strategist and theoretician when he was appointed chief of the Red Army Staff following Frunze's death, roles he was to continue to play regardless of formal position until 1937.

Nevertheless, Tukhachevsky remained something of "an alien in the Bolshevik camp." According to a close observer of the high command, he had "no friends among the older commanders and he lived in a strange isolation." The same writer watched

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<sup>98</sup> Tukhachevsky's inclusion in the RVS in 1925—at the age of thirty-two—was exceptional. Frunze, Voroshilov, Budenny, Egorov, Kamenev, Bubnov, and Unshlikht all were in their forties.

<sup>99</sup> V. M. Ivanov, *Marshal M. N. Tukhachevskii*, 2d ed. (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo, 1990), 21, 25. Tukhachevsky began to take a critical stance toward the autocracy while he studied to be an officer in Moscow in the years just prior to the outbreak of the First World War. The war radicalized him. (Daines, "Tukhachevskii," 40-41.)

<sup>100</sup> P. A. Aptekar', comp., "Krest'ianskaia voina," *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1993, no. 2: 66. On 8 July 1921 Tukhachevsky ordered at least five hostages to be seized from villages near every important bridge. They were to be shot immediately if the bridge was damaged by insurgents. According to Iakovlev, *Po moshcham i elei*, 24, Tukhachevsky directed that chemical munitions be used against the Kronstadt mutineers, although their resistance ceased before the order could be carried out; the same work, 41, cites his poison gas order of 12 June 1921, issued during the Tambov operation.

Tukhachevsky critique a military district exercise he attended with Voroshilov in summer 1936, when Tukhachevsky's standing and authority were at their peak:

His conclusions revealed a keen intelligence, but I noticed a distinct chilliness in his manner, as though he attached no importance to his own words and felt confident he would not be understood in any case.... Evidently, that day in the Tashkent theater he was conscious of the enmity of the generals under him, and so he spoke in dry, precise language, hardly looking at his audience. During all his speech Voroshilov sat silent, showing no sign of his reaction to Tukhachevsky's arguments.<sup>101</sup>

Hence Tukhachevsky's brilliance as a strategist and theoretician, displayed in a manner which could be perceived as haughty and domineering, provoked antipathy among peers who could not help but acknowledge his outstanding talents. Yet Tukhachevsky's foremost concern as a leading member of the high command was always the building of a powerful and modern army for the Soviet state. To that end, he was an ardent promoter of the Red Army Staff, to which he proposed to give the authority to coordinate and oversee the country's military and economic preparations for war. Ironically, it was Tukhachevsky's replacement as chief of staff, Shaposhnikov, a colorless, shrewd ex-Imperial General Staff officer, who succeeded in securing for the Red Army Staff hegemony over all mobilization planning within the military.<sup>102</sup>

Tukhachevsky and Voroshilov were at the center of Soviet military politics from 1925 to 1937. The two men coexisted uneasily. Mutual antagonism bubbled corrosively beneath a veneer of formal correctness. Arrogant, cultured, and able, Tukhachevsky promoted his original views on force structure, weaponry, and operations vigorously, even zealously, in a shower of published articles and secret memoranda and reports.

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<sup>101</sup> Mikhail Soloviev, *My Nine Lives in the Red Army*, trans. Harry C. Stevens (New York: David McKay, 1955), 130-31. The author's job as *Izvestiia's* military correspondent brought him into frequent contact with the Red Army's elite.

<sup>102</sup> Stone, "Tukhachevsky in Leningrad," 1369-75; Zakharov, *General'nyi shtab*, 34-38. Shaposhnikov's victory was codified in a special RVS resolution of 13 January 1930. Zakharov, himself the chief of the General (continued next page)

Zhukov stated in his memoirs that “we all felt that the chief leadership role in the People’s Commissariat of Defense was played by him.”<sup>103</sup> Tukhachevsky rightly considered Voroshilov—derided as a military “dilettante” by Zhukov—his intellectual and professional inferior, an attitude which surfaced in their dealings during his years as chief of the Red Army Staff (1925-28) and Voroshilov’s deputy (1931-37). Zhukov witnessed an incident, probably in 1936, which attests to the volatile relationship between the two men and, in particular, to Tukhachevsky’s insolent bravado. Tukhachevsky was briefing Voroshilov on the work of a commission he chaired when Voroshilov interrupted to propose revisions to an aspect of the report. Tukhachevsky replied quietly and evenly:

‘Comrade People’s Commissar, the commission cannot accept your amendments.’  
 ‘Why not?’ asked Voroshilov.  
 ‘Because your amendments are incompetent, Comrade People’s Commissar.’<sup>104</sup>

Voroshilov must have resented the self-assurance, polish, and precocity of Tukhachevsky, who was twelve years younger. However, Voroshilov’s closeness to Stalin, with whom he had been friendly since 1906, gave the defense commissar the upper hand in his tense relationship with his headstrong deputy.<sup>105</sup> The result, for a time, was an uneasy standoff: “...Voroshilov treated his deputy Tukhachevsky, who was noticeably superior to him in professional military matters, with extreme hostility, although, in contrast to the ‘swordsmen’ Semen Mikhailovich [Budenny], Kliment Efremovich [Voroshilov] conducted himself with seeming self-assurance.”<sup>106</sup>

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Staff for most of the 1960s, declares that Shaposhnikov’s achievement marks “the start of the centralization of military leadership in the RKKA Staff and its gradual transformation into a genuine general staff.”

<sup>103</sup>Zhukov, *Vospominaniia i razmyshleniia*, 1:187.

<sup>104</sup>K. M. Simonov, *Glazami*, 338.

<sup>105</sup>K. E. Voroshilov, *Rasskazy o zhizni (Vospominaniia)*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1968), 247.

<sup>106</sup>L. S. Skvirskii, “V predvoennye gody,” *Voprosy istorii*, 1989, no. 9: 60. The author, a lieutenant-general, served in Moscow during the 1930s, first on the Red Army Staff, and then at the Frunze Military Academy.

If Tukhachevsky merely had collided with his limited superior, he probably would not have been reviled as an “enemy of the people” and murdered. His ill-concealed disdain for Voroshilov’s competence represented implicit disapproval of Stalin’s judgment. Moreover, Tukhachevsky does not seem to have understood or was unwilling to acknowledge demonstrably the unvoiced Stalinist proviso, fully operative by the mid-1930s, that all recipients of promotions, decorations, and perquisites must attribute them to the dictator’s largesse and inspiring leadership.<sup>107</sup> Ambitious and charismatic, Tukhachevsky carried himself like a sovereign. In his own mind, he undoubtedly and properly credited his lofty position chiefly to his own abilities and accomplishments, a point of view he probably found impossible to conceal completely from ill-wishers.<sup>108</sup>

The series of positions held by Tukhachevsky after Frunze’s death do show that an outstanding military leader could find a place in Stalin’s high command before the Great Purges—but only if he was held in check by a submissive and reliably obedient Stalin protégé. Stalin controlled ambitious military and state security chiefs “by inserting his own often mediocre men in the chain of command. This practice, and the rivalries it engendered, stirred animosities...as bitter rivals fought for supremacy and Stalin’s favor.”<sup>109</sup> Voroshilov’s November 1925 appointment as military and naval commissar counterbalanced that of the talented, bumptious Tukhachevsky as chief of staff and, in 1931, his recall to Moscow after a three-year absence triggered by his own pique. As a member of the Politburo from January 1926, Voroshilov’s principal charge was not inherently military: it simply was to ensure the army’s loyalty to the regime and to advance and protect Stalin’s interests within the military command, which the dictator viewed warily and kept at arm’s length. Tellingly, Volkogonov examined thousands of

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<sup>107</sup>Spahr, *Stalin's Lieutenants*, 2.

<sup>108</sup>In November 1936 the Zhukovskii Military Aviation Academy established a prize for outstanding applied scientific research that was named for Tukhachevsky. (Daines, “Tukhachevskii,” 57.) This small (and badly timed!) sign of Tukhachevsky’s stature is just the sort of thing that would have rankled Stalin and Voroshilov.

<sup>109</sup>Murphy, Kondrashev, and Bailey, *Battleground Berlin*, 27.

documents bearing Voroshilov's name, but never saw "a single item of evidence attesting to any intellectual power, genuine civic feeling, vision or moral stature."<sup>110</sup> Nor can it even be said that Voroshilov was an effective administrator: Fleet Admiral Nikolai G. Kuznetsov commented sourly in his memoirs that if a matter went to Voroshilov for action, "everyone knew" a decision would not be forthcoming for weeks. Voroshilov simply did not settle major issues, guidance for which came "directly from Stalin."<sup>111</sup>

Until the Red Army's modernization began in earnest, Stalin did not require military chiefs of more than modest abilities. However, the advent of the five-year plans apparently made the need for Tukhachevsky's peerless (at least among Party veterans) technical and operational expertise in Moscow so imperative that in June 1931 Stalin summoned him from virtual exile in Leningrad back to the capital. Stalin made Tukhachevsky responsible for procurement of arms and military equipment from industry as well as for all military research and development—a job whose importance was so great at the time that it outweighed that of chief of staff. His triumphal return to Moscow as Red Army chief of armaments and Voroshilov's deputy must have galled Voroshilov deeply. In May 1927, that is, after only a year and a half as chief of staff, Tukhachevsky had asked Voroshilov to reassign him due to his dissatisfaction with what he believed were unwarranted and harmful restrictions on the Red Army Staff's role in planning for national mobilization in wartime. After the RVS flatly rejected Tukhachevsky's proposal to broaden the Staff's powers, he resigned in disgust in May 1928 and was appointed commander of the Leningrad Military District.<sup>112</sup> Voroshilov

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<sup>110</sup>Dmitri Volkogonov, "Voroshilov," in *Stalin's Generals*, ed. Harold Shukman (New York: Grove Press, 1993), 313.

<sup>111</sup>N. G. Kuznetsov, *Krutye povoroty: Iz zapisok admirala* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1995), 77-78.

<sup>112</sup>Samuelson, "Tukhachevsky and War-Economic Planning," 813-19; Stone, "Tukhachevsky in Leningrad," 1369-71. In essence, Tukhachevsky believed the Red Army Staff (and, by extension, himself) should be in charge of all aspects of the country's preparation for war. As Stone points out, Tukhachevsky would have had the Red Army Staff "not only dominate the Red Army but also take a leading role in industrial policy"—a commanding position Stalin and Voroshilov could not accept. V. N. Levichev, chief of the Red Army's Main Administration and a Tukhachevsky opponent, warned that the adoption of Tukhachevsky's proposal would mean that the Staff would become the organ that "plans and acts and inspects and, as a result, has all the criteria in its hands. In the leadership's hands there will be almost nothing...." (Cited in Zakharov, *General'nyi shtab*, 36.)

undoubtedly welcomed the appointment of the dispassionate Shaposhnikov to replace him: Tukhachevsky had begun to complain shrilly about the Staff's inability to perform its mission soon after he was chosen to lead it.<sup>113</sup>

Industrialization kindled harsh new clashes between Voroshilov and Tukhachevsky. In particular, in January 1930 Tukhachevsky precipitated a rancorous dispute with a series of memorandums sent from Leningrad that advocated astounding increases in the First Five-Year Plan's targets for the production of arms and military equipment and in the mobilized size of the Red Army. Voroshilov received a sober appraisal of Tukhachevsky's scheme from Shaposhnikov, and sent a summary of Shaposhnikov's refutation to Stalin accompanied by a damning note of his own. Stalin's response was threateningly hostile. Voroshilov read it at an April 1930 meeting of the RVS in order to humiliate Tukhachevsky. Pressing an advantage which in this instance proved temporary, Voroshilov also drafted an insulting letter that scolded Tukhachevsky for neglecting the Leningrad Military District in favor of "excessive literary enthusiasms" and stated that he shared Stalin's view that adoption of Tukhachevsky's proposals would cause "socialist construction" to be displaced by a "peculiar system of 'red militarism.'" Despite the support Voroshilov received from Stalin at the height of the dispute in 1930, the fickle dictator decided to promote Tukhachevsky in 1931 for reasons about which one can only speculate.<sup>114</sup> In any event, the quarrel can only have deepened

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<sup>113</sup> See, for example, Tukhachevsky to Voroshilov, 31 January 1926, Volkogonov Papers, reel 14, frames 57-59. Tukhachevsky began this report as follows: "I already have reported to you verbally that the RKKA Staff works in such abnormal conditions, which make productive work impossible, and also prevent the RKKA Staff from carrying out that responsibility which has been placed on it by statute." At the time, Tukhachevsky had been chief of staff for two and one-half months.

<sup>114</sup> Voroshilov to Tukhachevsky, 4 October 1931, Volkogonov Papers, reel 14, frames 80-84. The letter, labeled "draft," contains a handwritten notation indicating it was not actually sent. In his severe March 1930 response to Tukhachevsky's extravagant plan (Stalin to Voroshilov, 23 March 1930, Volkogonov Papers, reel 4, frames 282-83), Stalin referred to it as a "fantasy" whose adoption "certainly would ruin the country's economy as well as the army." But he prefaced his criticism by saying that Tukhachevsky was "an unusually capable comrade" for whom he had high regard—a clue as to why he appointed Tukhachevsky the Red Army's armaments chief the next year. In a remarkable May 1932 letter to Tukhachevsky (a copy of which went to Voroshilov), Stalin apologized for the sharpness of his comments about Tukhachevsky's arms proposals in March 1930 and stated that his earlier views had "not been entirely correct." (Stalin to Tukhachevsky, 7 May 1932, Volkogonov Papers, reel 4, frames (continued next page)

the well of malice between Voroshilov and Tukhachevsky, who had to work together following the latter's return to Moscow.

Spurred on by Budenny, who openly despised Tukhachevsky, Voroshilov also remained attached to the Red Army's storied cavalry arm.<sup>115</sup> Consequently, he continued to allot "sabers" (*shashki*, the term used to refer to cavalymen during the Civil War) a place, albeit a diminishing one, in a force structure Tukhachevsky wished to mechanize and motorize on the broadest possible scale. Conflict over the cavalry's place in the modernized Red Army crystallized the differences between the "technologists" and those whose perspective on the warfare of the future was dominated by the legendary Civil War campaigns and the supposed moral superiority of the Soviet fighting man. Budenny, the Red Army's inspector of cavalry, was the vocal, if buffoonish, champion of the cavalry commanders, of whom he was the foremost representative. He held a losing hand, but Voroshilov allowed his skirmishes with Tukhachevsky and the latter's supporters to continue for years. At an October 1929 meeting of the RVS, that is, soon after the Politburo had ordered the Red Army to be overhauled and thoroughly modernized, Budenny bawled: "Tukhachevsky wants to dismount the cavalry. Iakir [the Ukrainian Military District's commander and a Tukhachevsky associate recently returned from Germany] was with the Germans, who shrunk his brain—he wants to drive the cavalry on foot." Voroshilov, more smooth-spoken than his crude friend, stated that he

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283-84.) For detailed accounts of this singular episode, see Samuelson, "Tukhachevsky and War-Economic Planning," 820-35; and Stone, "Tukhachevsky in Leningrad," 1377-81.

<sup>115</sup> According to Skvirskii, "V predvoennye gody," 59-60, the enmity between Budenny and Tukhachevsky actually dated from early 1920 rather than the Polish campaign later that year. On 4 February 1920 Tukhachevsky assumed command of the disorganized Caucasus Front, of which Budenny's First Cavalry Army was a part, and quickly restored order. Skvirskii witnessed a startling 1930 incident involving the two men which illustrates their disdain for each other and the inflammatory effect of any open discussion of the failed 1920 drive to take Warsaw. At a high-level review of the Polish campaign before an audience in the Red Army's Central Club, Budenny upbraided the speaker (Triandafilov, a Tukhachevsky ally) for supposedly belittling the Red cavalry's role. When Tukhachevsky came to his defense, Budenny retorted: "You, Mikhail Nikolaevich, are a long-standing enemy of the cavalry." The urbane Tukhachevsky responded with a smile: "Semen Mikhailovich, your love for it is entirely enough." Hearing Tukhachevsky's witty riposte, someone then shouted that he ought to have been hung for his actions in 1920. A "deathly silence" fell over the hall, and the chief of the Political Administration halted the proceedings.

“was against those who think that cavalry has outlived its era.”<sup>116</sup> One suspects that Voroshilov’s views on the subject were influenced by a desire to nettle Tukhachevsky.

Even after the NKVM ordered 7,000 tanks in 1933 and 4,110 more in 1934, the conflict still simmered.<sup>117</sup> When Voroshilov spoke at an expanded session of the RVS attended by many commanders in late 1933, Tukhachevsky complained to him afterward (in writing no less) about the confusion his speech had created: “Many came away with the impression, notwithstanding the army’s new weapons, that the old tactics should remain.”<sup>118</sup> Tukhachevsky’s efforts to advance the cause of operational and technical innovation found an important source of support in several like-minded top commanders—notably Iakir, Uborevich, and Iakov I. Alksnis, the chief of military aviation—who formed “a kind of military syndicate.”<sup>119</sup> They stood in intellectual opposition to Voroshilov, who aligned himself with the cavalry generals publicly and unequivocally at the Party’s Seventeenth Congress in 1934: he declared that it was “necessary, once and for all, to put an end to pernicious ‘theories’ concerning the replacement of the horse by the machine, and the ‘fading away’ of the horse.”<sup>120</sup> Tukhachevsky affirmed his belief in the decisive role of tanks and aircraft in a sarcastic May 1937 article in *Krasnaia zvezda*: he asserted that the Red Army’s modernization had “refuted the theory of [its] ‘special’ maneuverability,” whose espousers “saw in the new man, in the Soviet worker and kolkhoznik, all that was necessary and sufficient to support the conduct of maneuver warfare.” Such “self-infatuation,” Tukhachevsky

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<sup>116</sup>Cited in Daines, “Tukhachevskii,” 54. Mikhail I. Kazakov, promoted to the very senior rank of army general in 1955, commanded a cavalry regiment in 1935-36. He wrote of his feelings at the time: “Cavalry as a troop branch had outlived its era. Our horses were being replaced by the motor everywhere.” So even some cavalry commanders acknowledged that the cavalry had no future. (M. I. Kazakov, *Nad kartoi bylykh srazhenii* [Moscow: Voennoe izdatel’stvo Ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1965], 35.)

<sup>117</sup>N. S. Simonov, *Voенно-promyshlennyi kompleks SSSR*, 84, 91.

<sup>118</sup>Tukhachevsky to Voroshilov, [date illegible] November 1933, Volkogonov Papers, reel 14, frames 99-100. Tukhachevsky attributed the muddle to Voroshilov’s improper characterization of the deep battle concept, and then counseled him on the proper use of operational and tactical terms.

<sup>119</sup>G. Isserson, “Razvitie teorii sovetskogo operativnogo iskusstva v 30-e gody,” pt. 1, *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1965, no. 1: 38; Erickson, *High Command*, 372.

<sup>120</sup>Voroshilov, “Eshche sil’nee,” 596. The speech appeared on *Pravda*’s front page on 4 February 1934.

warned, would lead to “futile, bloody losses” and “the greatest defeats.”<sup>121</sup> These lingering disagreements over force structure and operational roles, indeed, over the very nature of military innovation, tended to parallel and reinforce the natural aversion between the swaggering, unschooled cavalry and partisan heroes of the Civil War and the influential ex-Imperial professional officers in Soviet service.

To a much greater extent than the young Tukhachevsky, Kamenev and Egorov exemplify the latter group. Such men typically entered the Red Army in 1918 and were assigned responsible command and staff positions under the eye of pistol-toting, leather-jacketed commissars. Some won the commissar’s trust and became Party members before the conflict ended; others joined the Party much later or remained outside it entirely. Their contribution to the Bolshevik victory was huge: command and staff positions at the front-, army-, and division-levels were filled mainly by ex-Imperial officers (especially career General Staff officers), and the central and regional military administrations, as well as military educational and training establishments, were kept running by them as well. Although the number of ex-Imperial career officers in the Red Army of the 1920s and early 1930s was greatly reduced, their intellectual weight remained impressive.<sup>122</sup> Several former Imperial generals who had devoted themselves to the study of strategy and tactics were catalysts (and often lightning rods) in the debates of the time, when Soviet military thought flourished briefly.<sup>123</sup> Former colonels, lieutenant colonels, and captains—men such as Kamenev, Shaposhnikov, Nikolai N. Petin, Avgust I. Kork, Sergei A. Mezheninov (all graduates of the Imperial General Staff Academy), and Egorov—each

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<sup>121</sup> M. N. Tukhachevsky, “O novom Polevom ustave RKKA,” in *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 2:246. There is an amusing early illustration of Tukhachevsky’s technological bent and self-assurance. In a July 1918 note to his superior (Ioakim I. Vatsetis), an ex-Imperial General Staff general and the commander of the embattled Eastern Front, Tukhachevsky declaimed: “It is necessary to achieve technical superiority over the Czechoslovaks, mobilizing all of technical Russia for this.” (Cited in Daines, “Tukhachevskii,” 44.)

<sup>122</sup> Kavtaradze, *Voennye spetsialisty*, 222. By 1930 only 10.6 percent of the Red Army’s officers had been officers in the Imperial Army. (Loboda, *Komandnye kadry*, 53.)

<sup>123</sup> Raymond L. Garthoff, *Soviet Military Doctrine* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1953), 45–46. Despite flaws typical of Soviet-era works, Korotkov, *Istoriia Sovetskoi voennoi mysli*, is the best treatment of Soviet military thought during the 1920s and 1930s.

brought years of still-relevant training and experience in a great European army to a force that originated as a motley assemblage of armed bands.

Kamenev had proven to be virtually indispensable to the Bolshevik cause: he had served as commander-in-chief of Soviet forces from July 1919 to April 1924, when the position was abolished. Aided by Shaposhnikov, his fellow ex-Imperial colonel, Kamenev had guided the operations that defeated Denikin and Wrangel, as well as those against Poland. Yet Kamenev, like Shaposhnikov, had entered the Party only in 1930; in contrast, Tukhachevsky and Egorov had joined in 1918. Consequently, given the saturation of Soviet military affairs with abstruse ideological considerations, Kamenev's authority would have been confined to military-technical issues. Kamenev did represent the NKVM occasionally at Sovnarkom meetings in 1931, as did Voroshilov, Gamarnik (the head of the Political Administration), and Tukhachevsky. But Kamenev's trifling role there and the sporadic attendance of the NKVM's other chiefs merely underscore the fact that defense policy was being made inside Stalin's Politburo, which remained Voroshilov's domain.<sup>124</sup> Kamenev was fortunate to die naturally in August 1936 at the age of fifty-five, as he assuredly would have perished in the Great Purges.

Egorov, born in 1883, was to prove the more important figure in the pre-purge high command. Lacking the brilliance of Tukhachevsky and the erudition of Shaposhnikov—two contemporary chiefs of staff—Egorov did serve ably in that position for much of the 1930s. He brought to it extensive experience of higher command, a working knowledge of defense-industrial matters, and a demonstrated ability to get along with Stalin, Voroshilov, and Budenny. In fact, by 1931 Egorov was extolling Stalin's supposed military genius in a study of the 1919 campaign against Denikin.<sup>125</sup> Egorov's relationship with Tukhachevsky must have been poor. Egorov had commanded

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<sup>124</sup>Watson, *Molotov*, 60.

<sup>125</sup>Spahr, *Stalin's Lieutenants*, 56-60.

the front to which Tukhachevsky had looked vainly for help at the crucial juncture in the latter's attempt to capture Warsaw. And in April 1928 Egorov had joined Budenny and Pavel E. Dybenko, another distinguished Civil War veteran and RVS member, in seeking to have Tukhachevsky, then still chief of the Red Army Staff, sacked due to the bureaucratic infighting and disorder afflicting the central military administration.<sup>126</sup> (Tukhachevsky resigned the next month.) Nevertheless, Egorov generally shared the progressive views of Tukhachevsky and other innovators concerning the character of contemporary military operations and promoted these ideas in important ways while he served as chief of staff himself.<sup>127</sup>

When the RVS was disbanded in 1934, the high command's brittle nucleus included a prominent and influential political figure: Gamarnik, since October 1929 the chief of the Red Army's Political Administration and managing editor of *Krasnaia zvezda*. As a ranking Party official heading what amounted to the Central Committee Secretariat's military department, Gamarnik directed the political indoctrination of Soviet soldiers and (together with the military arm of state security) assessed their ideological rectitude and political loyalty to the regime.<sup>128</sup> Born in 1894, he bore the pinched, bearded face of a zealot, and was a fervent believer in the Party's messianic mission.<sup>129</sup> Gamarnik had seen action as a military commissar during the Civil War, but he spent much of the 1920s as a Party official in the Far East, in which he continued to maintain a keen interest while he ran the Political Administration.<sup>130</sup> Gamarnik was selected for

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<sup>126</sup>Stone, "Tukhachevsky in Leningrad," 1369; Zakharov, *General'nyi shtab*, 33-36.

<sup>127</sup>Spahr, *Stalin's Lieutenants*, 156-58.

<sup>128</sup>In 1934 the Party's rules specified that the Red Army Political Administration operated "with the rights of the military department of the TsK VKP(b)." ("O partorganizatsiakh v Krasnoi Armii. Iz Ustava VKP[b]," in *KPSS o Vooruzhennykh Silakh*, 332.) Gamarnik was made a member of the Orgburo in November 1929, an indication of his roots in the Party apparatus. (Edward L. Crowley, Andrew I. Lebed, and Heinrich E. Schulz, eds., *Party and Government Officials of the Soviet Union, 1917-1967* [Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1969], 41.)

<sup>129</sup>Erickson, *High Command*, 315.

<sup>130</sup>In order to further the economic and military development of the Far East, Gamarnik made occasional trips there on the Central Committee's behalf. These trips enabled him to maintain his network of personal contacts in the region, an aspect of his activities the NKVD was to seize on in 1937. (I. M. Rachkov, "Udivitel'nyi dar (continued next page)

candidate membership in the Central Committee at the Party's Fourteenth Congress in December 1925, evidence of his rising standing as a regional Party leader. Two years later, at the Fifteenth Congress, he became a full member.

Gamarnik resumed his involvement in military affairs in 1927, when he became a member of the revolutionary military council of the Siberian Military District. He moved to the Belorussian Military District's council after he was selected to lead the Belorussian Party organization in 1928. There he is said to have "fought steadfastly for the monolithic unity of the Party's ranks against the 'left' and right deviations...."<sup>131</sup> According to Voroshilov, Gamarnik's drive and tenacity impressed him during the maneuvers he and Shaposhnikov directed in the Belorussian Military District in September 1929.<sup>132</sup>

Voroshilov claims that Gamarnik was his own choice to replace Bubnov as head of the Political Administration.<sup>133</sup> If so, Gamarnik seems an odd candidate for a Philistine like Voroshilov to sponsor: he was a literate intellectual of Jewish origin, and his ranking commissars were "well-trained men who intellectually were far superior to the officers [who were their counterparts]." (On the other hand, the Political Administration's lower grades were said to be crowded with "talking machines.")<sup>134</sup> In considering Gamarnik's candidacy, the Politburo may have calculated that the looming upheaval of collectivization required the Political Administration to have a resolute and skilled overseer who would monitor closely the army's pulse and act vigorously to quell any manifestations of disaffection with Party policy. In any event, Gamarnik must have had the confidence of Stalin and Voroshilov, as he soon (in June 1930) was appointed

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pritiazheniia," in K. B. Bogomolova-Gamarnik et al., comps., *Ian Gamarnik. Vospominaniia druzei i soratnikov*. [Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1978], 167-72.)

<sup>131</sup>N. M. Khlebnikov, "Vernyi boets leninskoii partii," in Bogomolova-Gamarnik et al., *Ian Gamarnik*, 8.

<sup>132</sup>K. E. Voroshilov, "Tovarishch v bor'be," in Bogomolova-Gamarnik et al., *Ian Gamarnik*, 125.

<sup>133</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup>Soloviev, *Nine Lives*, 96-97, 100-01.

deputy military and naval commissar and deputy chairman of the RVS. He retained his position as Voroshilov's second-in-command after the reorganization of the central military administration in 1934. As the senior deputy defense commissar, Gamarnik answered only to Voroshilov; as chief of the Political Administration, he was accountable directly to the Central Committee, that is, effectively to Stalin and the Politburo.

Given Stalin's scrutiny of appointments to the Party's higher bodies, Central Committee membership is a useful gauge of the personal fortunes of the Red Army's leaders as well as the military establishment's standing within the regime. Study of the changes in the Central Committee's composition during this period shows that in 1930 a major shift occurred in the nature of the military's representation, one which signified a realignment in the relationship between the Red Army's higher command staff and the Party leadership. During the 1920s the Central Committee drew in only Old Bolsheviks on military assignments; however, in 1930 professional commanders who joined the Party during the Civil War began to be named to that assembly solely on the basis of their meritorious service as Soviet officers. Such flattering acknowledgment of the military profession's importance was a signal departure for the Party leadership, which previously had been leery of the higher command staff, still shot through with ex-Imperial officers. Henceforth the cream of the command staff took a place beside the political soldiers among the Party elite. The appointments of July 1930 (at the Party's Sixteenth Congress) were a sign that, as a consequence of the military modernization and build-up that were integral to the five-year plans, the Soviet officer was to be given "a distinctive place in Soviet society."<sup>135</sup> Stalinist state-building under conditions of "capitalist encirclement" required a large, modern army with a well-trained and self-confident command staff.

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<sup>135</sup>Garthoff, *Soviet Military Policy*, 34.

The Party's Fourteenth Congress convened in December 1925, that is, shortly after the accession by Voroshilov and Tukhachevsky to the leadership of the NKVM. Among the RVS's members, only Voroshilov, Bubnov (then head of the Political Administration), and Ordzhonikidze were selected for full Central Committee membership, none for the first time.<sup>136</sup> In addition, Voroshilov, as the new military and naval commissar, was taken directly into the Politburo as a full member. His deputies, Unshlikht and Lashevich, were given candidate's status on the Central Committee. The five members of the high command who also were named to the Central Committee all had joined the Party from 1900 to 1903. Hence they gained their positions on the Central Committee due to their long careers as revolutionaries and Party officials, in and out of uniform, rather than as soldiers per se. The career military men on the RVS who joined the Party during the Civil War—Tukhachevsky (1918), Egorov (1918), and Budenny (1919)—were too new to the Party to be considered for Central Committee membership. More important, the Party leadership did not consider the command staff a firm support for the still-shaky regime.

Little changed at the Party's Fifteenth Congress in December 1927. Voroshilov, now on the Politburo, naturally remained a full member of the Central Committee, as did Bubnov. Unshlikht stayed a candidate member. He was joined, for the first time, by Baranov, the air forces chief who had been a Party activist since 1912.<sup>137</sup>

The meaningful increase in the Red Army's Central Committee representation occurred at the Party's Sixteenth Congress in 1930. The selections of Voroshilov and

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<sup>136</sup>Data on the Central Committee's composition are drawn from *Pravda* and Crowley, Lebed, and Schulz, *Party and Government Officials*.

<sup>137</sup>*Sovetskaia Voennaia Entsiklopediia*, s.v. "Baranov." Ordzhonikidze's three-year stint on the RVS ended in February 1927, presumably because Zinoviev's loss of influence in the military made Ordzhonikidze's RVS status superfluous. Zinoviev's principal supporters on the RVS, Lashevich and Zof, lost their military leadership positions in summer 1926 as a consequence of Zinoviev's political defeat. In addition, the same July 1926 plenary session of the Central Committee that ousted Zinoviev from the Politburo also deprived Lashevich of Central Committee membership. The Fifteenth Congress expelled him (temporarily) from the Party. (*Sovetskaia Voennaia Entsiklopediia*, s.v. "Lashevich.")

Gamarnik, the new deputy commissar and a full Central Committee member since 1927, were routine. The appointment of Gamarnik's deputy, Anton S. Bulin, as a candidate member was a new development, but hardly remarkable.<sup>138</sup> The departure from past practice came in the selection of two eminent, young, and largely homegrown commanders, Ieronim P. Uborevich and Iona E. Iakir, for candidate membership. Both men were born in 1896, making them Tukhachevsky's contemporaries, and both had joined the Party in 1917. Iakir had no military experience outside the Red Army, which he entered in 1918; Uborevich was a 1916 graduate of a military school and fought in the First World War as a second lieutenant. He too began his Red Army career in 1918. By late 1925 both men were commanding military districts, plum positions in the reduced army of peacetime. Uborevich became a member of the RVS in 1926, Iakir in 1930.<sup>139</sup>

Uborevich was to command the Belorussian Military District, a border district rivaling Iakir's own in importance, from June 1931 until his execution with Tukhachevsky in 1937. A Lithuanian, Uborevich served as Tukhachevsky's deputy during the punitive campaign against the peasants of Tambov Province in 1921.<sup>140</sup> During the late 1920s Uborevich spent a good deal of time in Germany, where he observed maneuvers, examined weaponry, trained at the General Staff Academy, and dazzled his hosts.<sup>141</sup> (A contemporary German report called him "probably the most competent and able Red Army officer.")<sup>142</sup> Uborevich rocketed to the top of the Red Army between 1928 and 1931: he was chosen, in succession, to command the politically

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<sup>138</sup>Unshlikht remained a candidate member, but he had left the NKVM to take up a high economic position in June 1930. (*Sovetskaia Voennaia Entsiklopediia*, s.v. "Unshlikht.")

<sup>139</sup>*Sovetskaia Voennaia Entsiklopediia*, s.v. "Uborevich" and "Iakir." From 1926 until 1935 the territory of the Soviet Union was divided into eight military districts (Moscow, Leningrad, Belorussian, Ukrainian, Volga, North Caucasus, Central Asian, and Siberian). (A. Babakov, "Sovetskie voennye okruga," *Voenna-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1982, no. 9: 64-65.)

<sup>140</sup>P. N. Aleksandrov et al., comps., *Komandarm Uborevich. Vospominaniia друзei i soratnikov*. (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1964), 241.

<sup>141</sup>Erickson, *High Command*, 258-59. See *Fashistskii mech kovalsia v SSSR* for documentary material on the activities of Uborevich (among other Soviet military leaders) in Red Army-Reichswehr collaboration.

<sup>142</sup>Cited in Zeidler, *Reichswehr und Rote Armee*, 253.

sensitive Moscow Military District; to serve as Red Army armaments chief and deputy chairman of the RVS; and, finally, to lead the Belorussian Military District, a banner field command.<sup>143</sup> In Zhukov's opinion, as a commander and instructor, Uborevich "stood three heads higher than Tukhachevsky" (who, said Zhukov, suffered from a "certain lordliness and indifference to everyday dirty work"). Konev, who rose quickly during the late 1930s and achieved renown in the war against Germany, considered Uborevich the most talented of all the top commanders slain in 1937-38, a prodigy able not only to direct front operations but to assume "one of the leading roles in the army in wartime."<sup>144</sup>

Iakir, a close associate of Tukhachevsky, was a major figure in his own right. Idolized by his subordinates, he enjoyed enormous prestige within the Red Army. Though not yet twenty-five and lacking any military training, he had made his mark as a Civil War commander. His ensuing ascent in the military and Party hierarchies was rapid even by Bolshevik standards. In November 1925 Iakir was entrusted with the Ukrainian (Kiev from 1935) Military District, a border district that became the Red Army's most prestigious field command. He remained its commander until the eve of his arrest in 1937. Iakir's inclusion in the Ukrainian Party Politburo in 1927 presaged his elevation to the All-Union Party Central Committee in 1930.<sup>145</sup>

Prominent in Tukhachevsky's circle of young ranking officers, Iakir was instrumental in developing a professional ethos for the command staff and securing the institutional stability and social prominence its leaders enjoyed in the mid-1930s.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Aleksandrov et al., *Komandarm Uborevich*, 242-43.

<sup>144</sup> K. M. Simonov, *Glazami*, 337, 348-49. On Uborevich the commander, see also M. A. Gareev, *Obshchevoiskovye ucheniia*, 2d ed. (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo, 1990), 103-4.

<sup>145</sup> This summary of Iakir's career has been drawn primarily from P. I. Iakir and Iu. A. Geller, comps., *Komandarm Iakir. Vospominaniia druzei i soratnikov*. (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1963), especially 232-36.

<sup>146</sup> von Hagen, *Proletarian Dictatorship*, 328-30; Erickson, *High Command*, 350, 391-93, 401-2.

Like Uborevich, he had studied in Germany and left a highly favorable impression.<sup>147</sup> Iakir shared Tukhachevsky's passion for military innovation. Both men were keenly interested in exploring to the fullest the operational prospects afforded by mechanized forces and aviation. The Red Army's first mechanized formation was established in Iakir's district, and he regularly monitored work on the Kharkov Tractor Plant, soon to be one of the principal Soviet tank manufacturers.<sup>148</sup> If Iakir had a shortcoming, it was his lack of a formal military education: Konev found it difficult to envision him in the role of a front commander under the conditions of the titanic mechanized combat of 1941-45.<sup>149</sup>

Tukhachevsky was conspicuously absent from the military Central Committee members anointed at the Sixteenth Party Congress. His achievements and services to the regime certainly were no less praiseworthy than those of Uborevich and Iakir; indeed, his responsibilities during the Civil War and afterward, on the whole, were greater. Tukhachevsky had joined the Party after Iakir and Uborevich, but the gap was insignificant. The explanation for Tukhachevsky's striking omission from the Central Committee of July 1930 probably lies in the new outbreak of overt hostility between himself and Voroshilov earlier that year and in Stalin's unfavorable reaction to the arms proposals he had thrust on his superior. Tukhachevsky tried to recover lost ground by sending Stalin several letters detailing his reasoning and defending it against Shaposhnikov's alleged distortions.<sup>150</sup> Tukhachevsky's entreaties and the regime's need for his technological and operational insight early in its military modernization and expansion program apparently caused Stalin to reverse himself. In a startling and still opaque move, Stalin restored Tukhachevsky to central positions of influence over military development in June 1931.

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<sup>147</sup>Zeidler, *Reichswehr und Rote Armee*, 224. Field Marshal Hindenburg gave Iakir a copy of Schlieffen's study of Cannae inscribed to "one of the most talented army commanders of the present day."

<sup>148</sup>Nazym Iakupov, *Tragediia polkovoditsev* (Moscow: "Mysl'," 1992), 150-51.

<sup>149</sup>K. M. Simonov, *Glazami*, 348.

<sup>150</sup>Samuelson, "Tukhachevsky and War-Economic Planning," 830-33; Stone, "Tukhachevsky in Leningrad," 1379-81.

As far as Tukhachevsky's absence from the Central Committee was concerned, matters were set right when the Party's Seventeenth Congress (vaingloriously dubbed the "Congress of Victors" by *Pravda*) gathered in January 1934 to celebrate the First Five-Year Plan's early conclusion and the conquest of the countryside. The changes effected by the Seventeenth Congress in the Red Army's Central Committee delegation broadened its predecessor's inclusion of professional soldiers in what formally was the Party's highest governing body. Tukhachevsky finally was granted candidate member's status; however, the most notable development was Iakir's promotion to full member.<sup>151</sup> He joined Voroshilov and Gamarnik as one of three full members of the Central Committee from the Red Army. Iakir was the only professional commander to attain that eminent if largely empty station before 1939, when a replenished Central Committee included no less than fourteen military men, nine of them as full members.

The expansion of the military contingent of the 1934 Central Committee was reflected mainly in the assembly's candidate members. Apart from Tukhachevsky, candidates from the military included Uborevich (who, unlike Iakir, was not made a full member), Bulin, and, for the first time, Budenny, Egorov, and Bliukher. The group's composition was as significant as its size. Only the oafish Budenny can be called a crony of Stalin and Voroshilov; the other four men were, first and foremost, accomplished

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<sup>151</sup> According to N. D. Cherednik-Dubovaia, "Kommunista vse kasaetsia," in Iakir and Geller, *Komandarm Iakir*, 111-12, Iakir had angered Stalin by appealing for relief of the Ukrainian famine in 1933. But it seems very unlikely that Iakir would have been made a full member of the Central Committee in 1934 if he actually had provoked Stalin on such a sensitive issue. In spring 1932 Iakir did ask the Ukrainian Politburo to authorize the delivery of grain to soldiers' starving families, which is consistent with an element of the story related by Cherednik-Dubovaia, the wife of a ranking officer (Ivan N. Dubovoi) close to Iakir. She asserts that the Ukrainian Politburo turned a deaf ear to Iakir, prompting him to appeal directly to Moscow. A June 1932 report from Iakir to Voroshilov shows that the Ukrainian Politburo responded favorably to a request Iakir made at that time; he concluded by stating that the regular delivery of food and the news of such aid from the families receiving it would have "great significance with regard to the strengthening of the political mood of Red Army men." ("Dokladnaia zapiska I. E. Iakira K. E. Voroshilovu o meropriiatiakh po okazaniiu pomoshchi sem'iam krasnoarmeitsev. Iiun' 1932 g.," in *Krasnaia Armiia i kollektivizatsiia derevni v SSSR (1928-1933 gg.)*. *Sbornik dokumentov iz fondov Rossiiskogo Gosudarstvennogo Voennogo Arkhiva*, comp. Andrea Romano and Nonna Tarkhova [Naples: Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli and Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Voennyi Arkhiv, 1996], 448-50.) The two episodes are either separate incidents occurring in consecutive years or the Cherednik-Dubovaia account is embellished; it does appear in a hagiographic work published during Khrushchev's rule. To what extent (if at all) individual members of the high command actually opposed collectivization or at least the manner in which it was forced on the peasantry remains an open question.

professional officers, one of whom (Egorov) even had been a lieutenant colonel in the Imperial Army. Bliukher was a Civil War hero and future marshal who had led the Far Eastern Army since that command's establishment in 1929. The killing of all but Voroshilov and Budenny during the Great Purges is telling evidence of the underlying fissure in Stalin's first high command.

Hence there is an important difference between the "mixed" makeup of the Central Committee's military members in 1934 and the Stalinists and Party officials assigned to the Red Army on whom Central Committee membership was conferred during the 1920s. The composition of the 1934 Central Committee reflected the maturation of the Red Army's higher command staff and the legitimacy it had won for itself. More broadly, it marked the success of the high command's "persistent efforts to secure a respectable place for the army in post-revolutionary society" and to make it a professional institution.<sup>152</sup> The higher command staff's initiation into the Party elite also showed that the Communist professional officer, to whom the Stalin leadership looked to lead the strong, modern army of a mighty socialist state, was advancing to a prominent position of official favor and privilege. During the heady years of 1934-35, the Red Army's ranking commanders seemed to be on at least a par with the Chekist old guard of the newly formed NKVD, whose operatives throughout the Red Army were universally feared and resented. Stalin was careful to counterbalance, even symbolically, the two institutions possessing armed forces: the 1934 Central Committee also included three state security officials, two of them as full members.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> von Hagen, *Proletarian Dictatorship*, 326-28.

<sup>153</sup> The full members were People's Commissar for Internal Affairs Genrikh G. Iagoda and V. A. Balitskii, head of the Ukrainian SSR's NKVD. T. D. Deribas, chief of the NKVD's Far Eastern directorate, was the candidate member. According to Conquest, *Secret Police*, 16, "these were men of long experience, and all were Old Bolsheviks.... They had served in the security apparatus from, or nearly from, the beginning."

## V

By the mid-1930s the Red Army was assuming a structure and size consistent with the country's colossal human and material resources and the regime's prodigious ability to rally them, however wastefully, for Promethean ends. Although still consisting mainly of rifle and cavalry divisions, the Red Army was receiving an infusion of technology and possessed clusters of genuine technical depth and sophistication, especially in the development of armor and the concepts for employing it. Yet the Red Army's build-up at this early stage of Soviet military development was lopsided: it was weighted excessively toward the kind of "extensive" indicators characteristic of Stalinist economic planning (e.g., quantity of tanks produced) to the detriment of less tangible support and command and control (human as well as technical) capabilities. In fact, the Red Army's expansion was outstripping the regime's ability to recruit and train officers to the much higher levels required to operate and maintain machines with which very few had any prior experience and to command heterogeneous units in line with the principles advanced by Tukhachevsky and the other innovators. But these were deficiencies that time would have remedied, at least in part; the forging of such an extensive heavy and defense-industrial base and the simultaneous, albeit incomplete, overhaul of the Red Army were formidable interim achievements. (And, quite apart from the fielding of new weapons, the high command's ability to mobilize hundreds of divisions gave it a strategic flexibility few of its counterparts possessed.) To promote the development of self-confident, qualified, and—not least—Communist commanders, the Party leadership boosted the command staff materially and psychologically, and welcomed its leading representatives into the Party elite. In fact, the integration of the military command into the Party during the years when the industrial pillar of Soviet military might was built was a genuinely impressive feat that underpinned the growth of Soviet military power for decades thereafter.

Soviet military development was never solely, or even primarily, a straightforward process of maximizing force effectiveness for different military missions. After a wrenching period of adjustment during and after the Civil War, the Party leadership and high command did come around to the common-sense view that the Red Army, in order to be militarily effective, had to adopt conventional organizational forms while sustaining its revolutionary *raison d'être* and motivation. Simultaneously, Stalin's drive for political ascendancy (and then absolute power) after Lenin's death required him to ensure that the army would at least remain neutral in his contests with Trotsky and Zinoviev. This aim was accomplished neatly by the installation of Voroshilov as military and naval commissar in 1925, though he had to act, until 1934, as part of the nominally collective military leadership embodied in RVS.

The RVS was rent by the discordant backgrounds of its members, personal grudges and rivalries, and differences of view arising from successive reorganizations of the central military administration and the modernization program. Voroshilov, unqualified and totally undistinguished as a military administrator or thinker, increasingly became a touchstone for tension within the high command, as he remained atop the military establishment due simply to his dog-like loyalty to Stalin and to the dictator's need for an utterly reliable lieutenant to watch commanders who might attract a personal following. Indeed, in 1934 Voroshilov's authority was strengthened substantially, partly as a result of a wider move toward *edinonachalie* in government administration and partly because the Red Army's expansion and modernization made his role more important to Stalin.<sup>154</sup>

It fell to Tukhachevsky and his like-minded associates to supply the intellectual design and energy for the Red Army's renovation. Contemptuous of Voroshilov's pedestrian mind and lack of professional qualifications, Tukhachevsky undoubtedly was

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<sup>154</sup> *Edinonachalie* resists translation; one-man control or one-man management conveys its essential meaning.

deeply satisfied that it was he to whom Stalin had turned in 1931 to guide the Red Army's development in the years to come. But his heady appointment as the Red Army's armaments chief once again placed him directly under Voroshilov, a position of subordination he must have considered absurd for a man of his intellect and abilities. His collisions with Voroshilov, some of which were sufficiently prolonged and bitter to have generated a substantial written record, registered his extreme dissatisfaction with his superior. It is reasonable to suppose that Stalin viewed such profound disgruntlement on the part of a prominent and respected top officer as the soil from which a scheme to displace Voroshilov easily could take root. And, as Voroshilov was Stalin's personal agent, any such attempt on the part of the professional military would pose an implicit threat to Stalin too.

## Chapter 2

### Stalin's Military *Apparat* and the Advance of the Professional Command

... we have obtained tremendous, decisive results in the training of Bolshevik military cadres.

Military and Naval Commissar Voroshilov,  
on the fifteenth anniversary of the Red  
Army's founding, 23 February 1933

During the early 1930s Stalin used a new institution and an old associate, Voroshilov, to solidify his control of the Red Army and to intervene personally in defense policy.<sup>1</sup> The RVS was displaced within the government by the Defense Commission, a powerful and little-known board formed in December 1930, and inside the NKVM itself, by Voroshilov and his two deputies. Outmoded and superfluous, the RVS fell by the wayside. Accordingly, by 1935 the structure and manner of defense policy-making was centralized and controlled directly by Stalin and his closest associates to a much greater degree than they had been a decade earlier, when the RVS had overseen a disjointed central military administration and a threadbare army.

Personally, Voroshilov gained, as it were, by subtraction. A Central Executive Committee resolution of 20 June 1934 abolished the RVS. In addition, the act established the People's Commissariat of Defense (*Narodnyi komissariat oborony*, abbreviated

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<sup>1</sup>This study uses the term "defense policy" to refer to the military and socio-economic dimensions of national security; in contrast, "military policy" refers more narrowly to military affairs or matters under the purview of the Defense Commissariat. Finally, "security policy" would encompass the military, political (the traditional realm (continued next page)

*NKO*) in place of the *NKVM*—the renaming supposedly demonstrative of the USSR's peaceful intentions.<sup>2</sup> Whereas the Defense Commissariat's emergence as such entailed essentially a change in name only, the elimination of the *RVS* as a power in the running of the military establishment was genuinely significant. It removed a potential institutional constraint on Voroshilov's freedom of action.

The 1934 realignment of the central military administration, the first major one since the reforms of 1924-26, was Janus-faced.<sup>3</sup> It did have the prosaic aim of promoting centralization and greater efficiency and effectiveness in force planning, weapon acquisition, training, and administration, that is, in the daily business of any sizable military establishment. Yet the 1934 reorganization also strengthened substantially the authority of the defense commissar—namely, Voroshilov—thereby advancing the imposition of Stalin's system of personalized control on a vital state institution. The first half of this chapter traces the organizational innovations effected by Stalin and his cohorts in the early 1930s to bring the institutional levers of defense policy under their exclusive control. In particular, it details the main features of the 1934 initiatives, which were codified in a new statute for the Defense Commissariat promulgated in November 1934.

The reorganization of the central military administration continued into 1935. One of the chief military events of that year, the founding of the General Staff, actually represented little more than a boost in status for the Red Army Staff rather than the materialization of a major new authority to run the military establishment. Nevertheless, the renaming of the Red Army Staff did signify the regime's endorsement of a key

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of foreign policy), and socio-economic aspects of national security. See R. Craig Nation, *Black Earth, Red Star: A History of Soviet Security Policy, 1917-1991* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992), x-xii.

<sup>2</sup>Watson, *Molotov*, 107; "Narkomat Oborony SSSR," *Izvestiia*, 21 June 1934.

<sup>3</sup>Berkhin, *Voennaia reforma*, 146-60, covers the reorganizations of the mid-1920s. The 1924 measures were motivated largely by the determination of Trotsky's enemies to remove him from leadership of the Red Army.

development that Shaposhnikov and Egorov had done much to promote: the rise to preeminence of the central military planning staff in directing not only the Red Army's overall preparation for war but the actual use of forces in operations. The General Staff's creation, in turn, helped to trigger a new chain of consequential events: after a war game showed that ranking commanders were ill-prepared to command fronts and armies undertaking high-tempo, deep offensives, the Stalin leadership decided to organize a special academy under the General Staff to provide promising officers with a systematic and uniform course of instruction for service on army and military district staffs, as well as in the General Staff itself.<sup>4</sup>

The General Staff Academy proved to be a stepping-stone for many of the generals and marshals who fought with distinction against the Wehrmacht; moreover, the graduates of its first classes in 1937-38 were catapulted, often prematurely, into important positions left vacant by purge victims. In addition to underpinning the General Staff system which dominated the mature Soviet military establishment, the new General Staff Academy probably was seen by Stalin and Voroshilov as a ready source of qualified replacements for the legion of ranking commanders whom they came to consider suspect. The second half of the chapter covers these developments, which were formative ones for the modern Soviet military machine.

Finally, this chapter describes the Red Army's adoption of personal military ranks in 1935, a traditional feature of armies previously rejected in principle by the Party. Coinciding with the unveiling of the General Staff, this innovation was a conspicuous sign of the professionalization of a command corps which had become largely Communist. The institution of a hierarchical and sharply defined military order also reflected the Stalin regime's "great retreat" from the egalitarian and leveling tendencies of the First Five-Year

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<sup>4</sup>V. G. Kulikov, ed., *Akademiia General'nogo shtaba* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1976), 43.

Plan in the interests of state-building and industrial growth.<sup>5</sup> As a defender of an isolated regime, a holder of essential technical knowledge, and, increasingly, a reservoir of socialist-patriotic values, the military command was a natural beneficiary of these trends.

## I

The RVS's abolition in June 1934 was a product of several trends in the control of Soviet defense programs. It was part of a larger effort to rationalize Soviet administrative practice by strengthening the principle of managerial accountability following the chaos of the First Five-Year Plan.<sup>6</sup> This effort was itself impelled by official recognition of the need for clearer lines of authority, the regime's determination to extend its hand over every accessible aspect of social and economic activity, and the attendant rampant growth of the state bureaucracy. In the military realm, the RVS's elimination was part of a broader reorganization which aimed to promote more efficient and effective central control over the operational, technical, and administrative aspects of the Red Army's modernization and growth, a process culminating in the Red Army Staff's christening as the General Staff in 1935.<sup>7</sup> More immediately and concretely, the RVS's dissolution ineluctably bolstered Voroshilov's authority and stature as defense commissar; the substantial increase in his powers was codified in a new statute for the Defense Commissariat issued in November 1934. Finally, the RVS's demise was a consequence of Stalin's formation of an exclusive commission to centralize and streamline the direction of defense programs and activities throughout the government.

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<sup>5</sup>Nicholas S. Timasheff, *The Great Retreat: The Growth and Decline of Communism in Russia* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1946).

<sup>6</sup>On the chimerical nature of the First Five-Year Plan, see Moshe Lewin, "The Disappearance of Planning in the Plan," in *Russia/USSR/Russia* (New York: New Press, 1995), 95-113.

<sup>7</sup>Erickson, *High Command*, 371-72.

The immediate catalyst for the RVS's elimination was the Seventeenth Congress's call for a decisive shift toward strict *edinonachalie* in state administration.<sup>8</sup> Discomfited by the extraordinary managerial disarray produced by the First Five-Year Plan, the Congress directed that the collegiums of commissariats be disbanded; henceforth each commissariat was to be run wholly by a people's commissar who had no more than two deputies. In order to maintain the appearance of collegiality, the Congress stipulated that advisory councils consisting of forty to seventy officials and representatives of lower-level organizations be established and convened every two months.<sup>9</sup> The measure was implemented by a Central Executive Committee-Sovnarkom decree of 15 March 1934, which ordered commissars to dissolve their collegiums within two months.<sup>10</sup> Each commissar also was to nominate two deputies (for approval by the Central Executive Committee) who could represent him at the Sovnarkom. Finally, commissars were to propose members of their councils to the Sovnarkom; Stalin and Molotov were so concerned to oversee the new arrangements that the date, agenda, and proposals to be offered at the first meeting of the councils of key commissariats were subject to Politburo approval.<sup>11</sup> The Constitution of 1936 embodied the shift away from the collegiate principles of the 1920s toward a more conventional form of management, as it placed

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<sup>8</sup>The RVS's authority probably was diminished somewhat by the statute on the NKVM enacted on 30 January 1929. According to Berman and Kerner, *Soviet Military Law*, 176, the powers of the RVS were stated "much more briefly and generally" in the 1929 law than in its predecessor of 1923. The authors note that the apparent reduction in the RVS's authority "was consonant with a general reorganization of commissariats in 1928-1929, toward greater 'one-man control.'" Nevertheless, the decisive moves against collegiate control came in 1934.

<sup>9</sup>M. Gribanov, "K istorii razvitiia edinonachaliia i kollegial'nosti v narodnykh komissariatakh," *Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i pravo*, 1940, no. 11: 65. A council's basic functions were said to be "establishment of a closer link between the people's commissariat and the localities and ensuring a broad exchange of experience." See also Ananov, *Ministerstva*, 158; and Iu. M. Kozlov, *Kollegial'nost' i edinonachalie v sovetskom gosudarstvennom upravlenii* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo iuridicheskoi literatury, 1956), 20-21. For the pertinent part of the Seventeenth Congress's decisions, see "Rezoliutsiia XVII s'ezda VKP(b), fevral' 1934 g. Organizatsionnye voprosy (Izvlachenie)," in *Direktivy KPSS i Sovetskogo pravitel'stva po khoziastvennym voprosam (1917-1957 gody)*, vol. 2, 1929-1945 gg., comp. V. N. Malin and A. V. Korobov (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1957), 412.

<sup>10</sup>"Postanovlenie TsIK i SNK SSSR, 15 marta 1934 g. Ob organizatsionnykh meropriiatiakh v oblasti sovetskogo i khoziastvennogo stroitel'stva," in *Direktivy KPSS i Sovetskogo pravitel'stva*, 2:415-16.

<sup>11</sup>Watson, *Molotov*, 104. The advisory councils often did not meet until 1936, which is indicative of their ancillary role.

responsibility for the leadership and administration of commissariats solely on their heads.<sup>12</sup>

Considered in the context of Stalin's relentless accumulation of power, the abolition of the collegiums of commissariats had a definite political dimension. Some were bodies of substantial size which included a variety of experts. As important high-level forums for discussions of policy, they could press commissars and even the Sovnarkom itself. Hence their existence represented a prospective obstacle to Stalin's efforts to accumulate and consolidate power and to the implementation of his policies through the agents he and Molotov, the head of the government, picked to manage the commissariats.<sup>13</sup> In short, Stalin and Molotov methodically placed their own men in executive positions throughout the government, and then knocked down the potential hurdle the collegiums represented to their minions' ability to effect their will.

The RVS's dissolution put Voroshilov in position to run the Defense Commissariat largely as he saw fit. It meant that the Defense Commissariat no longer possessed a forum for frequent, high-level group reviews of military policy—in other words, a body before which the commissar would have to propose, explain, and justify. Voroshilov, poorly educated, with no military training, and a man for whom considerations of military effectiveness were secondary to Stalin's wishes and calculations of personal and political loyalty, could hardly have found the new situation anything but congenial. Although a Politburo member, Voroshilov had been merely first among equals within the RVS. Its demise elevated his role as defense commissar and further concentrated authority inside the Defense Commissariat in his hands. His two deputies, Gamarnik (the first deputy) and Tukhachevsky (the second), were directly

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<sup>12</sup>V. A. Vlasov, *Sovetskii gosudarstvennyi apparat* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo iuridicheskoi literatury, 1951), 126-27; Merle Fainsod, *How Russia is Ruled*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 390.

<sup>13</sup>Watson, *Molotov*, 102-3.

subordinate to him. A commentary in *Izvestiia* on the June 1934 changes supplied an abstract rationale for them: resolution of the new problems associated with the country's defense supposedly required "efficient and flexible leadership"; in turn, such leadership entailed liquidating the "unneeded remnants of collegiality" and a "strengthening of *edinonachalie*."<sup>14</sup> The RVS plainly was superfluous; indeed, the phrasing suggested Stalin and Voroshilov considered it a liability.

By 1934 the RVS was an institution in eclipse. Alone among the high command, Voroshilov had privileged access to Stalin, and his visits to Stalin's Kremlin office more than doubled from 1931 to 1933 (from 29 to 65).<sup>15</sup> In fact, Stalin's increasingly frequent contacts with Voroshilov represented his only routine interaction with the military elite. In contrast, Tukhachevsky, the Red Army's chief of armaments and a deputy commissar, was present at meetings in Stalin's office on six occasions in 1931, nine in 1932, and eight in 1933. Chief of Staff Egorov attended three meetings in Stalin's office in 1931, five in 1932, and just one in 1933. Clearly, Stalin did not ordinarily consult Tukhachevsky, Egorov, or any other professional officer for military advice. On the contrary, he kept the high command, with the exception of Voroshilov, at arm's length.<sup>16</sup>

Voroshilov also was one of the very few who sat on the Defense Commission, an obscure yet supremely powerful board established in December 1930 that nominally was under the Sovnarkom.<sup>17</sup> As indicated by its membership, small size, and scattered

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<sup>14</sup>"Narkomat Oborony SSSR."

<sup>15</sup>Khlevniuk, *Politbiuro*, 290. The time Voroshilov spent in meetings (including Politburo sessions) with Stalin nearly tripled, from a total of 56 hours and 45 minutes in 1931 to 150 hours and 30 minutes in 1933.

<sup>16</sup>"Posetiteli Kremlevskogo kabineta I. V. Stalina," comp. A. V. Korotkov, A. D. Chernev, and A. A. Chernobaev, *Istoricheskii arkhiv*, 1994, no. 6: 27-44; 1995, no. 2: 129-200. Gamarnik had roughly the same level of access to Stalin as Tukhachevsky. Gamarnik appears in the log of visitors to Stalin's office on six days in 1931 (all in November and December), eleven in 1932, and eight in 1933. Budenny visited Stalin only once (for thirty minutes on 15 May 1932)—evidence of his limited, if not negligible, role in military policy.

<sup>17</sup>Watson, *Molotov*, 106, comments: "By 1931 the secret Defence Commission of Sovnarkom (*Komissiya oborony pri SNK*) was in existence but little is as yet known about its functions."

references in Soviet sources to its activities, the Defense Commission functioned during the 1930s as the highest national authority dealing with the USSR's preparation for war. As such, it would have been central to the determination of defense-industrial policy and procurement levels for arms and military equipment. Originally, the Defense Commission consisted only of Stalin, Molotov (its chairman and the Sovnarkom's new head), Voroshilov, Ordzhonikidze (the new chairman of the Supreme Council of the National Economy, the commissariat-level body responsible for industry), and Kuibyshev (the new chief of the State Planning Commission).<sup>18</sup> Apart from Stalin, of course, all were senior Politburo members and stalwart Stalinists. Hence the Defense Commission represented an unparalleled concentration of power in the economic, government, Party, and military spheres. Accordingly, "the members of this behind-the-scenes organ personally supervised all military procurement and outlays to military industry, much as the [Military-Industrial Commission] did years later."<sup>19</sup>

In effect, then, the Defense Commission was the Politburo's subcommittee for defense policy. Any Defense Commission "proposal" (*predlozhenie*)—in practice, a policy decision—endorsed by Stalin was virtually certain to be repackaged as a Politburo decision or resolution (*postanovlenie*).<sup>20</sup> Such decisions were implemented through the Sovnarkom and, within the military, through the RVS, to which Voroshilov could relate the superior body's deliberations. As each of the Defense Commission's members (except Stalin) simultaneously held a top government and Party position, this select body reflects the wholesale fusion of Party and government leadership characteristic of the

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<sup>18</sup>Introduction to pt. 1, *Stalinskoe Politbiuro v 30-e gody. Sbornik dokumentov.*, comp. O. V. Khlevniuk et al. (Moscow: Izdatel'skii tsentr "AIRO-XX," 1995), 19; "Postanovlenie Politbiuro po voprosam Molotova," 23 December 1930, in *Stalinskoe Politbiuro*, 30. The State Planning Commission (acronym *Gosplan*) was upgraded to a state committee under the USSR Council of Ministers in January 1948. (Korzhihina, *Sovetskoe gosudarstvo*, 282.)

<sup>19</sup>William E. Odom, *The Collapse of the Soviet Military* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 55-56.

<sup>20</sup>See, for example, "Postanovlenie Politbiuro po voprosam Komissii oborony," 6 June 1932, in *Stalinskoe Politbiuro*, 56. This Politburo resolution approved a Defense Commission proposal for additional imports of materials for the Stalingrad Tractor Factory (a tank manufacturer).

pinnacle of Stalin's regime.<sup>21</sup> Adding to the increasingly intricate and redundant machinery of the emerging Stalinist state, the Defense Commission's creation also signified that Stalin would be personally involved in the particulars of defense policy to a greater extent than ever before.

Few details concerning the Defense Commission's policy role are yet available. However, Zhukov attributed the RVS's dissolution to the overlapping of its functions with those of the Defense Commission.<sup>22</sup> This strongly suggests that the Defense Commission, which had its own staff as well as the power to override any RVS decision, reviewed the policy questions for which the RVS had been the principal authority during the 1920s.<sup>23</sup> It is known, for example, that in May 1932 the Defense Commission approved the RVS's plan for expanding the system of military academies after hearing a report by Voroshilov.<sup>24</sup> And in an undated letter to Voroshilov written sometime in 1934, Tukhachevsky called for the Defense Commission to consider an accelerated buildup of the air forces and the implementation of a decision to fix the number of mechanized brigades at fifty.<sup>25</sup> The supposition that the Defense Commission began to encroach on the RVS's prerogatives stands to reason, as Voroshilov and Ordzhonikidze, the RVS's chairman and a past RVS member, respectively, were among its original members. The RVS must have been left with little autonomy.

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<sup>21</sup> Khlevniuk, *Politbiuro*, 62-63. At lower levels, of course, the Party and state administrations maintained separate identities and prescribed functions.

<sup>22</sup> Zhukov, *Vospominaniia i razmyshleniia*, 1:177.

<sup>23</sup> Introduction, *Stalinskoe Politbiuro*, 19; "Postanovlenie Politbiuro o voenno-tekhicheskom biuro pri Komissii oborony," 21 March 1936, in *Stalinskoe Politbiuro*, 56.

<sup>24</sup> Voropaev and Iovlev, *Bor'ba KPSS*, 137.

<sup>25</sup> Tukhachevsky to Voroshilov, [no date] 1934, Volkogonov Papers, reel 14, frame 96. Tukhachevsky asserted that the development of aviation and the mechanized forces along the lines he favored would boost Soviet military power to the point where none of the country's enemies would be able to surpass it.

The Defense Commission also must have usurped the key functions formally accorded the Council of Labor and Defense (*Sovet truda i oborony*, abbreviated *STO*).<sup>26</sup> The STO had been headed by the “rightist” Rykov (simultaneously the chairman of the Sovnarkom) until his removal in December 1930. It was established in 1920 to direct and coordinate economic programs in the interests of national defense. Chaired by the Sovnarkom’s chairman and meeting two or three times a month, the STO consisted of the commissars for military and naval affairs and each of the main branches of the economy, as well as a few other top economic officials.<sup>27</sup> By 1927 the STO’s functions apparently had become mainly economic and not specifically defense-related: Voroshilov stated that the crisis in relations with Britain in the spring of that year had impelled the STO to meet regularly once again for “the resolution of all questions connected with defense.”<sup>28</sup> Formally, the STO had extensive powers, but its responsibilities for industry and the economy were never clearly delineated from those of the Sovnarkom, to which the STO nominally was subordinate as its chief standing commission. The two bodies occasionally met jointly to issue decrees on defense matters, and the STO reportedly was briefed on and gave its approval to the Red Army’s war plan.<sup>29</sup>

Stalin saw the Rykov-led STO as a bastion of the Right. In letters written in September 1930 to Molotov, Stalin scornfully called the STO an “idle parliament” and useless “body of chatterers” and stated that he wished to transform it into “a militant and viable economic management body.”<sup>30</sup> To that end, in December 1930 the STO’s

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<sup>26</sup>The Defense Commission is said to have “studied and worked out in advance the basic, fundamental questions of the building of the armed forces and the development of the USSR’s defense, passing them to the Council of Labor and Defense for review and approval legally.” (Zhukov, *Vospominaniia i razmyshleniia*, 1:177 n.)

<sup>27</sup>Watson, *Molotov*, 54; *Sovetskaia Voennaia Entsiklopediia*, s.v. “Sovet Truda i Oborony.”

<sup>28</sup>Watson, *Molotov*, 105-6; Voroshilov, “Voprosy oborony i piatiletka,” 196.

<sup>29</sup>Watson, *Molotov*, 45, 60; Iu. A. Gor’kov, “Gotovil li Stalin uprezhdaiushchii udar protiv Gitlera v 1941 g.,” *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 1993, no. 3: 31.

<sup>30</sup>*Stalin’s Letters to Molotov, 1925-1936*, ed. Lars T. Lih, Oleg V. Naumov, and Oleg V. Khlevniuk; trans. Catherine A. Fitzpatrick (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), Letter 65, 13 September 1930, 214; Letter 68, 22 September 1930, 217.

membership was reduced from fourteen (plus deputies) to eleven, Stalin among them.<sup>31</sup> However, since the Defense Commission was established at the same time to replace the so-called executive sessions of the STO and a defunct Politburo defense commission chaired by Rykov, Stalin clearly intended it to be the means by which he or Molotov would become involved personally in every defense-related decision of consequence.<sup>32</sup> For example, in 1933 the Defense Commission ratified a five-year plan for naval construction proposed by Vladimir M. Orlov, the naval chief, an act that would have been performed before 1931 only by Rykov's STO.<sup>33</sup> The Defense Commission's policy-making role, at the very least, must have blurred that of the STO in the defense realm; eventually it reduced the STO, now chaired by Molotov, to merely another mechanism within the government for executing its decisions. After a period of decline during the mid-1930s, the STO finally was abolished in April 1937.<sup>34</sup>

The Defense Commission undoubtedly sought to mesh more effectively the Red Army's modernization and the development of the defense industry. The First Five-Year Plan had underscored the importance of closely synchronizing such plans: the NKVM's changing orders for weapons had rippled disruptively through the State Planning Commission and the Supreme Council of the National Economy.<sup>35</sup> In a March 1932

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<sup>31</sup> Watson, *Molotov*, 46; "Postanovlenie Politbiuro po voprosam Molotova," *Stalinskoe Politbiuro*, 31.

<sup>32</sup> Introduction, *Stalinskoe Politbiuro*, 19.

<sup>33</sup> Dmitriev, *Sovetskoe podvodnoe korablestroenie*, 127-28. On 11 July 1933 the revamped STO did adopt a resolution on naval shipbuilding through 1938, which must have been based on Orlov's proposal. This indicates that the Defense Commission and the STO both were involved in such programmatic decisions during the first years of the former's existence.

<sup>34</sup> Watson, *Molotov*, 23-24, 132. Providing responsive central direction to the sprawling command economy quickly emerged as an acute problem. Yet another Sovnarkom board (the Economic Council) for "operational management of the national economy" sprang up in November 1937. (Korzhikhina, *Sovetskoe gosudarstvo*, 209.) And, at a January 1941 Politburo meeting, Stalin sharply criticized it too for "parliamentarianism." In his view, effective decisions could be taken "on the basis of individual meetings with knowledgeable comrades." ("Proidet desiatok let," 114.)

<sup>35</sup> After the dissolution of the Supreme Council of the National Economy, in January 1932 the factories formerly beneath its arms trusts became subordinate to directorates and trusts in the new Commissariat of Heavy Industry. In January 1937 all military production was concentrated in a separate Commissariat of Defense Industry. (N. S. Simonov, *Voенно-promyshlennyi kompleks SSSR*, 83, 96.)

report on the lessons of the First Five-Year Plan for the defense industry, the State Planning Commission's Defense Sector stated that it had been hamstrung by its lack of knowledge concerning the basis for fluctuations in the NKVM's annual weapon orders.<sup>36</sup> After the self-induced convulsions of the First Five-Year Plan, the Defense Commission presumably would have been motivated and well positioned to impose some sorely-needed coherence on the planning and implementation of arms production and military modernization. Its focus, authority, and exclusive membership would have facilitated more efficient decision-making for defense, the need for which was acute at a time when military expenditures were soaring. Although the RVS and the STO continued to exist for a few more years, after 1930 Stalin's office, where the Defense Commission almost certainly met, was the hub of defense policy-making in the five-year-plan era.

## II

One other aspect of the completion of the shift to *edinonachalie* (unified command in a military context) in the Red Army must be noted.<sup>37</sup> The RVS's abolition was matched by the simultaneous dissolution of the revolutionary military councils of military districts, armies, fleets, and flotillas. This was a striking departure from the restrictive approach to high-level military command and control the Party's leaders had taken from the time of the Red Army's founding in 1918. The change is said to have been endorsed by Stalin and Tukhachevsky in September 1933. It was vigorously resisted by

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 89.

<sup>37</sup>At lower levels of command the move toward *edinonachalie* had begun in 1925, when Central Committee guidance limited the role of unit military commissars to Party affairs and political indoctrination. ("Ob edinonachalii v Krasnoi Armii," 6 March 1925, in *KPSS o Vooruzhennykh Silakh*, 280-81.) Commanders who were Party members were considered able to take responsibility for "Party-political leadership" in their units, in addition to their usual duties. Apart from its desirability from an efficiency standpoint, *edinonachalie* ultimately was politically palatable due to the steady increase in the proportion of commanders who were affiliated with the Party. A definitive Political Administration directive of May 1927 freed the command staff, "once and for all, from the political control of the military commissars, effectively reducing the latter to the role of the commander's political assistant." (Steven J. Main, "The Red Army and the Soviet Military and Political Leadership in the Late 1920s: The Case of the 'Inner-Army Opposition of 1928,'" *Europe-Asia Studies* 47, no. 2 [1995]: 340-41.)

Gamarnik, who viewed military councils as a mainstay of the Party's control over the higher command staff.<sup>38</sup>

The revolutionary military council was a vestige of the Civil War. It was the instrument Lenin and Trotsky devised for subjecting the Red Army's front and army commanders, the vast majority of them professional officers whose allegiance to the Bolshevik cause remained unproved, to close supervision by Party veterans. All orders issued by the commander (usually the council chairman) were required to be countersigned by one of council's political members in order to ensure their revolutionary probity. Hence a Party representative effectively had a veto over the commander's every decision, and Moscow made the military council as a whole responsible for the field command's actions. Although the entire arrangement was founded on mistrust, it worked reasonably well: more often than not, commanders worked effectively with the Party

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<sup>38</sup>Petrov, *Partiinoe stroitel'stvo*, 287. There was a major dispute between Gamarnik and Tukhachevsky concerning the military council's role in late 1933; it probably dragged on into 1934 before it was settled by the decision to do away with the institution completely. In a November 1933 note addressed to Stalin and Voroshilov, Gamarnik criticized a proposal by Tukhachevsky to exclude the chief of the military district's political directorate from the district military council as "incorrect" and "harmful in peacetime and especially in wartime." Based on Gamarnik's comments, it seems that Tukhachevsky, probably taking his cue from Stalin (see below), had asserted that district political officers tended to interfere with the prerogatives district commanders possessed under the unified command concept and were inclined to "disparage" the commanders' role. Tukhachevsky evidently believed that the senior officers commanding the military districts, of whom virtually all current or recent ones had been Party members for years (Shaposhnikov was the exception), should not have to continue to consult routinely with their political officers, as the inclusion of the latter on the military council had necessitated. In Tukhachevsky's view, the council should include only the commander and the heads of the Party committee and the executive committee that were a particular military district's civil counterparts. Removing the district political officer from the council would, according to Tukhachevsky, make him the commander's "political assistant" (*pompolit*)—a definite reduction in his authority. A March 1934 note by Tukhachevsky shows that Stalin participated in a discussion of this controversial subject in Sochi in September 1933 (confirming *ibid.*, 287 n. 5). Tukhachevsky summarizes what seems to have been Stalin's view at the time as follows: "...you indicated that it is necessary to revise the existing statute [on the role of the military council] in favor of unified command on the part of the commander of forces...." However, Tukhachevsky apparently had thought that Stalin wanted to abolish the military council completely, whereas Stalin, it appears, actually envisioned a wartime role for the council similar to that which it had possessed during the Civil War: providing a mechanism for ranking Party officials to monitor decisions by field commanders. According to *ibid.*, 287 n. 5, in April 1934, that is, just before the decision to abolish the military council was taken, Gamarnik again made a strong appeal to maintain the council in its traditional form. Although the details of this entire episode remain obscure (especially the evolution of Stalin's thinking on the matter), it was a milestone in the Party's efforts to integrate the military command into the regime. (Gamarnik to Stalin and Voroshilov, 22 November 1933, Volkogonov Papers, reel 14, frame 97; Tukhachevsky to Stalin and Voroshilov, 31 March 1934, Volkogonov Papers, reel 14, frames 97-98.)

authorities assigned to watch them; for their part, the latter tended to identify their personal and political fortunes with their command.<sup>39</sup>

Despite the loyalty shown by the great majority of the Red Army's ex-Imperial officers, residual suspicion of them and the Party's fear of a future Bonapartist threat caused the military council to be retained in the peacetime Red Army. The councils remained a fixture in the command and control of military districts, armies, fleets, and flotillas, the regional field commands to which ground, air, and naval forces were assigned. A council consisted of the military district or formation commander, a ranking political officer, and the secretary of the counterpart civil Party committee.<sup>40</sup> As a result, Party officials retained some authority, however ambiguous and conditional, over the day-to-day administration of the command on whose council they sat. The very existence of the councils therefore represented an implicit check on the authority of top commanders.

Military councils were restored suddenly in 1937 and were carried over into the wartime command and control structure in 1941, times of national upheaval and crisis. For this reason, their presence or absence in the Red Army's command structure appears to be a reliable, if indirect, barometer of Stalin's and Voroshilov's attitude toward their generals. Consequently, the dissolution of military councils throughout the Red Army in 1934 strongly suggests that they no longer had serious qualms about the allegiance of the men in charge of the Red Army's major field commands. Given the ostensibly glorious history of the military council as an instrument of Party authority, their elimination affirmed the Party leadership's confidence in its leading commanders. By abolishing military councils, the Party also confirmed ranking commanders' power over their subordinates and boosted their standing and prestige. Whereas the political officer on the

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<sup>39</sup>Timothy J. Colton, "Military Councils and Military Politics in the Russian Civil War," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 18, no. 1 (1976): 36-38.

<sup>40</sup>Petrov, *Partiinoe stroitel'stvo*, 207. Similarly, the political officer on the military council of a military district or fleet was a member of the counterpart civil Party committee.

military council of a military district (who also was the chief of its political directorate) could be considered the district commander's peer in some respects, he now became his deputy for political affairs, while remaining subordinate to the chief of the Political Administration.

The basis for the Party's signal display of confidence in the higher command staff lay in the success of its efforts to recruit officers into the Party (rather than to recruit Party members into the Red Army).<sup>41</sup> Indeed, Party membership had become a virtual prerequisite for higher command by about 1930: in February 1933 Voroshilov crowed, on the occasion of the Red Army's fifteenth anniversary, that every commander of a military district or rifle corps was a Communist.<sup>42</sup> Since this, of course, made them subject to Party discipline, military councils apparently came to be seen (at least by Stalin, Tukhachevsky, and presumably Voroshilov) as redundant and very possibly as a bureaucratic impediment to effective military administration and command.

Thus, assurance that the higher command staff, initially an alien element in the Red Army, had been overhauled and stocked with now-seasoned "commander-Bolsheviks" was fundamental to the shift to full *edinonachalie* in the major field commands.<sup>43</sup> Although the savage campaign to collectivize and "dekulakize" the rural population had produced widespread disaffection among the Red Army's conscripts and even its primary Party organizations, its leading commanders, by and large, seem to have assimilated (if only crudely) the Party's world-view, supported its utopian goals, and, in general, identified with the regime.<sup>44</sup> The Party leadership hailed the military command's

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<sup>41</sup> Reese, *Stalin's Reluctant Soldiers*, 105.

<sup>42</sup> Voroshilov, "15 let Krasnoi Armii," 575.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 576. Voroshilov even said that the small percentage of "non-Party commanders" were "unquestionably our people."

<sup>44</sup> On the unmitigated hostility of conscripts to collectivization and the confusion it engendered in military primary Party organizations in 1929-30, see *Krasnaia Armiia i kollektivizatsiia*; and Roger R. Reese, "Red Army Opposition to Forced Collectivization, 1929-1930: The Army Wavers," *Slavic Review* 55, no. 1 (1996): (continued next page)

steadfastness during the regime's recent trial in the countryside: privileges and benefits began to be bestowed on the high command and the command staff as a whole in recognition of their esteemed places in the Stalinist state and in Soviet society.

### III

The revamping of the military establishment was codified in a new statute that set forth the Defense Commissariat's responsibilities and structure in detail. Promulgated by a government resolution of 22 November 1934, this act "established the basic form of the modern Soviet military system."<sup>45</sup> The set of functions it prescribed for the Defense Commissariat remained undivided and essentially unaltered for decades thereafter, though the central military administration underwent several changes in name and one in legal status before emerging as the Ministry of Defense in 1953.<sup>46</sup> The 1934 reorganization also was self-contained: the Defense Commissariat neither gained nor lost any major

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24-45. Reese claims that the high command, to include Voroshilov, came to oppose Stalin's policy of breakneck collectivization because it was undermining the Red Army's reliability. However, he does not present any direct evidence for his view, citing only statements by other historians who themselves had to use reporting from questionable second-hand sources. (Ibid., 42-45.) For example, Jonathan Haslam, *Soviet Foreign Policy, 1930-33* (London: Macmillan, 1983), 121-22, summarizes contemporary reports of rumors heard by British, French, and purportedly well-informed Italian diplomats, the latter recounting a supposed demand by Gamarnik for a drastic change in policy at a February 1930 meeting of Party leaders. Consequently, Erickson's judgment that reports of high-level military opposition to collectivization remain "unsubstantiated rumours" still seems sound. (Erickson, *High Command*, 356.) If a few top commanders (such as Iakir, in charge of the Ukrainian Military District, or Bliukher in the Far East) actually did voice misgivings over collectivization, they were expressed confidentially, and to no discernible effect. Moreover, they almost certainly would have concerned the detrimental effects on military readiness and discipline of the barbaric manner in which the collectivization was being implemented rather than its necessity or rationale. (Indeed, numerous documents in *Krasnaia Armiia i kollektivizatsiia* as well as Haslam, *Soviet Foreign Policy*, 25-26, attest to the anxiety of the high command and the Political Administration over what Voroshilov termed the Red Army's "moral-political stability" in February 1930.) Tukhachevsky, for one, considered collectivization a positive development, at least in the long run, because it promised to raise the educational level and political awareness of the peasantry, from which the bulk of the Red Army's conscripts were being drawn. (Samuelson, "Tukhachevsky and War-Economic Planning," 823.)

<sup>45</sup> John Erickson, *The Russian Imperial/Soviet General Staff* (College Station, Tex.: Center for Strategic Technology, 1981), 103.

<sup>46</sup> In a move intended to support the admission of two constituent republics (the Belorussian and the Ukrainian) into the United Nations, the Defense Commissariat was transferred from all-union to union-republic status on 1 February 1944. This supposedly was to enable the republics to raise their own military formations. (Berman and Kerner, *Soviet Military Law*, 26-27.) Surprisingly, the Defense Ministry did not revert to all-union status until 1977.

functions. Hence, for the time being, naval forces remained under its purview. More important, the border troops and the internal troops, the latter a veritable small army for internal security, continued to exist in counterpoise to the Red Army, each force having been incorporated into the new People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (*Narodnyi komissariat vnutrennikh del*, abbreviated *NKVD*).

In eliminating the duplication inherent in the existence of the RVS and the Defense Commission by dissolving the older body, the 1934 reorganization necessarily strengthened the authority of the defense commissar inside the Defense Commissariat. And, as the Defense Commission consisted exclusively of dyed-in-the-wool Stalinists, among them Voroshilov, the restructuring further consolidated the hold of Stalin and Voroshilov on the military establishment, evidently one of its chief aims. There was a prosaic goal, too, one which had eluded the high command from the time of the Frunze reforms of the mid-1920s: attaining greater efficiency and effectiveness in the Defense Commissariat's day-to-day business. To that end, the Red Army Staff was elevated to a position of clear superiority in operational matters, and responsibility for administrative and technical ones was divided among the Defense Commissariat's other components. But the new organizational scheme's dependence on Voroshilov, "without whom no one would act," and virtually constant bureaucratic tinkering within the Defense Commissariat indicates that this aim was attained only in part, if at all.<sup>47</sup>

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the increase in Voroshilov's powers was part of a general move in Soviet government to concentrate authority and responsibility in a chief executive rather than to diffuse them among the members of a council, each of whom

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<sup>47</sup> Barmine, *One Who Survived*, 220. The author recalled an incident in which the Defense Commissariat's approval of a minor, follow-on shipment of military equipment abroad, subsequent to earlier Politburo approval of the main shipment, was held up for weeks because Tukhachevsky and Gamarnik were unwilling to act while Voroshilov was away on the Black Sea coast. Voroshilov finally was telephoned by Gamarnik, to whom a secretary in the Caucasus barked: "Wait until the War Commissar gets back!" Barmine's is a valuable account: (continued next page)

had the formal right to appeal decisions by the commissar to the Sovnarkom. Accordingly, the first article of the Defense Commissariat's statute stated flatly that the defense commissar headed it (i.e., the central military administration) and the Red Army as well. He was assisted by two deputies, but only the commissar himself had the power to issue general orders. The statute also subordinated commanders of military districts, armies, and fleets directly to the defense commissar.<sup>48</sup> Prior to June 1934, they had been subject, at least nominally, to collective control by the RVS. Henceforth the chain of command extended, straight and unadorned, from Stalin and Molotov (the chairman of the Sovnarkom) through Voroshilov to the Red Army's regional commanders. It was used to ill effect in autumn 1939, when Stalin tasked the command of the Leningrad Military District with drafting the plan of attack against Finland, thereby shunting aside Shaposhnikov, the "old *genshtabist*" whose sober view on the size of the force needed to defeat the Finns had caused the sanguine dictator to chuckle.<sup>49</sup>

In an attempt to maintain at least a collective facade at the top of the Defense Commissariat, its statute established an advisory council (the *Voennyi sovet*) under the defense commissar. This new body had its own statute, which was vague about its function: "The Military Council examines issues forwarded for its consideration by the defense commissar of the USSR, as well as issues nominated by the members of the Council." Despite the similarity of its title to the defunct RVS, the Military Council was a mere appendage of the defense commissar: he chaired it, he called its meetings, and he had to approve all of its decisions. In addition, the defense commissar nominated its

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he knew Tukhachevsky and his duties as a trade official in Moscow from 1933 to 1935 brought him into frequent contact with the high command and, on a few occasions, with Stalin.

<sup>48</sup>"Prikaz s ob''iavleniem polozhenii o Narodnom komissariate oborony SSSR i Voennom soveta pri Narkome oborony SSSR," 22 November 1934, in *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR* [hereafter *Priказы*], comp. A. P. Aristov et al., vol. 13(2-1) of *Russkii arkhiv: Velikaia Otechestvennaia*, ed. V. A. Zolotarev (Moscow: "TERRA," 1994), 283-84.

<sup>49</sup>K. M. Simonov, *Glazami*, 390-91. On Shaposhnikov, see I. S. Konev, "Vospominaniia," pt. 1, *Znamia*, 1987, no. 11: 24.

members for approval by the Sovnarkom.<sup>50</sup> As the Military Council was an unwieldy body of some eighty ranking commanders and military commissars scattered throughout the country, its meetings would be akin to the orchestrated convocations of the Central Committee.<sup>51</sup> Real power in the Defense Commissariat resided with Voroshilov and, to a much lesser degree, with his two deputies, Tukhachevsky and Gamarnik.

The Military Council's main utility was as a forum for Voroshilov and his deputies to inform, exhort, or rebuke a large number of their chief subordinates simultaneously. In short, the Council served as a means for Voroshilov to brief and mobilize the military elite as a group, functions which would become especially important as it fell under the NKVD's blows. Indeed, the Military Council was convened in early June 1937 expressly so that Voroshilov and Stalin could explain and justify the stupefying news concerning the supposed exposure of the "military-fascist conspiracy" allegedly headed by Tukhachevsky. And Voroshilov chose to review the results of the military purge before a depleted Military Council in November 1938: just a handful of members remained from the somber group that he and Stalin had unnerved eighteen months earlier.<sup>52</sup> Meeting fitfully in the defense commissar's shadow and having no real powers, the Military Council was a "mere pale shadow" of the RVS, which, by 1934, itself had been supplanted by the Defense Commission.<sup>53</sup>

The RVS's elimination and the new Defense Commissariat statute left Voroshilov free to issue orders without any obligation to consult even his deputies, however foolhardy this would have been for a parade general such as he. On the other hand,

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<sup>50</sup>"Prikaz s ob''iavleniem polozhenii o Narodnom komissariate oborony SSSR," *Priказы*, 297-98.

<sup>51</sup>Watson, *Molotov*, 107.

<sup>52</sup>"'Nevol'niki'; "Pobezhdai' vruga maloi krov'iu. Vystuplenie K. E. Voroshilova na zasedanii Voennogo Soveta pri narkome oborony SSSR. 1938 g.," ed. A. A. Pechenkin, *Istoricheskii arkhiv*, 1997, no. 4: 64-74. These are the texts of the keynote speeches by Stalin and Voroshilov. Analyzed in Chapter 4, Stalin's address of 2 June 1937, in particular, provides new insight into his aims in orchestrating the military purge.

<sup>53</sup>Erickson, *High Command*, 369.

Voroshilov had to operate under a severe constraint: he had to help satisfy his touchy boss's desire to know about the "thousands of relatively unimportant, as well as all-important, problems" constantly being mooted within the bowels of the commissariats and other organs of the state administration.<sup>54</sup> According to Barmine, "all practical questions, even those of minor importance, could be decided by Gamarnik, by Tukhachevsky, or even by Voroshilov only after detailed and precise instructions had been received from the Politburo—that is to say, from Stalin."<sup>55</sup> Hence the 1934 military reorganization should be seen as a manifestation of broader political processes then underway: the boost to Voroshilov's authority and freedom of action secured his and Stalin's control over the military establishment, but Voroshilov himself was yoked more tightly than ever to Stalin.

#### IV

In addition to elevating the defense commissar's position, the new statute heralded the Red Army Staff's emergence as the dominant planning and coordinating body in the central military administration. Significantly, the Staff was the first of twenty-eight Defense Commissariat components whose functions were described: "The Staff of the Worker-Peasant Red Army is the central organ of command and control of the defense commissar of the USSR in respect to the training and use of the Armed Forces of

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<sup>54</sup>Barmine, *One Who Survived*, 213. For example, in May 1935 Voroshilov sent Stalin and Molotov a report on "organizational measures to strengthen the RKKA in 1936 and 1937 (mainly the rifle forces)," which supplemented decisions already taken with regard to aviation, cavalry, and mechanized units. The cover note shows that Stalin, Molotov, and Commissar for Heavy Industry Ordzhonikidze—all of them, like Voroshilov, Defense Commission members—read and approved the proposals. This particular matter was not trivial, but such correspondence from Voroshilov to Stalin probably was an everyday occurrence. (Voroshilov to Stalin and Molotov, 7 May 1935, Volkogonov Papers, reel 4, frame 28.)

<sup>55</sup>Barmine, *One Who Survived*, 222-23. Barmine also provides evidence that Tukhachevsky consulted Voroshilov on small matters. Moreover, he suggests that Tukhachevsky, despite his manifest superiority, apparently was sufficiently chastened at times to act quite deferentially toward Voroshilov. During a meeting between Barmine and Tukhachevsky, the latter received a telephone call from Voroshilov. Tukhachevsky jumped to his feet and responded to Voroshilov's instructions in "a definitely respectful voice." Barmine commented: "Even Tukhachevsky no longer dared to make decisions; he merely carried out commands. He, too, had to ask (continued next page)

the USSR for the country's defense." As the quintessential mission of the Red Army (as well as of the internal and border troops) was to defend Soviet territory and Party rule over it, the statute effectively made the Staff the linchpin of the central military administration. The Staff's chief was given the authority, under the defense commissar's guidance, to "coordinate the activity of all directorates of the People's Commissariat of Defense, giving them tasks and instructions." His responsibilities included:

- Developing war plans for air, naval, and ground forces;
- Planning the armed forces' deployment for wartime operations;
- Preparing theaters of military operations to support the armed forces' deployment;
- Ensuring the armed forces were trained and ready for combat;
- Improving their organization;
- Ordering weapons, military equipment, and supplies from industry;
- Defining technical specifications for arms and military equipment;
- Setting requirements for industrial mobilization;
- Drafting combat manuals and regulations;
- Directing military topographic work.<sup>56</sup>

Given this expansive set of planning and management tasks, it was but a short step, then, for the Staff to be graced with the tradition-laden title "General Staff" on 22 September 1935. The General Staff had virtually the same functions as those assigned to the Staff by the November 1934 statute, so it is clear that the General Staff's establishment actually represented little more than a change in name for symbolic reasons.<sup>57</sup> More important, these duties were to be carried out by a select cadre of specially-trained staff officers devoted to a rigorous, technical military professionalism. This conception of the

and ask; his every action had to conform to instructions, from Voroshilov on the one hand and the Politburo on the other....He had been a leader; now he was reduced to a functionary." (Ibid., 219-20.)

<sup>56</sup>„Prikaz s ob''iavleniem polozhenii o Narodnom komissariate oborony SSSR," *Priказы*, 285.

<sup>57</sup>Zakharov, *General'nyi shtab*, 35. It is amusing to note that V. D. Danilov, a specialist on the evolution of the central military administration, felt it necessary to state that "this transformation [of the Staff into the General Staff] was not simply a change in titles, but reflected the creation of a qualitatively new body, invested with corresponding powers." (V. D. Danilov, "Polozhenie o sluzhbe GSh i kommentarii voennogo istorika," *Voennaia mysl'*, 1990, no. 11: 54.)

Soviet General Staff as the “army’s brain” and general staff service as a demanding special calling was derived from the Prussian military model, with which Shaposhnikov, the Staff’s chief from 1928 to 1931, was especially familiar. While commanding the Leningrad and Moscow Military Districts, the intellectual Shaposhnikov had labored over a ponderous historical study of general staffs entitled *Mozg armii*, of which the first two volumes were published in 1927 and the third in 1929.<sup>58</sup> The formation of the General Staff was the last in a series of steps toward the adoption of a General Staff-centered military system: this, together with moves to mold a special corps of General Staff officers, were major departures from early Bolshevik military practice.

In effect, the high command and the Stalin leadership, after a long period of searching examination and acrimonious debate, had “absorbed [the Prussian model] completely.”<sup>59</sup> This was one choice which was apt if necessary, given the regime’s commitment to top-down planning and control, its ambitious military development program, and the more dispassionate approach to planning and administration which prevailed under the Second Five-Year Plan. The adoption of the Prussian concept of a general staff was a precondition for the Soviet General Staff’s maturation into the powerful organization—albeit within the limited, technical sphere the Party leadership defined for it—through which the command economy’s military outputs were packaged into large force groupings and detailed plans for their use methodically worked out.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Soviet military historians and leaders acclaimed the book a classic, though one wonders how many actually read the rambling work in its entirety. Marshal Aleksandr M. Vasilevskii’s praise for the book is typical: “...in 1927 I, as a regiment commander, still could not appreciate fully the entire richness of content of this work, which unfolded before me gradually....Even today the significance of B. M. Shaposhnikov’s work remains enormous, as before.” (Vasilevskii, *Delo vsei zhizni*, 63.)

<sup>59</sup>Christopher Donnelly, *Red Banner: The Soviet Military System in Peace and War* (Coulsdon, Surrey, England: Jane’s Information Group, 1988), 141.

<sup>60</sup>The Soviet military never became a “state within the state,” as Gordon A. Craig has characterized the Prussian army’s position in Germany after unification in 1871. (Gordon A. Craig, “The State Within the State, 1871-1914,” in *The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945* [London: Oxford University Press, 1955], 217-54.) According to Craig, “a significant part of the officer corps looked upon civilian society with a mixture of contempt and hostility and regarded themselves as forming a castle guard to watch over their master’s unruly subjects and see to it that they did their duty.” (Ibid., 252.) The absence of such attitudes on the part of the Soviet military elite is striking—evidence of the Party’s success in co-opting the military command.

The General Staff also came to have a virtual monopoly on assessments of military threats and the forces and weapons necessary to defeat them, which gave it an overriding influence on the size and nature of the command economy's military production. Yet the General Staff's influence on Stalin initially was episodic and mostly indirect: Egorov, its first chief, met with Stalin only nine times during the years 1935-37, whereas it was not unusual for Voroshilov to see Stalin nine times in a single month, especially in 1937.<sup>61</sup>

Still, the 1934 Defense Commissariat statute and the unveiling of the General Staff in 1935 spoke volumes about the distance the high command and the Party leadership had travelled in fifteen years. The very concept of a "general" staff had been anathema to many old Bolsheviks, who considered such an institution a hallmark of "bourgeois militarism" and an unsavory vestige of tsarism. A 1922 order actually had forbade use of the title "General Staff officer" and introduced the term "officer with a higher military education" as a cumbersome replacement; moreover, the uniform that graduates of the Imperial General Staff Academy (i.e., General Staff officers), of whom 475 served the Red Army loyally, were entitled to wear was abolished. These actions unequivocally conveyed the message that proletarian or peasant origin would carry more weight than an advanced military education in the Civil War's aftermath, though some ex-Imperial career officers were able to use their professional knowledge to great advantage in securing responsible positions in the peacetime Red Army. A quite different attitude informed the statute on the special General Staff service that was drafted in 1936 and sent to the Defense Commission for review in May 1937: graduates of the new General Staff

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<sup>61</sup>Gor'kov, *Kreml'. Stavka. Genshtab.*, 30, 232-37. The author suggests that although Egorov's experience and position made his voice an important one, Stalin found his presence uncomfortable:

On the one hand, from the standpoint of his operational-strategic background, Egorov obviously was indispensable to Stalin as a versatile military leader, able to serve in high-level command as well as staff positions...he should have been a most useful advisor to the top political leadership of the USSR...However, on the other hand, the possession of high professional qualifications, an intellect, tremendous authority in the army, and consequently, a certain independence in judgment and action had a negative significance for I. V. Stalin. A. I. Egorov was well aware of Stalin's role during the Civil War, and he knew that I. V. Stalin had a poor understanding of military issues.

Academy were to receive higher pay; more rapid promotion; the ability to append the words “of the General Staff” to their rank; an auto for service use; a distinctive uniform; and the right to appeal over the head of an immediate superior to a more senior General Staff officer on certain matters in which General Staff officers were supposed to be especially expert. In other words, General Staff officers represented the cream of the command staff, already a privileged group in Stalinist society.<sup>62</sup>

During the late 1920s, the specific question of whether the Red Army Staff should be given prime responsibility for planning and coordinating military and economic preparations for war had been the battleground over which the larger, ideologically-charged issue of whether a *general* staff was appropriate for a revolutionary proletarian state had been fought. Meanwhile, the central military administration had floundered: suffering initially from what Berkhin has described as “the paper method of leadership” and murky lines of authority, it continued to be hampered by an awkward and contentious division of responsibilities between the Staff and its rival, the Red Army Main Administration. Initially (in March 1924), the Frunze reforms had sought to balance the Staff (responsible for organization and operational planning) not only with the Administration (handling everyday management) but with an Inspectorate in charge of combat training. This ungainly triangular arrangement was found quickly to be unsatisfactory, and the Inspectorate was eliminated in July 1926. Its training responsibilities were transferred not to the Staff but to the Main Administration, whose chiefs, V. N. Levichev and Mikhail K. Levandovskii, stridently contested proposals by

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<sup>62</sup>Danilov, “Polozhenie o sluzhbe GSh,” 50-53. The statute, on which Chief of the General Staff Egorov apparently spent a good deal of time, was sent to Molotov, the Defense Commission’s chairman, on 5 May 1937. (Ibid., 55.) This was just days before Tukhachevsky’s arrest. The statute was never approved: in effect, it codified the creation of a separate military elite whose status stemmed from the advanced training, knowledge, and assignments of its members. It could be seen as suggesting that military affairs were a realm best left to experts rather than subject to close control by the Party. Moreover, the statute was tainted by its association with prominent “enemies of the people,” notably, Egorov and Tukhachevsky.

Tukhachevsky and Shaposhnikov to make the Staff preeminent within the central military administration.<sup>63</sup>

The status quo, however, left much to be desired: in 1929 the RVS was forced to convene a commission headed by Kamenev which found that the functions of the Staff and the Main Administration overlapped, resulting in the issue of conflicting directives.<sup>64</sup> Responsibility for combat training and troop mobilization remained especially unsettled. The training bureau was moved from the Main Administration to the Staff in 1929; in 1931 the Staff's Combat Training Directorate became a separate entity under the defense commissar, only to revert to the Staff once again in November 1934. Troop mobilization was transferred to the Main Administration in 1926, to the Staff in 1930, and back to the Main Administration in 1933, which became the Administrative-Mobilization Directorate in November 1934.<sup>65</sup> Such frequent and erratic reorganizations can hardly have aided the process of updating training and mobilization plans, their presumed aim.

Tukhachevsky, Shaposhnikov, and Egorov, of whom the latter two were Imperial General Staff Academy graduates, all saw the remedy to the NKVM's administrative ailments in a strong central staff to implement or oversee every major aspect of Soviet military and economic preparation for war: strategic and operational planning, training, military organization, arms and matériel, and national mobilization. Their opponents, who included Budenny, warned darkly of a "dictatorship of the general staff" and accused the NKVM's "young academics," (i.e., those who had received a military education only recently) of having succumbed naively to "the bacillus of the Great General Staff." Levandovskii openly raised the specter of a Soviet Bonaparte: "Under the conditions of

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<sup>63</sup>Berkin, *Voennaia reforma*, 152-57; V. Danilov, "Ot Shtaba RKKA k General'nomu Shtabu Raboche-Krest'ianskoi Krasnoi Armii (1924-1935 gg.)," *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1978, no. 8: 102-03.

<sup>64</sup>Zakharov, *General'nyi shtab*, 35.

<sup>65</sup>L. V. Dvoynikh, T. F. Kariаeva, and M. V. Stegantsev, eds., *Tsentrал'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Sovetskoi Armii. Putevoditel' v dvukh tomakh.*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: East View Publications, 1991), 24, 75.

proletarian government, the concept of a chief of the general staff as it has taken shape in bourgeois military circles and as held by Comrade Shaposhnikov is unthinkable and dangerous.”<sup>66</sup>

Confronted by such unyielding opposition and rebuffed by the RVS, Tukhachevsky disgustedly resigned as chief of the Red Army Staff in spring 1928. Shaposhnikov, Tukhachevsky’s replacement, shared his views concerning the need for the Staff to be a “genuine general staff” rather than a “simple technical *apparat*,” but his stolid personality and subdued manner were much less abrasive.<sup>67</sup> The grounds for the Staff’s emergence as the dominant body inside the Defense Commissariat in 1934 undoubtedly were prepared earlier by Shaposhnikov: his sober, methodical arguments ultimately persuaded Stalin and Voroshilov to accept the concept and methods of staff work that Stalin later would refer amiably to as the *shaposhnikovskaia shkola*.<sup>68</sup> It also is true that the intimate, high-level contacts between the Red Army and the Reichswehr during the late 1920s “added to the appreciation of the value and role of a ‘General’ Staff” among Soviet military leaders.<sup>69</sup>

During his first tenure as chief of staff, Shaposhnikov had contended that only the RVS itself, rather than the various directorates of the NKVM, should be permitted to judge Staff proposals and plans. As drafter of the Red Army’s war plans, the Staff, he believed, should be the chief planning and executive arm of the RVS, as it would be for the high command in wartime. Consequently, the Staff’s responsibilities in peacetime should correspond to its wartime ones.<sup>70</sup> That this line of argument eventually prevailed

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<sup>66</sup>Cited in Danilov, “Ot Shtaba RKKA,” 104. See also idem, “Polozhenie o sluzhbe GSh,” 53-54.

<sup>67</sup>V. M. Ivanov, *Marshal M. N. Tukhachevskii*, 235-36.

<sup>68</sup>Vasilevskii, *Delo vsei zhizni*, 94.

<sup>69</sup>Donnelly, *Red Banner*, 142.

<sup>70</sup>Zakharov, *General’nyi shtab*, 37.

probably is due to the massive scale of the planning and management tasks associated with the Red Army's modernization and growth, which hit its stride during the Second Five-Year Plan and demanded more bureaucratic order and hierarchy. The backdrop of the Second Five-Year Plan was conducive to the Staff's elevation, as the move clearly was a decisive break with the failed reorganization schemes of the mid-to-late 1920s. Those arrangements had created a bureaucratic balance of power within the central military administration, but carried a high cost in day-to-day efficiency and organizational effectiveness. By discarding, once and for all, devices to trim the General Staff's powers arising from outmoded anxieties about the loyalty of the military command, the 1934-35 reorganization put a contemporary, conventional stamp on Soviet military administration.

## V

The General Staff's emergence was a catalyst for the creation of a special military academy in April 1936 as the capstone of the expanding system of higher military education. This institution was to sustain the General Staff-centered Soviet military system for decades. Subordinated directly to the chief of the General Staff, the General Staff Academy prepared able, experienced commanders for assignment to army and military district staffs and to the General Staff itself.<sup>71</sup> To that end, the curriculum was designed to provide students, a heterogeneous mix from the ground, naval, and air forces, with a uniform "General Staff" method for planning and conducting front and army operations using the tanks, aviation, and airborne forces the Red Army now possessed in quantity. The General Staff Academy also became the Defense Commissariat's primary research center for land warfare, though it never had license to consider matters of genuine strategic import due to Chief of the General Staff Egorov's fear of impinging on Stalin's

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<sup>71</sup>The Academy's graduates also included naval officers who were assigned to responsible command and staff positions in the Navy.

prerogatives.<sup>72</sup> (Perversely, the Academy, acme of Soviet military professionalism, was named after Voroshilov in February 1941.)<sup>73</sup> The General Staff Academy's significance before and during the Second World War is twofold: it trained dozens of the marshals and generals who managed the titanic defensive and offensive operations against the Wehrmacht; it also served as a ready source of replacements for ranking commanders purged in 1937-38. Indeed, Stalin and Voroshilov may well have embarked on the military purge under the mistaken belief that any drop in the proficiency of the higher command staff would be mitigated quickly by the General Staff Academy's output of men trained specifically for responsible command and staff positions.

Although the need for a select corps of specially-trained *genshtabisty* was a corollary of the Staff's development into the nerve center of the Soviet military system, the immediate stimulus for the General Staff Academy's creation was a war-game held under the auspices of Voroshilov and Egorov in early 1936. This exercise on maps was a major production: it featured the participation of Tukhachevsky and Shaposhnikov, other leading officers from the central military administration, and the commanders and chiefs of staff of several military districts. The game's scenario was a standard one for the second half of the 1930s: three "red" (Soviet) fronts (generated from the western border military districts) sought to repel "brown" (German) and "blue" (Polish) invaders. But the game turned out badly. Tukhachevsky accused the General Staff of arbitrarily lowering the number of divisions Germany could muster from two hundred to one hundred, thereby sharply increasing the Soviet side's prospects.<sup>74</sup> In addition, as the General Staff Academy's official history notes dryly, "the exercise showed that its participants did not have a unified view on the means of solving the most important operational-strategic tasks connected with the practical preparation and conduct of

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<sup>72</sup>Isserson, "Razvitie teorii," pt. 2., *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1965, no. 3: 49-50.

<sup>73</sup>Kulikov, *Akademiia*, 73.

<sup>74</sup>L. M. Sandalov, *Na moskovskom napravlenii* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," 1970), 9-10.

large-scale contemporary operations. Such a situation aroused alarm.”<sup>75</sup> According to a player, the game “did not yield the valuable results which were expected” due to the differences in view among the high command on strategic and operational fundamentals, especially in relation to operations-in-depth, the Red Army’s new combat doctrine for armies and fronts.<sup>76</sup>

After Voroshilov convened the Military Council in February 1936 to discuss remedies to the conceptual faults exposed by the war-game and, no doubt, consultations with Stalin, the official decision to form the General Staff Academy was issued on 2 April.<sup>77</sup> Several frenetic months of work ensued so that the Academy could open on 1 November. The Academy’s first chief was Divisional Commander Dmitrii A. Kuchinskii, a well-regarded ex-Imperial officer who had been Iakir’s chief of staff in Kiev, an association which almost certainly made him a target for the NKVD after Iakir’s fall in May 1937.<sup>78</sup> Two large buildings on a quiet street in Moscow’s Frunze neighborhood were appropriated for the Academy and its students. The faculty was assembled mainly from other military academies, and included some of the country’s most knowledgeable and sophisticated military minds, for example, Aleksandr A. Svechin, a learned and original military historian, theorist, and ex-Imperial General Staff Academy graduate.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>Kulikov, *Akademiia*, 43.

<sup>76</sup>Sandalov, *Na moskovskom napravlenii*, 10.

<sup>77</sup>Because the Frunze Military Academy trained officers to command divisions and regiments, its curriculum consisted mainly of instruction in tactics, that is, in how divisions and their components fight. Consequently, it was not suited to the task at hand. (Kulikov, *Akademiia*, 43-44; Sandalov, *Na moskovskom napravlenii*, 13.) Instead, a separate, higher-level institution was needed to provide training in operations by armies and fronts. It was precisely this field—operational art—on which the 1936 war-game had shown ranking commanders, as a group, to have a poor grasp.

<sup>78</sup>Suvenirov, *Tragediia RKKA*, 388.

<sup>79</sup>Irrascible, outspoken, and not a Party member, Svechin caused at least two uproars at the Academy with provocative statements in class to which his “Party-minded” students objected. (Kazakov, *Nad kartoi*, 43; Sandalov, *Na moskovskom napravlenii*, 16-17; M. V. Tiulenev, *Cheez tri voiny* [Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva oborony Soiuza SSR, 1960], 73-74.) Sandalov, *Na moskovskom napravlenii*, 14, remarks condescendingly that although Svechin and Aleksandr I. Verkhovskii (also an ex-Imperial General Staff Academy graduate and the Provisional Government’s war minister) had sided with the Bolshevik regime, “to the end of their lives they remained...merely ‘military specialists.’”

The faculty was organized into five departments: army operations, higher formation (i.e., corps) tactics, organization and mobilization, military history, and foreign languages, of which the first two were fundamental to the Academy's purpose. The department of army operations soon was renamed the department of operational art (which encompasses operations by fronts as well as armies), and there were plans to establish a department of strategy. It is indicative of the threatening change in atmosphere in the Red Army in 1937 that a department of "socio-economic sciences" was set up at that time to instill "the fundamentals of Marxist-Leninist theory and of the Communist Party's history" to men who were Party members of long standing.<sup>80</sup> The course of study was set at eighteen months, divided into three semesters, and combined extensive self-study, supervised group exercises, and assignments in the field. Lectures by Tukhachevsky, Egorov, Alksnis, and Budenny were highlights of the first class; in addition, Iakir and Uborevich traveled from Kiev and Minsk, respectively, to lead war-games.<sup>81</sup> The students' bible was *PU-36 [Polevoi ustav-36]*, the new field regulation that set forth the principles of operations-in-depth.<sup>82</sup>

Consisting of 138 men—mostly colonels between the ages of 35 and 40—the first class literally was hand-picked.<sup>83</sup> In the Kiev Military District, interviews with

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<sup>80</sup>Kulikov, *Akademiia*, 45-46, 55, 69. According to this official history of the General Staff Academy, the course on strategy was dropped in autumn 1937 because its content was "hopelessly obsolete" and it was impossible to devise quickly a new course which would "reveal the essence, content, and tasks of the military strategy of a socialist state from principled Party positions." The original course on strategy undoubtedly was heavily influenced, if not devised, by Svechin, who had written an unorthodox textbook on the subject (now considered a classic) in the 1920s that advocated a strategically defensive posture quite different from the offensive one championed by Frunze and Tukhachevsky. (See Chap. I n. 19.) Svechin was executed in July 1938, so he probably was arrested no later than the previous autumn. According to Isserson, "Razvitie teorii," pt. 2, 51, strategic issues—especially the military situation on the USSR's western border and how a future war there might begin—were considered to be "the exclusive preserve of the highest political and military leadership." Consequently, the study of front and army operations at the Academy proceeded without being grounded in the actual strategic situation in which they would have to be undertaken at the start of a war.

<sup>81</sup>Kulikov, *Akademiia*, 52-53. Budenny described how masses of cavalry would be used in a future war, especially one conducted in the Western Theater of Military Operations, that is, in east-central Europe!

<sup>82</sup>Vasilevskii, *Delo vsei zhizni*, 78; Kazakov, *Nad kartoi*, 41; Isserson, "Razvitie teorii," pt. 1, 46.

<sup>83</sup>F. F. Gaivoronskii et al., *Akademiia General'nogo shtaba*, 2d ed. (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo, 1987), 35. The first edition gives the number of students in the first class as 137. (Kulikov, *Akademiia*, 48.)

candidates were conducted by Iakir, his chief of staff, and the head of the district's political directorate; the list of nominees then was scrutinized by Egorov. It was a seasoned group, too: the typical student was a veteran of the First World War and the Civil War, a Frunze Academy graduate, and had commanded a regiment, served as a division or corps chief of staff, or been assigned to a responsible position on a military district staff or in the central military administration.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, according to a member of the class, "a number of [students], evidently as a result of extended sedentary work in staffs, already had lost the sporty profile so characteristic of Red Army commanders of that time."<sup>85</sup>

From the time of their arrival in Moscow, the class was made to feel that it was an elect group. General Staff Academy staff and students wore a flashy new uniform highlighted by black velvet, white piping, and raspberry stripes.<sup>86</sup> Quite different from the drab Red Army garb of the past, the uniform made a definite impression on the students: one thought it "striking" and noted that it was made of "high-quality material with first-class tailoring"; to another, it was "excessively loud" and even "garish"; a third said that it immediately "distinguished Academy students from other servicemen." (Interestingly, the Academy's special uniform was abandoned in April 1940, when the post-purge high command was engaged in a severe, albeit far from completely frank, self-examination after being shamed by the Red Army's lethargic and ineffectual performance in Finland.) More important to the students, each received a generous allotment of food and consumer goods, as well as one or two well-furnished rooms for himself and his family, opulent quarters by the standards of the time.<sup>87</sup> The class was enjoined that it

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<sup>84</sup> Kulikov, *Akademiia*, 48; Sandalov, *Na moskovskom napravlenii*, 10-11; Kazakov, *Nad kartoi*, 40.

<sup>85</sup> Sandalov, *Na moskovskom napravlenii*, 10.

<sup>86</sup> Pavel Lipatov, *Uniforma Krasnoi armii i vermakhta* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii dom "Tekhnika-molodezhi," 1995), 15.

<sup>87</sup> Kazakov, *Nad kartoi*, 41; L. M. Sandalov, *Perezhitoe* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1966), 3, 6-7, 20-22; Vasilevskii, *Delo vsei zhizni*, 78; Gaivoronskii et al., *Akademiia*, 35.

was “an example and a model, always and in everything.” The administration even tried to have it lead the annual parade of the Moscow garrison, but the students did not have time to drill to the required standard. They did receive weekly instruction in dancing from “experienced masters,” though. It seems that a Soviet military delegation had paid an official visit to a neighboring country shortly before the Academy’s opening, and only Budenny, the rakish cavalry marshal, had excelled on the capitalist dance floor.<sup>88</sup>

Dance lessons for Red Army colonels may seem frivolous, but they did reflect Stalin’s and Voroshilov’s intent to use the General Staff Academy to incubate a rising new group of officers who could, in time, fill any position in the military districts, fleets, or in Moscow. The perquisites the students received were a manifestation of the regime’s general policy of using high salaries, decent housing, and privileged access to material goods to stimulate and reward achievement in the service of the state, especially by officials of the Party *apparatus* and the government bureaucracy.<sup>89</sup> As in the various branches of the national economy, the regime was cultivating “leading cadres” for the Red Army who were both Communist and technically expert in their ability to direct a large, machine-laden army.<sup>90</sup> The General Staff Academy was a fulcrum of the Party’s struggle in the military realm to acquire “personnel with sufficient experience to squeeze from technology the maximum which can be squeezed from it,” as Stalin told military academy graduates at a May 1935 Kremlin reception.<sup>91</sup> Stalin probably saw the Academy not only as the source for what, in time, would become a new core for the higher command staff but as the wellspring for a future high command’s professional element (as opposed

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<sup>88</sup>Sandalov, *Perezhitoe*, 18.

<sup>89</sup>Lewin, “Bureaucracy,” 61-62.

<sup>90</sup>In general, Stalin took a special interest in the development and promotion of managerial and technical personnel during the First and Second Five-Year Plans due to his conviction that “the old dichotomy between Red and expert must be abolished.” (Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Stalin and the Making of a New Elite, 1928-1939,” *Slavic Review* 38, no. 3 [1979]: 377-80.)

<sup>91</sup>I. V. Stalin, “Rech’ v Kremlevskom dvortse na vypuske akademikov Krasnoi Armii,” 4 May 1935, in *Sochineniia*, vol. 1 (14), 61. In this speech Stalin expounded on the slogan “Cadres decide everything.”

to its Party-political side). Given the extent to which the higher command staff was liquidated in 1937-38, the General Staff Academy would be even more instrumental in realizing these visions than Stalin or Voroshilov probably anticipated at the time of its founding in spring 1936.

The rosters of the five pre-war General Staff Academy classes are a veritable who's who of Soviet military leadership during the Second World War and the Cold War. Thanks to the Academy, "the Armed Forces received more than 430 highly-trained commanders and staff officers for the highest level of command" before the outbreak of war with Germany.<sup>92</sup> (Purge-related expulsions from the Red Army among the higher [i.e., brigade commander through marshal of the Soviet Union] command staff in 1937-38 accounted for 490 men, of whom 377 were arrested.)<sup>93</sup> The first class, in particular, contributed amply to the military campaigns against the Wehrmacht: it included two wartime chiefs of the General Staff; four commanding generals of fronts; nine chiefs of staff of fronts; eight commanding generals of armies; more than twenty chiefs of staff of armies; six chiefs of central directorates; the Navy's chief of staff; and a host of commanders of rifle, tank, and aviation formations.<sup>94</sup> Hundreds more senior- (*starshii*) and higher-level (*vyshii*) commanders attended General Staff Academy courses to improve their operational knowledge as the regime expanded the Red Army more rapidly than ever. Four hundred men were cycled through Academy courses in 1939-40 alone.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup>Kulikov, *Akademiia*, 71.

<sup>93</sup>"Spravka ob uvolennom komnachsostave," in "Statistika antiarmeiskogo terrora," 113. This document is a statistical summary, dated 2 March 1939, prepared by the Defense Commissariat's directorate for officer personnel. The great majority of the officers holding all but the lowest (brigade commander) of the five ranks comprising the higher command staff were shot. It must be borne in mind that the Red Army was growing rapidly (especially from 1938 to 1941), so its total annual requirement for higher-level commanders exceeded the number of purge victims in that category. Nevertheless, most of the General Staff Academy's first class of 138 undoubtedly filled vacancies created by the military purge.

<sup>94</sup>Sandalov, *Perezhitoe*, 24.

<sup>95</sup>Kulikov, *Akademiia*, 58-59; 71-72; Gaivoronskii et al., *Akademiia*, 58.

Hence the General Staff Academy was indeed, in the words of a student in its first class, “a splendid forge for the higher command staff.”<sup>96</sup> Its inaugural class, in particular, represented a distillation of that “untouched wealth of talent” on which Stalin enjoined the soon-to-be-decimated Military Council to draw on 2 June 1937, at the outset of mass purging among the command staff. The purge would clear the way for the type of able “men without names” chosen for the Academy.<sup>97</sup> Accordingly, midway through their course of study, dumbfounded members of the first class began to receive “high-level assignments in order to fill the opening breach,” as another student put it.<sup>98</sup> The Academy’s official history states that more than thirty were dispatched prematurely from August to October 1937, that is, during the first wave of wild purging. Many filled key vacancies on the staffs of the military districts. Others (e.g., Aleksandr M. Vasilevskii, a wartime marshal) were thrust into “quite responsible positions in the General Staff.”<sup>99</sup> According to Vasilevskii, “more than 30 students of our first Academy class were sent to various, occasionally quite senior, command and staff positions. Only half continued their training, and a fourth of the class completed it.”<sup>100</sup> Another member of the first class speaks of the premature departure, “one after another,” of students for “leading positions in the forces.”<sup>101</sup> By 1 November 1937 only 68 of the original 138 students remained. Meanwhile, a second class, consisting of 128 men, had been chosen. Hence the Academy’s formation in 1936 proved especially timely for Stalin and Voroshilov: its first class represented a source of reasonably qualified and readily

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<sup>96</sup>Sandalov, *Na moskovskom napravlenii*, 23.

<sup>97</sup>“Nevol’niki,” 83.

<sup>98</sup>Kazakov, *Nad kartoi*, 46.

<sup>99</sup>Kulikov, *Akademiia*, 54; Sandalov, *Perezhitoe*, 22. Many of the students (e.g., Zakharov, Vatutin, Antonov, Sandalov) who were pulled from the Academy in summer 1937 replaced purged chiefs of staff of military districts or chiefs of the operations department on district staffs.

<sup>100</sup>Vasilevskii, *Delo vsei zhizni*, 80. According to another member of the first class, about a third of the original class completed the full course and graduated in August 1938. However, those who were reassigned partway through the course to fill vacancies created by the purge were considered to be Academy graduates. (Zakharov, *General’nyi shtab*, 53.)

<sup>101</sup>Sandalov, *Na moskovskom napravlenii*, 24.

available replacements for dozens of ranking purge victims, particularly commanders felled in 1937. And in embarking on a mass purge of the command staff that year, Stalin and Voroshilov knew that the Academy annually would turn out 100-120 officers for senior assignments thereafter.<sup>102</sup>

In summary, the General Staff Academy was seen by the Party leadership and the high command alike as a vital endeavor requiring a major investment of resources, which were committed to the project quickly in 1936, and continuing attention and assistance.<sup>103</sup> By summer 1937, at the very latest, it must have occurred to Stalin and Voroshilov that the Academy's creation the previous year had been fortuitous, as it could satisfy an important immediate need: as the Academy was producing what, in effect, was a reserve of able men trained specifically for senior positions, its graduates could step into the places left by ranking commanders implicated in the supposed "military-fascist conspiracy."<sup>104</sup> The General Staff Academy's first class was selected in summer 1936, that is, coincident with the trial of Zinoviev and Kamenev, whose case yielded "evidence" of military complicity in Trotskyite machinations, and with the first of the series of overt NKVD incursions against the command staff that culminated in the Tukhachevsky affair of spring 1937.

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<sup>102</sup>Kulikov, *Akademiia*, 54-55.

<sup>103</sup>According to Gaivoronskii et al., *Akademiia*, 39, "the Academy was constantly under the eye of the chief of the General Staff and the leading authorities of the USSR Defense Commissariat."

<sup>104</sup>The Red Army's campaigns against Poland and Finland in 1939-40 provide additional support for the proposition that Stalin and Voroshilov saw the General Staff Academy as a reserve for the higher command staff. Students and faculty alike were assigned to the staffs of Soviet forces committed to the war with Finland as well as to the General Staff, in which most augmented the Operations Directorate. Twenty-four second-year students were sent to the General Staff alone. (Kulikov, *Akademiia*, 56-57.) According to S. M. Shtemenko, *General'nyi shtab v gody voiny* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1968), 8-9, large groups of students were sent to the Kiev and Belorussian Special Military Districts in late summer 1939 to help their staffs prepare for the Red Army's entry into Poland. Shtemenko, in the Academy's third (1938) class, was among the students sent on temporary duty first to a western border military district and then to the General Staff. From 1948 to 1952 he was Stalin's choice to be chief of the General Staff.

## VI

Apart from their dapper new uniforms, the members of the General Staff Academy's inaugural class also sported a personal emblem of merit and authority absent in the Red Army before 1935: ranks conferred on individuals rather than attached to the positions they filled. The introduction of an elaborate rank system (having a total of eighty-four ranks in nine distinct career ladders) for Red Army officers was richly symbolic of the Stalin regime's turn away from radical social policies toward traditional institutions and incentives that tended to fortify, rather than undermine, the power and purposes of the state.<sup>105</sup> In modern armies, an ordered system of military rank traditionally has been "an instrument to regulate patronage and promotion according to rank and seniority," as well as "a basis for effective command and control in both war and peace."<sup>106</sup> Although the new system of personal ranks for Red Army officers responded to both requirements, the main goal in 1935—a time when the Red Army was chronically short of officers and external threats were growing—definitely was to elevate the prestige and authority of an officer corps which by then was heavily Communist and therefore ostensibly loyal.

From the outset, the Party leadership and the high command were torn between the need for an effective, stable command corps and the Bolshevik disavowal of hierarchy and privilege. In October 1924 Frunze and the RVS tried to strike a balance by organizing the command staff into groups and categories based on length of service and responsibility of assignment, but abjuring ranks belonging to individuals, officers' traditional social status, and material privilege.<sup>107</sup> The officer corps as a whole was

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<sup>105</sup>P. P. Ganichev, *Voinskie zvaniia* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo DOSAAF SSSR, 1989), 49-50; Reese, *Stalin's Reluctant Soldiers*, 127-28.

<sup>106</sup>R. A. Wolff, "Soviet Military Doctrine and the Officer Rank of the Armed Forces—1984," *Defense Analysis* 1, no. 3 (1985): 174-75.

<sup>107</sup>*Ibid.*, 176.

divided into command, political, administrative, medical, and veterinary components. The command staff was grouped into four tiers (junior, mid-level, senior, and higher) and fourteen categories (e.g., battalion commander, the seventh category overall and the first in the senior group).<sup>108</sup> Under the 1924 measure, “duty positions had titles, which were a form of rank,” and “insignia to identify them. When an officer received a new duty position, he took the title and insignia of that position.”<sup>109</sup> Yet all members of the command staff had a single, unadorned title: “commander of the Worker-Peasant Red Army.”<sup>110</sup> Indeed, the term *ofitser* (officer) was not used officially in the Red Army until 1943 due to its pejorative association with the Imperial Army and the Whites.<sup>111</sup> The severity of the Red Army’s uniform reflected its initial renunciation of a traditional system of military rank: from 1924 to 1935 simple collar insignia (consisting of one to four red triangles, squares, rectangles, or diamonds) indicated on which rung of the command staff the wearer stood.<sup>112</sup>

The 1935 measure that instituted personal ranks represented a fundamental change: an officer kept his rank regardless of the position he held until he was promoted to the next higher rank after a fixed period of service.<sup>113</sup> The new system was inaugurated by a government resolution of 22 September 1935. This was the same date that the Red Army Staff became the General Staff, and immediately after the heralded

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<sup>108</sup>Berkhin, *Voennaia reforma*, 315-17.

<sup>109</sup>Reese, *Stalin's Reluctant Soldiers*, 128.

<sup>110</sup>Berkhin, *Voennaia reforma*, 263. Commanders were addressed in accordance with the position they held, however. (For example, the commander of a division was addressed as *tovarishch komdiv*.) The RVS order of 30 July 1924 mandated use of the term “commander of the Worker-Peasant Red Army” in place of the previous titles “Red commander” and “military specialist.” Hence the order was a symbolic move to consolidate the command staff, and was tied to the impending changeover to unified command to which the Party leadership and high command had just committed themselves, though the transition was slow and uneven. (von Hagen, *Proletarian Dictatorship*, 214-17.)

<sup>111</sup>Ganichev, *Voinskie zvaniia*, 43.

<sup>112</sup>G. Andreev and N. Bobkov, “O znakakh razlichiiia v Krasnoi Armii (1918-1943),” *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1968, no. 2: 111 n. 6.

<sup>113</sup>Reese, *Stalin's Reluctant Soldiers*, 128.

Kiev maneuvers, in which all arms of the Red Army and more than a thousand tanks participated.<sup>114</sup> The simultaneous introduction of these breaks from past Bolshevik military practice clearly was intended to signify the Red Army's professionalization. The Stalin leadership and the high command alike wanted service as a Red Army officer to be seen as a prestigious career, an aim promoted by ranks carried by worthy individuals rather than attached to duty positions held only in passing.<sup>115</sup> Under the new system, officers held their final ranks for life.<sup>116</sup>

The resolution of 22 September 1935 was forthright in stating the rationale for the installation of a traditional rank system:

Officer personnel of the Worker-Peasant Red Army are the most valuable capital cultivated and trained by the Party....The role of command cadres...has become paramount at the present state of development of the Soviet Union's armed forces....For the entire mass of commanders, political workers, military engineers, technicians, doctors, and the military economic, administrative, and judicial staffs, service in the Worker-Peasant Red Army has become a lifelong profession, and the special features of this service require an exact, legally-regulated procedure for its performance.<sup>117</sup>

The ranks for commanders were a curious mixture of traditional ones from the Imperial Army and new ones based on the position titles used in the Red Army since 1924. The former were adopted for the mid-level (lieutenant, senior lieutenant, and captain) and senior (major and colonel) tiers of the command staff, whereas the ranks for the higher

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<sup>114</sup>Gareev, *Obshchevoiskovye ucheniia*, 106.

<sup>115</sup>Reese, *Stalin's Reluctant Soldiers*, 131.

<sup>116</sup>"Polozhenie o prokhozhenii sluzhby komandnym i nachal'stvuiushchim sostavom Raboche-Krest'ianskoi Armii," *Sobranie zakonov i rasporiashenii Raboche-Krest'ianskogo Pravitel'stva Soiuzs Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik*, 1935, no. 57 (pt. 1): 830.

<sup>117</sup>"O vvedenii personal'nykh voennykh zvaniy nachal'stvuiushchego sostava Raboche-Krest'ianskoi Krasnoi Armii i ob utverzhenii Polozheniia o prokhozhenii sluzhby komandnym i nachal'stvuiushchim sostavom Raboche-Krest'ianskoi Krasnoi Armii," 22 September 1935, *Sobranie zakonov i rasporiashenii Raboche-Krest'ianskogo Pravitel'stva Soiuzs Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik*, 1935, no. 57 (pt. 1): 822.

command staff (brigade commander and above) all were derived from the old position titles.<sup>118</sup> In other words, the Party leadership and the high command refrained, for the time being, from adopting generals' and admirals' ranks for the top command positions, choosing instead to use the ones to which officers and Party members already were accustomed. It was only in 1940, that is, after the regime's elite had undergone a violent renewal, that generals' and admirals' ranks were introduced by a regime whose social face was increasingly conservative and even retrogressive. In 1935, however, the Political Administration still was sensitive to any perception that the introduction of personal ranks made the Red Army little different from other armies: the lead story in *Krasnaia zvezda* for 23 September extolled the Red Army command staff as "red lieutenants and captains, Soviet majors, proletarian colonels...revolutionary army commanders."<sup>119</sup> In contrast to the "class antagonism" between the "two camps" of officer and soldier in "capitalist armies," the Red Army commander and fighter were "men of the same class.... Today's fighter could become a commander tomorrow. Any commander—a marshal."<sup>120</sup> The latter statement referred to the extraordinary rank of marshal of the Soviet Union, which capped the command ladder and was reserved for "outstanding and especially distinguished representatives of the higher command staff."<sup>121</sup> This innovation struck an observer as a peculiar attempt to evoke the glories of the French revolutionary armies.<sup>122</sup>

The government resolution of 22 September also approved a detailed statute regulating service as an officer. Among its most important provisions were uniform rules for promotion. Promotion to the next higher rank through colonel was to occur after a

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<sup>118</sup>D. Fedotoff White, *The Growth of the Red Army* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1944), 375; Ganichev, *Voinskie zvaniia*, 48-50.

<sup>119</sup>"Komandnye kadry Krasnoi Armii," *Krasnaia zvezda*, 23 September 1935.

<sup>120</sup>"Marshaly, komandarmy, komissary," *Krasnaia zvezda*, 21 November 1935.

<sup>121</sup>"O vvedenii personal'nykh voennykh zvanii," 824.

<sup>122</sup>Fedotoff White, *Red Army*, 375.

commander had served in the preceding rank for an established period and received a favorable certification by his superior. In theory, this gave officers the ability to forecast their progression upward with a degree of certainty they previously had lacked. No fixed periods of tenure were established for officers holding the rank of brigade commander (or its equivalent for the non-command components of the officer corps), and promotion to the rank of division commander (or its equivalent) or higher was at the prerogative of the defense commissar. The ranks of army commander, fleet flag-officer, and army commissar all required a government resolution—in other words, review by the central Party organs—on the recommendation of the defense commissar.<sup>123</sup> In general, the September 1935 statute gave Voroshilov very considerable powers over the officer corps, reflecting the expansion of the defense commissar's authority realized in the Defense Commissariat statute of November 1934.

The award of personal ranks that officers held for life was indicative of the rising standing and well-being of the officer corps in the increasingly stratified Soviet society of the mid-1930s. Officers also benefited from substantial material and even legal privileges. The former included major pay increases (weighted toward the senior and higher command staff); a military trade system which provided retail shops, dining facilities, laundries, tailors, barbers, and bootmakers; apartments, blocks of which were built on a large scale; and rest and recreation facilities, among them resorts on the Black Sea. “Well-shaven, with a white collar under the collar of his tunic,” the Red Army commander “stood out in strong contrast to the drab mass of the population.”<sup>124</sup>

Legally, commanders enjoyed “a peculiar habeas corpus” which set them apart from their fellow citizens: the statute regulating the officer corps gave all but junior

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<sup>123</sup>“Polozhenie o prokhozhdanii sluzhby,” 828-29.

<sup>124</sup>Fedotoff White, *Red Army*, 379-80.

commanders immunity from arrest by civil authorities without the defense commissar's express permission.<sup>125</sup> In effect, this measure awarded the command staff a legal status separate from the rest of the population. As Erickson has observed, the military command seemed to have been "set off in a world segregated from the havoc being wreaked by the NKVD" on those with suspect social or political backgrounds in the months after Kirov's murder.<sup>126</sup> The statutory requirement for the defense commissar's consent before the state security service could arrest a commander was one factor which made Voroshilov so central and complicit a figure in the military portion of the Great Purges. This singular provision probably also made operatives of the Special Department of the NKVD's Main Directorate of State Security, responsible for monitoring the loyalty of servicemen, resentful of the protected position enjoyed by the commanders under their scrutiny.

The certification and grant of a rank to each officer proceeded through autumn 1935.<sup>127</sup> The ranks conferred on individual members of the higher command staff were announced in *Krasnaia zvezda*, a practice which presumably was intended to inflate their prestige, self-esteem, and pride in the Red Army's rejuvenation. Award of the biggest prizes was trumpeted by a government resolution of 20 November: Voroshilov, Tukhachevsky, Egorov, Budenny, and Bliukher were named marshals of the Soviet Union.<sup>128</sup> *Krasnaia zvezda's* lead story on the 21st unwittingly captured the cleavage at the Red Army's apex between the Stalinist marshals and the more professionally-minded ones. Whereas Voroshilov was "Stalin's truest comrade-in-arms" and Budenny the "legendary people's hero," Tukhachevsky was merely a "talented military leader" and the

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<sup>125</sup>Ibid., 377; "Polozhenie o prokhozhenii sluzhby," 836.

<sup>126</sup>Erickson, *High Command*, 391.

<sup>127</sup>Ganichev, *Voinskie zvaniia*, 52.

<sup>128</sup>"O prisvoenii voennogo zvaniia marshala Sovetskogo Soiuzha tovarishcham Voroshilovu K. E., Tukhachevskomu M. N., Egorovu A. I., Budennomu S. M., Bliukheru V. K.," 20 November 1935, *Pravda*, 21 November 1935.

commander of the “brilliant march of Red forces on Warsaw” (which, everyone knew, had failed).<sup>129</sup> The commanders of the Kiev (Iakir), Belorussian (Ubovich), Leningrad (Shaposhnikov), and Moscow (Ivan P. Belov) Military Districts received the rank of army commander grade 1, as did Kamenev, the head of air defense. The rank of army commander grade 2 was awarded to ten other leading commanders, among them, four military district commanders, the head of the Air Forces (Alksnis), the deputy chief of the General Staff (Aleksandr I. Sediakin), the head of the Automotive-Armored Directorate (Innokentii A. Khalepskii), and the chief of the Frunze Military Academy (Avgust I. Kork). Orlov, the head of the Navy, and the commander of the Pacific Ocean Fleet were appointed fleet flag-officers grade 1; the commanders of the Baltic and Black Sea Fleets were confirmed as fleet flag-officers grade 2. Top ranks for the Political Administration also were conferred: Gamarnik was the sole army commissar grade 1 to be named; fifteen other top commissars, the majority assigned to military districts, the Far Eastern Army, and fleets, were recognized as army commissars grade 2. Lastly, Vasilii V. Ul’rikh, the vicious chairman of the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court and soon-to-be grand inquisitor of the Red Army, was designated army military jurist, the only member of the military judicial staff to receive this lofty rank.<sup>130</sup> His appearance verging on the grotesque, Ul’rikh is said to have aroused “revulsion and fear in everyone with whom he came into contact.”<sup>131</sup> These appointments carried Stalin’s personal endorsement: “He personally knew nearly all the officers from corps commander up, most of the marshals and army commanders since the civil war, and from the middle of the 1930s all the top Red Army appointments were made by him.”<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup>“Marshaly, komandarmy, komissary.”

<sup>130</sup>“Ob utverzhdenii lits vysshego komandnogo i nachal’stvuiushchego sostava RKKA v voennykh zvaniakh,” 20 November 1935, *Pravda*, 21 November 1935.

<sup>131</sup> Arkady Vaksberg, *The Prosecutor and the Prey*, trans. Jan Butler (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1990), 336 n. 8. See also O. F. Suvenirov, “Voennaia kollegiia Verkhovnogo suda SSSR (1937-1939 gg.),” *Voprosy istorii*, 1995, no. 4: 137-38.

<sup>132</sup> Dmitri Volkogonov, *Stalin: Triumph and Tragedy*, ed. and trans. Harold Shukman (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991), 316.

This group of forty-one men, of whom all but six would die by execution or suicide from 1937 to 1939, was the backbone of a seemingly self-assured military command that, on the whole, was reasonably competent. Their recognition in November 1935, individually and collectively, seemed to show that the leaders of the Red Army and Navy had come into their own within the regime. But this group also exhibited dichotomies that would contribute to its destruction: strategic and operational aptitude, command ability, and verve mingled with ineptitude, bravado, and the ruthless calculation of personal and political allegiance. The number and positions of the five marshals and the eight men who held “grade 1” appointments echoed the composition of the RVS, a venue for regular, collective policy deliberations, during the late 1920s. However, power over the Defense Commissariat now was held tightly by Voroshilov, assisted by Tukhachevsky and Gamarnik. By 1935, moreover, Stalin’s influence over military affairs, exercised primarily through Voroshilov and the Defense Commission but on occasion directly, was greater than ever before. It is pertinent to note that in March 1935 Tukhachevsky had sent him the draft of an article on Germany’s rearmament plans for review prior to publication. Stalin changed the title and rewrote the conclusion (stressing Germany’s territorial designs on its immediate neighbors and omitting Tukhachevsky’s reference to “the great Leader Comrade Stalin”), and the text was published with Stalin’s modifications, word for word, in *Pravda* on 31 March 1935. Tukhachevsky, who almost certainly disdained Stalin for his boorishness, nevertheless had felt obliged to send him the article (which did concern a sensitive subject), praise his leadership in its conclusion, and then accept his revisions.<sup>133</sup> Tukhachevsky’s actions were a sign of the times.

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<sup>133</sup>“Rukopis’ stat’i M. N. Tukhachevskogo ‘Voennye plany Gitlera’ s pravkoi I. V. Stalina. 29 marta 1935 g.,” *Izvestiia TsK KPSS*, 1990, no. 1: 161-70.

## VII

The Red Army's robust and buoyant public image at the end of 1935 masked a complex and even precarious reality. Voroshilov recently had presided over a restructuring of the central military administration which made the position he held preeminent; much earlier, in 1930, Stalin had formed an elect cabinet to place defense policy under his and Molotov's exclusive direction. By 1935 Stalin's control of the military establishment, the basis for which originally rested upon Voroshilov's placement as military and naval commissar in 1925, was solid. In tandem with the consolidation of Stalin's hold on the military, the regime set out to make the Red Army a more professional and, in some respects, conventional institution. The years 1934-35 saw it cast off features that had been hallmarks of the army of Lenin's egalitarian and militantly revolutionary regime in favor of measures to make the command staff, now overwhelmingly Communist in its higher ranks, a technically competent, forward-looking, and stable pillar of the state. The discards included the revolutionary military council, initially the bedrock of the Party's control over ranking field commanders; a central military administration within which power was diffused to inhibit the rise of a Red Bonaparte; and a command hierarchy in which authority was vested in the position rather than in the person filling it. The period from September 1935 to April 1936 was a watershed. The establishment of the General Staff, the creation of the General Staff Academy to provide an elite command cadre, and the introduction of personal military ranks were major innovations to promote institutional professionalism and effectiveness.

These measures show that Stalin's goals in regard to the Red Army went far beyond merely holding the power to appoint and promote cohorts and supporters to key positions: in his view, a great socialist state under conditions of "capitalist encirclement" must have a strong, modern army to protect itself, to promote its revolutionary mission abroad, and to foster "Soviet patriotism" internally. Accordingly, a prime objective of the First and Second Five-Year Plans was to provide the industrial base for the

development of overwhelming military power in Europe and Asia. But the masses of weapons, highly advanced for their day, that the new factories began to disgorge in 1933-34 themselves required commanders who combined technical literacy, military proficiency, and political reliability—tens and tens of thousands of them. To secure and retain such men, the arduous and often harsh life of the military officer had to be made more attractive, especially in comparison to civilian professions. The sustained effort to make the officer corps a privileged group in Soviet society and a mainstay of the Stalinist state, which culminated in the introduction of personal ranks in 1935, was a calculated, positive response to the problem which broke decisively with the military dogma of the Bolshevik past. Consequently, the prestige, authority, and material welfare of the pre-war officer corps were at a peak in 1935-36, when, to all appearances, a stable and secure military command had come to identify wholly with the regime. In fact, the professional military officer *was* integrated into the Party at the same time that the industrial foundation of Soviet military power was laid broadly. These were signal achievements for Stalin's regime that go a long way to explain the symbiosis between the high command and the Party leadership which prevailed for decades afterward.

Not far below the surface, however, was the latent possibility of conflict stemming from the imposition of Stalin's personalized and fickle methods of control. In fact, two of the main lines of Stalin's military policy—on the one hand, maintaining close control of the military establishment through personal agents and, on the other, fostering greater professionalism and operational effectiveness—ultimately were at odds. Steps to boost the prerogatives, stature, and stability of military command, albeit within an overall milieu of Party control, nevertheless implied a greater degree of authority and autonomy for the command elite than Stalin finally was prepared to tolerate. Naturally, Voroshilov, Stalin's chief military agent, became a focal point for discontent on the part of Tukhachevsky, Iakir, and other like-minded top commanders who chafed under the leadership of a political puppet. Set largely apart from the increasingly fevered political environment of 1935-36, they failed to foresee that the frictions, rivalries, and

**disagreements within the high command, of which a good many lingered from as far back as the Civil War, were more susceptible to being cast in brutally political and ideological terms.**

## Chapter 3

### The Backdrop for 1937: State Security and the Red Army

And since there is the army, so there is intelligence, so there is counter-intelligence, so there is the strengthening of the Chekist organs within the country, because our enemies, they do not sit, time and again they send us new people in order to probe...

Stalin, addressing a conference of Party propagandists, 1 October 1938

Hands in his pockets and seemingly deep in thought, Marshal of the Soviet Union Tukhachevsky, first deputy defense commissar and one of five men holding the Red Army's highest rank, walked slowly across Red Square toward the Lenin Mausoleum. He paused for a moment to study the assembled throng and the banners shimmering in the bright morning sun, and then strode to his place on the tribune in front of the squat red granite tomb. Pale and impassive, Tukhachevsky waited for the 1937 May Day parade to begin. A few minutes later Marshal Egorov, the chief of the General Staff, took a spot to the left of Tukhachevsky. Egorov neither saluted nor even glanced at his fellow marshal. Army Commissar Grade 1 Gamarnik, the other deputy defense commissar, was the next top military officer to arrive. Gamarnik took his place without acknowledging Tukhachevsky or Egorov. Each of the three gazed stolidly ahead, as if alone. Overlooking them was Stalin and the other members of the Politburo, who stood on the roof of the tomb.

As the clock on the Kremlin's Spasskii Tower struck ten, the crisp sound of horseshoes striking cobblestones rang out. Bemedalled and resplendent atop a charger, Marshal Voroshilov rode slowly into Red Square and made his way to the crypt, where

he accepted the report of the parade commander. The men saluted, Voroshilov assumed his position, and the parade began with a march past by a ceremonial regiment of officers. Over the next two hours tanks, trucks, armored cars, artillery, and stern-faced soldiers streamed past the Mausoleum. A few minutes before noon the buzz of aircraft motors reached the throng: the military review concluded with a flyover by squadrons of bombers, fighters, and other Soviet-designed and -produced military aircraft.<sup>1</sup>

In the intermission before the start of the civilian parade, Tukhachevsky, hands still in his pockets, stepped out of line, left the reviewing area, and strode out of Red Square.<sup>2</sup> "Icy coldness surrounded him," according to a Soviet official at the time who speculated that none of Tukhachevsky's colleagues had dared to risk Stalin's disfavor by approaching the marshal.<sup>3</sup> That evening Stalin attended a dinner hosted by Voroshilov. There, in the presence of the high command, Stalin menacingly declared that the Party's enemies would be unmasked and crushed to "powder"; he then offered a toast to those who had remained loyal.<sup>4</sup>

Three weeks later, on the twenty-second, state security men ambushed and seized Tukhachevsky in Kuibyshev, where he had just arrived after his demotion to command the backwater Volga Military District.<sup>5</sup> Six weeks after the May Day parade,

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<sup>1</sup>W. G. Krivitsky, *In Stalin's Secret Service* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1939), 228-29; "'Krasnaia ploshchad,'" *Pravda*, 4 May 1937.

<sup>2</sup>Krivitsky, *In Stalin's Secret Service*, 228-29.

<sup>3</sup>Barmine, *One Who Survived*, 7.

<sup>4</sup>"Pis'mo byvshego nachal'nika Razvedyvatel'nogo upravleniia RKKA S. P. Uritskogo K. E. Voroshilovu s pros'boi razobrat'sia s ego delom i vernut' na sluzhbu v armiiu," 27 September 1937, in *Repressii v Krasnoi Armii (30-e gody)*, comp. Antonella Cristiani and Vera M. Mikhaleva (Naples: Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli and Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Voennyi Arkhiv, 1996), 254. See also "Delo o tak nazyvaemoi 'antisovetskoi trotskistskoi voennoi organizatsii' v Krasnoi Armii" (hereafter cited as "Delo"), *Izvestiia TsK KPSS*, 1989, no. 4: 46-47. This is a report by the Politburo commission established in September 1987 to evaluate Stalin's crimes. (On the commission, see "Ob obrazovanii Komissii Politbiuro TsK KPSS po dopolnitel'nomu izucheniiu materialov, svyazannykh s repressiiami, imevshimi mesto v period 30-40-x i nachala 50-x godov. Postanovlenie Politbiuro TsK KPSS 28 sentiabria 1987 g.," in *Reabilitatsiia: Politicheskie protsessy 30-50-x godov*, ed. A. N. Iakovlev [Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1991], 17.)

<sup>5</sup>A. Kotlova-Bychkova, "Riadam s marshalom," *Vechernaia Moskva*, 5 April 1989.

Tukhachevsky, Gamarnik, and seven other ranking officers were dead, Gamarnik by his own hand. The group was charged with conspiring to overthrow the Soviet government and to restore capitalism, as well as with undertaking espionage for the German General Staff. Apart from Gamarnik, Tukhachevsky and the other accused were given a cursory “trial” on 11 June and shot the next day. The corpses were dispatched to the Moscow crematorium for immediate disposal.<sup>6</sup> “For dogs—a dog’s death,” snarled *Pravda* on the twelfth, disclosing that a Special Judicial Board of the Supreme Court had sentenced the eight “Judases” to “the supreme criminal penalty—shooting.” (Unfortunately, *Pravda* continued, “the vile reptile Gamarnik” had escaped judgment by committing suicide.)<sup>7</sup> Before the judicial proceeding of 11 June, Stalin expressly had ordered that all of the accused were to be shot.<sup>8</sup>

Despite a series of increasingly plain signs over the preceding months that Tukhachevsky had fallen from grace, the initial announcement of the case on 11 June left Soviet citizens and foreign observers alike dumbfounded.<sup>9</sup> Whereas the two public trials of Zinoviev, Kamenev, Karl B. Radek, and other ex-oppositionists in August 1936 and January 1937 were preceded by an escalating drumfire of outrage and condemnation in the media, there had been no attempt to inflame public sentiment against the doomed generals. In fact, on 6 May *Krasnaia zvezda* had carried Tukhachevsky’s long commentary on the Red Army’s new field regulation.<sup>10</sup> Such uncharacteristic media restraint prior to the Tukhachevsky group’s detention probably was motivated by the

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<sup>6</sup>Aleksei Khorev, “Kak sudili Tukhachevskogo,” *Krasnaia zvezda*, 17 April 1991.

<sup>7</sup>“Za shpionazh i izmenu rodine—rasstrel!,” *Pravda*, 12 June 1937.

<sup>8</sup>“Spravka o proverke obvinenii, pred’iavlennykh v 1937 godu sudebnymi i partiinymi organami tt. Tukhachevskomu, Iakiru, Uborevichu, i drugim voennym deiateliam, v izmene rodine, terrore i voennom zagovore” (hereafter cited as “Spravka o proverke”), *Voennye arkhivy Rossii*, 1993, no. 1: 54-55. This document is the 1964 report of the commission created by Khrushchev’s Presidium in 1961 to investigate the fabrication of the charges against Tukhachevsky et al. The commission was chaired by Nikolai M. Shvernik.

<sup>9</sup>“Krizis inostrannoi burzhuaznoi razvedki,” *Pravda*, 11 June 1937.

<sup>10</sup>M. N. Tukhachevsky, “O novom Polevom ustave RKKA,” in *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 2:245-59.

inherent delicacy of an operation to seize men who commanded many thousands of troops or had substantial personal followings.

The apparent speed with which the NKVD had acted against the Tukhachevsky group did much to convince foreign diplomats and correspondents (and even such historians as Isaac Deutscher) that a genuine counter-revolutionary plot at the Red Army's apex actually had been snuffed out.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the story that "a gigantic conspiracy" had been uncovered at the last moment was promulgated actively within the Main Directorate of State Security by its leaders, and circulated widely among second-tier state security officers.<sup>12</sup> For Stalin's and Ezhov's purposes, this notion of a sudden crisis at the summit of the regime was useful, for it seemed to justify their mobilization of the Party and the NKVD for the *Ezhovshchina*—the saturnalia of expulsion, arrest, and execution in 1937-38 that Tukhachevsky's execution inaugurated.<sup>13</sup>

Tukhachevsky's demise triggered a furious attack on the officer corps as a whole. Within nine days of the tribunal, 980 officers, dozens of them quite senior, had been detained by the NKVD on spurious charges of espionage and plotting to overthrow the regime.<sup>14</sup> Over the next eighteen months the military element of the *Ezhovshchina* cut a swath through the command and political staffs of the Red Army and Navy. According to one of the military prosecutors who conducted the first post-Stalin investigation of the

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<sup>11</sup> I. Deutscher, *Stalin: A Political Biography* (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), 379-80.

<sup>12</sup> Krivitsky, *In Stalin's Secret Service*, 230; Orlov, *Secret History*, 242. Mikhail P. Frinovskii, deputy people's commissar for internal affairs, told Krivitsky, "We've just uncovered a gigantic conspiracy in the army, such a conspiracy as history has never known." Another top NKVD officer reportedly exclaimed to Orlov, "That [the Tukhachevsky affair] was a real conspiracy!" Alluding to the "panic" the matter caused in the Kremlin, the officer said that Frinovskii had declared, "The whole Soviet Government hung by a thread." According to Orlov, *Secret History*, 244, Voroshilov told a ranking officer serving in Spain that "in this case not a single hour could be lost!" Orlov's reliability on certain points is questionable (O. Khlevniuk, "Istoriia 'Tainoi istorii,'" *Svobodnaia mysl'*, 1996, no. 3: 114-19), but there is no reason to doubt these statements of his.

<sup>13</sup> Conquest, *Great Terror*, 188. *Ezhovshchina* might be translated as "the terrible deeds of Ezhov," the people's commissar for internal affairs from September 1936 until November 1938. As Conquest observes, it is a measure of Stalin's guile that many Soviet citizens believed that he, the true architect of the Great Purges, remained unaware of the crimes perpetrated by his minion. (*Ibid.*, 63.)

<sup>14</sup> "Delo," 57.

Tukhachevsky case, the campaign to unmask members of the “counter-revolutionary military-fascist organization” ultimately “reached the point where there was not a single military unit that did not have at least one conspirator.”<sup>15</sup> By the end of 1938 several thousand officers had been arrested and dismissed from the Red Army for treason or other “counter-revolutionary crimes.” The majority of these men must have perished in NKVD jails or been dispatched to forced labor camps to fell trees or toil in mines. There many certainly died from exhaustion or illness brought on by malnutrition and overwork. Perhaps twenty thousand others were discharged from the Red Army on political grounds, of whom an unknown number were arrested subsequently.<sup>16</sup>

The paroxysm of violence and lawlessness in the Red Army that began in earnest with Tukhachevsky’s liquidation did not slacken until the last months of 1938, as did the larger campaign of which the NKVD’s military onslaught was a main part. The last top military man to fall was Marshal Bliukher, victor in the battles against the Japanese in summer 1938. Bliukher was not toppled until October, though for months he had watched helplessly as his underlings were picked off before his own, final summons to Moscow. Arbitrary arrests and killings of high-ranking commanders continued after 1938—in fact, they were sustained through and after the war—but at a diminished rate.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Boris A. Viktorov, “‘Zagovor’ v Krasnoi Armii,” *Pravda*, 29 April 1988.

<sup>16</sup>“O rabote za 1939 god. Iz otcheta nachal’nika Upravleniia po nachal’stvuiushchemu sostavu RKKA Narkomata Oborony SSSR E. A. Shchadenko, 5 maia 1940 g.,” *Izvestiia TsK KPSS*, 1990, no. 1: 188. This authoritative report contains essential, albeit incomplete, data for quantitative assessment of the military purge’s effect. It indicates that 9,506 officers were arrested in 1937-38 (although as many as 3,441 arrests were for non-political offenses or, at least, for offenses other than “counter-revolutionary crimes” or participation in the supposed military conspiracy or Trotskyite underground; see A. T. Ukolov and V. I. Ivkin, “O masshtabakh repressii v Krasnoi Armii v predvoennye gody,” *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1993, no. 1: 57-58); 14,684 more were expelled from the Red Army as associates of “the conspirators,” some of whom assuredly were arrested after their separation from military service. These figures do not cover the Air Forces (considered part of the Red Army), the Navy, the border troops, or the internal troops, all of which were parts of the armed forces. In addition, 4,138 officers were discharged from the Red Army in 1938 on the basis of a directive of 24 June 1938, which evidently proscribed military service for those of Polish, German, Latvian, Lithuanian, Estonian, Finnish, and Korean extraction. Shchadenko’s report also shows that about one-third of those arrested or discharged had been reinstated by May 1940. As Shchadenko was not an NKVD official, his report does not indicate how many of those who had not been reinstated as of that date had been executed or had died in captivity.

<sup>17</sup>Nikolai Smirnov, *Vplot’ do vyssei mery* (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1997), describes numerous wartime and postwar cases of generals and admirals who were imprisoned or executed.

Egorov, the last capable marshal of the original five, was arrested in April 1938 but not shot until February 1939.<sup>18</sup> In June 1941 the NKVD simultaneously held three former chiefs of the Air Forces, all of whom were shot summarily on 18 and 28 October 1941, when Moscow was threatened with occupation.<sup>19</sup>

Unlike previous centrally-directed purges (*chistki*) of the Party's membership, the military purge of 1937-38 combined three punitive processes: expulsion from the Party, discharge from the Red Army, and arrest, the latter the prelude to execution for most high-ranking officers. Whereas expulsion proceedings were handled by the Red Army's political organs (and usually initiated by primary Party organizations which turned inward upon themselves), arrests were the responsibility of the state security service inside the NKVD.<sup>20</sup> State security's military arm, operating a network of cells throughout the Red Army that worked hand-in-hand with its political organs, was instrumental in planning and implementing the military aspect of the *Ezhovshchina*. This is especially true for the Tukhachevsky group's meticulously-plotted ruin.

The first half of this chapter delineates the unhappy relationship between the Red Army and the state security service, each of which dates its existence to the beginning of the regime. This discussion serves to introduce my analysis of the Tukhachevsky affair and the ensuing military purge (presented in this chapter and the next one), which focuses on their rationale and radical effect on the composition of the high command. Tukhachevsky's liquidation and the systematic destruction of all but one figure in the remainder of the high command's professional nucleus spawned the Stalinist high command of 1938-40. The second half of this chapter explores the murky, tangled

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<sup>18</sup>Suvenirov, *Tragediia RKKA*, 373; Volkogonov, *Triumfi i tragediia*, vol. 1, pt. 2, 294-95, contains the text of a 16 March 1939 report for Stalin by Ul'rikh, chairman of the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court, concerning the sentencing of 436 people (among them Egorov) from 21 February to 14 March, of whom 413 were shot.

<sup>19</sup>P. P. Bochkarev and N. I. Parygin, *Gody v ognennom nebe* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo, 1991), 16-17; Suvenirov, *Tragediia RKKA*, 376, 381; Smirnov, *Vplot' do vysshei mery*, 14-18.

<sup>20</sup>Reese, *Stalin's Reluctant Soldiers*, 132-37.

background to the downfall of Tukhachevsky and his associates, a dangerous and unprecedented operation whose catalyst and purposes continue to be debated. The next chapter begins by placing the Tukhachevsky affair and the military purge in the broader perspective of the Great Purges, of which the crusade against “enemies of the people” in uniform was an integral part.

## I

Institutionally, the Defense Commissariat and the NKVD, revived in July 1934 on the base of the OGPU, stood in uneasy counterpoise within Stalin’s regime. The NKVD maintained its own substantial armed forces, albeit with fundamentally different missions than those managed by the Defense Commissariat: one force, the heavily-armed internal troops, existed solely to maintain internal order and control, whereas the Red Army’s purpose was “to defend the achievements of socialism against attack from without.”<sup>21</sup> Yet the two commissariats did not operate in completely separate spheres: the Red Army was honeycombed with a lurking state security contingent that a well-informed Soviet observer likened to a “foreign body” inside the “army organism.”<sup>22</sup> Operating independently of the military command to which they were assigned, the “Chekists in military uniform” were charged not only with counter-espionage but with exposing and suppressing “anti-Soviet manifestations” among all military personnel.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, state security’s long-standing and thorough penetration of the Red Army makes the destruction of the high command and the bulk of the higher command staff in 1937-38 all the more remarkable and mysterious, while it facilitated greatly the process by which Stalin’s top military prey was incriminated and isolated.

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<sup>21</sup>I. V. Stalin, “Otchetnyi doklad na XVIII s’ezde partii o rabote TsK VKP(b),” 10 March 1939, in *Sochineniia*, vol. 1 (14), 390, 394-95.

<sup>22</sup>Soloviev, *Nine Lives*, 134.

<sup>23</sup>David Ortenberg, *Stalin, Shcherbakov, Mekhlis i drugie* (Moscow: MP “Kodeks”; Ob’edinnennaia redaktsiia MVD Rossii, 1995), 119. This is a brief but valuable memoir of the war years by a chief editor of *Krasnaia zvezda*.

Due to the centrality of conspiracy, surveillance, and the aspiration to transform human nature itself to the ethos of the Soviet regime, the latter has been called a “counterintelligence state”—an exceptional, “millenarian, security-focused system” of power.<sup>24</sup> Another view holds that the Bolshevik regime’s rapid institutionalization of surveillance merely extended practices common to the First World War belligerents that are a hallmark of the emerging “national security state.” This view attributes the massive scope of Bolshevik surveillance to the Party’s all-embracing conception of the political sphere.<sup>25</sup> What cannot be disputed is that the loyalty of the military command worried the Party’s leaders from the time of the Red Army’s founding, and not only because it contained tens of thousands of suspect ex-Imperial officers who possessed skills and knowledge essential to the infant regime’s survival. More important in the long run, “as a cross-section of the population bearing arms, the army has always been considered dangerous by the regime.”<sup>26</sup> The continued existence of state security’s military surveillance organs in virtually the same form they assumed during the Civil War until the USSR’s collapse shows that vestiges of this attitude persisted even after the success of the Party’s assiduous efforts to make the command staff identify with the regime. For all but a few months in 1941 and the years 1943-46, surveillance of military personnel remained a prerogative of the state security service, that is, of an agency outside the direct control of the military establishment.<sup>27</sup> Foreign intelligence, in contrast, was a function traditionally shared by the military and state security.

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<sup>24</sup> John J. Dziak, *Chekisty: A History of the KGB* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1988), 2-3.

<sup>25</sup> Peter Holquist, “‘Information is the Alpha and Omega of Our Work’: Bolshevik Surveillance in Its Pan-European Context,” *Journal of Modern History* 69, no. 3 (1997): 415-50.

<sup>26</sup> E. A. Andreevich, “Structure and Functions of the Soviet Secret Police,” in *The Soviet Secret Police*, ed. Simon Wolin and Robert M. Slusser (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1957), 127.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Stephan, “Smersh: Soviet Military Counter-intelligence during the Second World War,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 22, no. 4 (1987): 585; Dziak, *Chekisty*, 106. Interestingly, a presidential decree of 7 February 2000 approved a statute governing the counter-intelligence activities of directorates and departments of the Federal Security Service (a KGB successor) within the Russian Federation Armed Forces. These latter-day state security organs report to the Military Counter-intelligence Directorate (or 3d Directorate) of the Federal Security Service. Among other responsibilities, they are to prevent unauthorized actions involving weapons of mass destruction. (“Ob utverzhdenii Polozheniia ob upravleniakh [otdelakh] Federal’noi sluzhby bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii v Vooruzhenykh Silakh Rossiiskoi Federatsii, drugikh voiskakh, voinskikh (continued next page)”)

From 1925, the year the Red Army's Political Administration was placed under the direct supervision of the Central Committee *apparatus*, the Soviet military machine was exceptional in possessing three distinct, primary axes of command and control. There existed the operational chain of command embodied by the command staff; the separate channel of Party control represented by the grid of army political organs, all ultimately subordinate to the Political Administration; and the intermingled hierarchy of state security special departments (singular form *osobyi otdel*, abbreviated *OO*, whose operatives often were called *osobisty*), which operated outside direct military control. The latter was a pyramid of surveillance organs capped by the central Special Department in state security headquarters. The distinct military, Party-political, and state security hierarchies converged to some extent in the military councils of military districts, armies, and fleets, to which the corresponding special departments could report the discovery of deficiencies in military readiness or incriminating material on servicemen.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, by the 1930s most officers had joined or were entering the Party or the Komsomol and therefore were subject to Party discipline, and the vast majority of the Red Army's ranking commanders were Party members of long standing.

Yet the very success of the Political Administration's efforts to induce the officer corps to identify with the regime—in effect, to turn the former into a disciplined arm of the Party—had made state security's role as an external instrument for the surveillance and control of the military relatively greater. During the Civil War, when the weight of effective Bolshevik military command had rested on ex-Imperial officers almost wholly outside the Party, the situation had been quite different: Communist commissars could watch their charges from positions that were clearly and substantially distant. By the

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formirovaniakh i organakh [organakh bezopasnosti v voiskakh],” *Sobranie zakonodatel'stva Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, 2000, no. 7: 1671-79.)

<sup>28</sup>Special departments were obligated to convey such information to corresponding military councils by point 9 of “Prikaz NKO SSSR i NKVD SSSR o rabote osobykh otdelov NKVD SSSR,” 13 January 1939, in *Nakanune*, comp. V. P. Iampol'skii et al., (*noiabr' 1938 g.-dekabr' 1940 g.*), vol. 1, bk. 1 of *Organy gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti SSSR v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine. Sbornik dokumentov*, ed. S. V. Stepashin et al. (Moscow: A/O “Kniga i biznes,” 1995), 29-31.

mid-1930s, the mid-level commander and the commissar both were Party members, full *edinonachalie* was the order of the day, and the alignment between the regime and its army supposedly was complete, as evidenced by the substantial military representation on the Central Committee. Consequently, the question of control had become much more ambiguous and difficult, especially at the higher levels of command, where the incumbents often had joined the Party during the Civil War.<sup>29</sup> The polemics between Gamarnik and Tukhachevsky in 1933-34 over the impending abolition of military councils show that the role of ranking commissars relative to that of ranking commanders was more prickly than ever.<sup>30</sup> Erickson has observed perceptively that “the problem of physical control over the armed forces had begun to change fundamentally” as a result of the Party’s steady inroads into the command staff. As the military council had been a centerpiece of the military command and control system from the start, Stalin’s endorsement of the council’s elimination substantiates Erickson’s point; moreover, it suggests that Stalin recognized the change. Given the deterioration of the Political Administration’s ability to act as an effective, outside instrument of negative or punitive control, that role fell increasingly to the special departments of state security, which themselves were manned by Party members.<sup>31</sup>

Stalin’s acquiescence to the military council’s demise might be explained by the relative confidence he and Voroshilov seem to have had in the fidelity of the Red Army’s leading commanders by about 1933-34, despite occasional and sometimes serious disputes over military policy. But Stalin, one of Lenin’s roving troubleshooters during the Civil War, also was fully aware of the special departments’ surveillance and punitive functions, and he must have known of their more recent operations to drive supporters of Trotsky and Zinoviev as well as ex-Imperial officers (especially once-senior ones who

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<sup>29</sup>Erickson, *High Command*, 375-76.

<sup>30</sup>See Chap. 2 n. 38.

<sup>31</sup>Erickson, *High Command*, 314, 377.

stood outside the Party) from the Red Army. He also would have realized that the NKVD's impending formation, a few weeks after military councils were abolished, would in no way diminish state security's constant scrutiny of officers and soldiers. Indeed, the enhancements to the state security service and to the personal status and authority of its operatives in 1934-35 is indicative of a careful effort to match the strides being made by the military command.<sup>32</sup>

Prior to July 1934, the special departments assigned to major military headquarters and formations were overseen by the Special Department in the OGPU's central administration; after the NKVD's creation, the pyramid of special departments remained in place, responding to the central Special Department in the powerful Main Directorate of State Security (*Gosudarstvennoe upravlenie gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti* or *GUGB*) that was formed from the OGPU and constituted the core of the new commissariat.<sup>33</sup> The essential continuity in state security operations in the transition from OGPU to NKVD and, in particular, in the military surveillance role of the special departments is underscored by the stability of the state security leadership. The OGPU's chairman, Genrikh G. Iagoda (said to have been "unbelievably arrogant and vain" but an able administrator) was appointed people's commissar for internal affairs;<sup>34</sup> Iakov S. Agranov, first deputy OGPU chairman and a Iagoda cohort, was named first

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<sup>32</sup>An October 1935 government resolution introduced a distinctive system of personal ranks for state security officers and promulgated a detailed regulation on their conditions of service. ("Prikaz narodnogo komissara vnutrennikh del Soiuzs SSR N° 226 ot 21 iunia 1936 g. s ob'javleniem postanovleniia TsIK i SNK SSSR ot 16 oktiabria 1935 g. 'Ob utverzhdenii Polozheniia o prokhozhdanii sluzhby nachal'stviushchim sostavom Glavnogo upravleniia gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti NKVD Soiuzs SSR,'" in A. I. Kokurin and N. V. Petrov, comps., *Lubianka. Spravochnik*. [Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratiia," 1997], 187-96.) These paralleled the measures implemented in the military on 22 September 1935 that are discussed in Chapter 2. Similarly, the position of the Main Directorate of State Security inside the NKVD is roughly analogous to that of the General Staff within the Defense Commissariat.

<sup>33</sup>S. Ostriakov, *Voennye chekisty* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1979), 130; Conquest, *Secret Police*, 14. The NKVD combined in one body "the political police, regular police, criminal investigation, border troops, internal troops, and, from October 1934, the entire penal system...." (Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story* [New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1990], 131.) For details on the organizational development of the special department hierarchy, see N. V. Petrov and K. V. Skorkin, *Kto rukovodil NKVD, 1934-1941: Spravochnik* (Moscow: Zven'ia, 1999), 42-44.

<sup>34</sup>Mikhail Shreider, *NKVD iznutri. Zapiski chekista*. (Moscow: Vozvrashchenie, 1995), 7.

deputy commissar for internal affairs and de facto chief of the GUGB; and Mark I. Gai, the head of the OGPU's Special Department, assumed the same position in the GUGB.<sup>35</sup> All were awarded top ranks after personal ranks for state security officers were introduced, Iagoda being graced with the singular title of "commissar general of state security" in November 1935.

Ever since a state security presence was made integral to the Red Army in 1919, when a network of special departments under the Cheka was organized, its military operatives repeatedly had been mobilized for repressive political tasks. Such operations fell under the elastic "counter-intelligence" mission attributed to the special departments in official Soviet sources.<sup>36</sup> The January 1939 statute governing the special departments gave them "special tasks in combating counter-revolution, espionage, sabotage, wrecking, and *any kind of anti-Soviet manifestations* in the Worker-Peasant Red Army, the Navy, and the border and internal troops of the NKVD."<sup>37</sup> The special departments' basic approach to surveillance of military personnel is conveyed by an official history of Soviet state security:

The experience of combat with class enemies who had penetrated the Red Army demonstrated that espionage was interwoven tightly with other forms of counter-revolutionary activity. Consequently, F. E. Dzerzhinskii [the Cheka's first chairman] drew Chekists' attention to the fact that the battle with espionage and counter-revolution was a single task.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Kokurin and Petrov, 12-13. Iagoda had headed the Special Department from 1922 to 1929. (Ibid., 158.) He then was promoted to lead the Secret-Operational Directorate, which contained the departments constituting the OGPU's operational heart.

<sup>36</sup>According to *Sovetskaia Voennaia Entsiklopediia*, s.v. "kontrrazvedka," the counter-intelligence programs of socialist governments battled "ideological sabotage" (*ideologicheskaiia diversiiia*), among other targets.

<sup>37</sup>Point 1 of "Prikaz NKO SSSR i NKVD SSSR," *Nakanune*, 1:29. My emphasis.

<sup>38</sup>V. M. Chebrikov et al., eds., *Istoriia Sovetskikh organov gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti* (Moscow: Vysshaia Krasnoznamennaia shkola Komiteta gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti pri Sovete ministrov SSSR imeni F. E. Dzerzhinskogo, 1977), 53.

In other words, political unorthodoxy or outright hostility to the Soviet order were considered fertile grounds for recruitment by a foreign intelligence service, and therefore were to be exposed and extinguished relentlessly.<sup>39</sup>

After the Cheka's "heroic" maiden period ended with the Civil War, the special departments (under the OGPU from 1922) had to reorient themselves to grapple with diffuse and even immaterial threats, namely, "the pernicious ideological influence of kulaks and the bourgeoisie...class enemies who have penetrated the ranks of the troops...the smallest sign of demoralization in individual military units." Their warrant, according to the 1922 special department statute, specifically encompassed the suppression of "open counter-revolutionary speech." The central Special Department, then directed by Iagoda, orchestrated campaigns to intimidate or dislodge supporters of Trotsky and Zinoviev from the Red Army in 1926-27. (At the same time, "Chekist organs themselves were purged of Trotskyites.") A few years later the special departments were mustered to monitor and quell the anti-collectivization sentiment widespread among servicemen, especially among conscripts in the territorial forces.<sup>40</sup> This campaign sought to identify the "socially alien element" among military personnel, and resulted in the discharge of 22,308 servicemen (11,103 of them "kulaks") in 1933, a huge increase over the 3,889 removed in 1932. The special departments also organized ad hoc teams (*brigady*) of soldiers to "dekulakize" villages and force them to collectivize. Surprisingly, the marshalling of the special departments for collectivization did not bring an increase in the number of servicemen arrested for "counter-revolutionary crimes" (which actually dropped from 2,811 in 1932 to 2,390 in 1933), and shooting continued to be reserved for exceptional cases.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, the wave of punitive discharges did represent repression on a mass scale, albeit in a much milder form and at a lower level

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<sup>39</sup> Amy W. Knight, "The KGB's Special Departments in the Soviet Armed Forces," *Orbis* 28, no. 2 (Summer 1984): 274.

<sup>40</sup> Ostriakov, *Voennye chekisty*, 104-06, 121-23, 128-29.

<sup>41</sup> Suvenirov, *Tragediia RKKA*, 50-51; Reese, *Stalin's Reluctant Soldiers*, 90.

than would be the case in 1937-38. The periodic mobilization and retargeting of the special departments during the 1920s and early 1930s shows that they were used, as a matter of course, not only as an instrument of Party control over officer and soldier alike, but as a weapon against perceived opponents of the Stalinist faction of the Party leadership during the 1920s and its General Line of socio-economic policy afterward.

Official sources and defector accounts show that the bulk of special department operations in peacetime involved close, comprehensive surveillance. At a time when surveillance technologies were rudimentary, this work entailed, first and foremost, the “organization of an agent-informant *apparatus*” within each military unit, school, or facility, as well as among civilians with military contacts. Basic to Soviet surveillance practice, recruitment of informants was carried out without prior authorization by the commanders of the affected military units, in fact, without any specific knowledge on their part about the identity, number, or targets of the recruits, whose cooperation often was coerced.<sup>42</sup> Thus, the very nature of special department operations made the state security service a pervasive but only partly visible threat, braided insidiously into the hierarchy of military command at every level.

As noted above, the organizational basis for state security’s penetration of the military establishment was the pyramid of special departments assigned to major military headquarters and formations. A special department was attached to the headquarters of every military district, fleet, army, corps, flotilla, division, and brigade in the Red Army and Navy. “Special department representatives” (*upolnomochennye osobykh otdelov*) were sent to regiments; individual schools and depots too had their own assigned monitors. Hence the Red Army and Navy literally were saturated with state security

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<sup>42</sup> Aleksei Myagkov, *Inside the KGB: An exposé by an officer of the Third Directorate* (Richmond, Surrey, England: Foreign Affairs Publishing Co., 1976), 57-58, 63-72. The author, an ex-KGB officer, was assigned to the special department of a division stationed in East Germany in 1969. “You need agents,” his new superior counseled him, “more agents and yet more agents.” A. I. Romanov, *Nights Are Longest There: A Memoir of the* (continued next page)

operatives, who had the power to investigate counter-revolutionary crimes, carry out searches, arrest suspects, and incarcerate them pending trial by military tribunal. Those operating, say, within a particular military district were linked by their own chain of command separate from the military one: according to the basic scheme (there were local variations in organization), a regimental representative was accountable to a division's special department; the latter was under a corps department which, in turn, was subordinate to the district's department. From June 1938 military district special departments reported directly (rather than through provincial or union-republic state security directorates) to the Special Department in the GUGB of the central NKVD.<sup>43</sup> This self-contained, conspiratorial corps, with operatives dispersed throughout the military establishment and its own system of secret communications, gave the state security leadership in Moscow the ability to target particular groups or individuals, to amass incriminating material using secret informants, and then to move swiftly and effectively against its quarry. By the mid-1930s, all but the final step (arrest), which required the defense commissar's authorization and obviously was impossible to conceal, could be carried out surreptitiously, unchecked by any outside control at any level but for that provided from the Kremlin. Important to the full flowering of these prodigious and arbitrary powers of repression was the abolition in August-September 1931 of the RVS's right to task the central Special Department and review its activities, which the high command formally had possessed since 1919.<sup>44</sup> These features of "military Chekist" organization and operations greatly facilitated the preparation and execution of the special departments' offensive against the military command in 1937.

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*Soviet Security Services*, trans. Gerald Brooke (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1972) is another useful defector account.

<sup>43</sup>Ostriakov, *Voennye chekisty*, 37-38; points 5 and 6 of "Prikaz NKO SSSR i NKVD SSSR," *Nakanune*, 1:29-30; Chebrikov et al., *Istoriia*, 273-74; Petrov and Skorkin, *Kto rukovodil NKVD*, 44.

<sup>44</sup>Chebrikov et al., *Istoriia*, 232; Ostriakov, *Voennye chekisty*, 104; "Spravka o proverke," 107. Soviet sources do not discuss the reason for this significant change, but it is another sign of the RVS's decline. The Defense Commission, Stalin's defense cabinet, was created in December 1930; as discussed in Chapter 2, it garnered powers previously exercised by the RVS. At the same time, the OGPU's powers were waxing: in 1930-31 it gained control of the corrective-labor camp system and began to provide central direction to police and criminal investigative organs throughout the USSR. (V. F. Nekrasov et al., *Organy i voiska MVD Rossii* [Moscow: Ob'edinennaia redaktsiia MVD Rossii, 1996], 196-202.)

The lifeblood of the state security machine was a massive, constant two-way flow of reports and orders. The special departments regularly compiled summaries and masses of statistics about “anti-Soviet” and other pernicious phenomena for the leaders of the NKVD and the Defense Commissariat, especially during periods of social or political strife. This aspect of special department activities paralleled work by the Political Administration, which assembled and forwarded its own reports on the political moods of servicemen to Voroshilov and (until 1934) the RVS.<sup>45</sup> The extent to which the Red Army was spied upon from within—at all levels and by two separate systems of monitors—is remarkable. The central Special Department’s activities went well beyond simple factual reporting. In June 1929 Iagoda sent Voroshilov and the RVS an analytic report on the “weak points” of the Red Army’s territorial system of manning, which were attributed to the “peasant attitudes” brought by the conscripts on brief call-ups who were cycling continually through the territorial units.<sup>46</sup> Comparative monthly statistics on “instances of the expression of dissatisfaction with the peasant question” were being collated for each military district by the central Special Department in 1929. A summary report used noteworthy or representative quotations concerning collectivization and conditions in the countryside that were gleaned from the mass opening and screening of letters to servicemen.<sup>47</sup> Another diagrammed the types of “negative” pronouncements noted by the special departments in 1933 and how they had evolved.<sup>48</sup> Special departments also were authorized to report failings in the combat readiness of the military units whose personnel they monitored; reports on military deficiencies were sent upward through state security channels, bypassing the military

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<sup>45</sup>V. S. Izmozik, “Politicheskii kontrol’ v Sovetskoi Rossii. 1918-1928 gody,” *Voprosy istorii*, 1997, no. 7: 41-42. *Krasnaia Armia i kollektivizatsiia* contains many examples of such reports for the period 1928-33.

<sup>46</sup>“Iz pis'ma zamestitelia predsedatelia OGPU G.G. Iagody Predsedateliu RVS SSSR K.E. Voroshilovu o terchastiakh,” 1 June 1929, in *Krasnaia Armia i kollektivizatsiia*, 154-56.

<sup>47</sup>“Iz svodok Osobogo otdela OGPU ‘Osnovnye momety [sic] otritsatel'nykh nastroenii RKKA’ o krest'ianskikh nastroeniiakh v armii,” May-August 1929, in *Krasnaia Armia i kollektivizatsiia*, 158-66.

<sup>48</sup>Suvenirov, *Tragediia RKKA*, 49.

chain of command, from which they would be passed to top Party authorities.<sup>49</sup> The positive, long-term aim of such blanket surveillance may have been to aid the transformation of uneducated, apolitical peasants into politically enlightened, patriotic Soviet citizens by gathering information on their political attitudes,<sup>50</sup> but the repressive and punitive nature of special department operations—entailing the unmasking and suppression of “anti-Soviet” and “counter-revolutionary” elements—was overwhelming in its immediacy and urgency.

## II

The world of the dedicated *osobist* was closed, conspiratorial, and threatening: everywhere, crafty, hidden enemies awaited discovery. A special department man’s chilling declaration encapsulates the outlook of the “military Chekist” during the *Ezhovshchina*: “In every person I see an enemy of the people. And not a single one will escape, slip by, or dupe me.”<sup>51</sup> As state security’s distrust of the military command was institutionalized and therefore undisguised, the behavior of *osobisty* toward military officers often was disrespectful: “...it’s a well-known fact,” according to a military counter-intelligence officer during the war with Germany, “that Chekists greet army men who are their senior in rank very carelessly and unwillingly. This goes even for army generals.”<sup>52</sup> Although *osobisty* wore the uniform of the Red Army’s political staff from May 1936, a military unit’s officers invariably were able to recognize them, and reacted

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<sup>49</sup>For instance, a January 1939 Ukrainian NKVD report on the poor state of readiness in a fortified area of the Kiev Special Military District concluded: “The Special Department of the KOVO [Kiev Special Military District] has informed Army Commander Grade 2 Comrade Timoshenko [the district commander] repeatedly of the enumerated defects in the Mogilev-Iampol’skii UR [fortified area], but no measures of any sort have been taken.” (“Iz dokladnoi zapiski NKVD USSR v TsK KP[b] Ukrainy o sostoianii Mogilev-Iampol’skogo ukreplennogo raiona,” 16 January 1939, in *Nakanune*, 1:31-35.)

<sup>50</sup>Holquist, “Bolshevik Surveillance,” 448-49.

<sup>51</sup>A. Ia. Vedenin, *Gody i liudi* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1964), 56.

<sup>52</sup>Romanov, *Nights Are Longest*, 110.

to their presence with distaste and fear.<sup>53</sup> A Soviet military correspondent during the 1930s wrote of the state security men in military garb:

No ordinary military man will have any acquaintance with them or meet them in personal or private circumstances....It was quite impossible to feel at ease among the specialists [i.e., *osobisty*]. They inhabited another world, and it was just as well to keep as far from that world as possible. The army Cheka men emitted a kind of inner tension, and it made any enforced intercourse with them a strain.<sup>54</sup>

When approached by an *osobist*, a military man tended to respond deferentially, even obsequiously.<sup>55</sup> Officers knew that special department operatives could ascribe a political basis to almost any objectionable non-political act. As for conduct that was genuinely unacceptable from a political standpoint, the special department, according to a former Red Army commander, "immediately took over and subjected the individual involved to the heaviest punishment conceivable."<sup>56</sup> Given the largely arbitrary power and touchy vigilance of the *osobisty*, "the traditional hatred of the secret police by the army" is readily comprehensible.<sup>57</sup>

A revealing June 1934 report by Alksnis, the chief of the Air Forces, and his political assistant conveys the mood of anxiety and resentment created by the Party membership purge of 1933-34, during which the special departments assisted the verification commissions purging individual units. Alksnis was irked by the heavy-handedness with which the purge was being conducted in the Air Forces. He complained

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<sup>53</sup>O. F. Suvenirov, "Narkomat oborony i NKVD v predvoennye gody," *Voprosy istorii*, 1991, no. 6: 28. The purpose of providing special department operatives with military uniforms must have been to provide them with a modicum of cover or to reduce the sense of intrusiveness their presence projected. Tellingly, an individual *osobist* was authorized to wear rank insignia two levels higher than the rank of his political staff equivalent.

<sup>54</sup>Soloviev, *Nine Lives*, 134.

<sup>55</sup>See, for example, Myagkov, *Inside the KGB*, 64.

<sup>56</sup>Peter Gornev, "The Life of a Soviet Soldier," in *Thirteen Who Fled*, ed. Louis Fischer, trans. Gloria and Victor Fischer (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1949), 33.

<sup>57</sup>Simon Wolin and Robert M. Slusser, "The Evolution of the Soviet Secret Police," in *The Soviet Secret Police*, 8.

to Voroshilov that hundreds of pilots and technical personnel (the majority probably junior and mid-level officers) who had been serving honorably were under “constant suspicion” due to their “petty-bourgeois, social-alien origins,” relatives living abroad, connections with “social-alien elements,” or “moral defects” (e.g., occasional drunkenness). According to Alksnis, “harassment and distrust has reduced many of these commanders to such a state of enervation that they cannot speak without tears in their eyes, and cannot carry out normal service, especially flight duty.” He noted that more than two thousand pilots and technicians had been expelled from the Air Forces from 1931 to 1934 on the basis of “social origin and politico-moral unsuitability,” yet a good number had carried out their military duties well and subsequently had found work in civil aviation. In fact, five of the seven fliers who had been decorated for heroism in rescuing the crew of the icebreaker *Cheliuskin* had been discharged from the Air Forces “at the insistence of the special departments, the political organs, and commanders” due to their supposed “political and moral instability” and unsuitability for military service! Moreover, Alksnis suggested, the treachery of a pilot who had defected with his aircraft in March 1934 had been provoked by persecution and the unwarranted threat of dismissal.<sup>58</sup> This actually was the case: in December 1933 the pilot had been summoned by his brigade’s special department and presented with information showing that he had hidden the fact that his father was a police official who was executed during the Civil War. This damaging information was brought to light by the special department during the Party purge, prompting the pilot to flee across the border while on a training flight.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>“Doklad nachal’nika Voenno-vozdushnykh sil RKKA Ia. I. Alksnisa, i ego pomoshchnika po politicheskoi chasti B. U. Troiankera K. E. Voroshilovu ob otritsatel’nykh posledstviakh chistki dlia VVS RKKA,” 25 June 1934, in *Repressii v Krasnoi Armii*, 122-24.

<sup>59</sup>Suvenirov, “Narkomat oborony i NKVD,” 26-27. This incident caused an uproar among military, state security, and Party leaders. It evidently was the catalyst for a *Iagoda* order of 3 June 1934 to special department chiefs and representatives. Asserting that military personnel must be absolutely certain that the special departments “strike overt and incorrigible enemies of the Soviet Government,” the order decried the “use of Chekist means and methods in combating all manifestations of counter-revolution in the ranks of army personnel.” It called for “an especially cautious approach” with regard to actions involving the officer corps and technically-trained personnel, and it “categorically” forbade special departments from interrogating servicemen without the consent of unit commissars. *Iagoda*’s warning must have resulted from complaints by the high command that military morale was suffering from the strong-arm tactics of the special departments, especially with (continued next page)

Alksnis concluded by calling for an overhaul of personnel verification procedures and a prohibition on the ability of the special departments, political organs, and commanders to question pilots and technical personnel about their social origins and related matters, accompanied, however, by an “*absolute, simultaneous further increase in class vigilance.*” He proposed that a special order be issued to reassure fliers and other aviation personnel, including those who remained outside the Party, that they were trusted. But those shown to be truly “politically unreliable” by the “most thorough factual verification of their autobiographical information” would be expelled from the Red Army.<sup>60</sup> The careful balance Alksnis sought to strike between fairness and vigilance was inherently tenuous. He inadvertently had highlighted a central dilemma of the Soviet military system: how could the “fact” of political unreliability, itself a malleable concept, be established without resort to the intrusive and repressive methods that inhibited enterprising leadership, sapped morale, and ultimately eroded combat capability?

In a sense, this predicament burdened leading officers relatively more heavily than their juniors. The degree to which a commander was watched by state security was proportional to his rank and apparent power: “there was not a single unit or corps commander who had not one or more Cheka agents at his elbow.”<sup>61</sup> Tukhachevsky, for one, was long a prime target for secret surveillance, especially as veteran Chekists considered pre-Revolutionary service as a career officer in the Imperial Army as *prima facie* evidence of anti-Soviet views. The OGPU was in receipt of agent reporting concerning Tukhachevsky’s supposed “Bonapartist moods” as early as December 1925.<sup>62</sup> He narrowly escaped arrest in 1930, when OGPU interrogators extracted

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regard to persons with “class-alien” backgrounds who had not actually committed any hostile act. (“Doklad nachal’nika Voennovo-zhdushnykh sil RKKA Ia. I. Alksnisa,” 130 n. 3.)

<sup>60</sup>“Doklad nachal’nika Voennovo-zhdushnykh sil RKKA Ia. I. Alksnisa,” 124-26. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>61</sup>Romanov, *Nights Are Longest*, 132; Abdurakhman Avtorkhanov [Alexander Uralov, pseud.], *The Reign of Stalin*, trans. L. J. Smith (London: Bodley Head, 1953), 63. The latter work is quoted.

<sup>62</sup>“Spravka o proverke,” 100. An OGPU report (apparently written about 1930) asserted that all ex-Imperial career officers serving in the Red Army were “awaiting the fall of Soviet power.” (Ibid., 102.)

statements alleging that Tukhachevsky was conspiring to overthrow the regime from two officers teaching at the Military Academy who had met him there. The OGPU's chairman, Viacheslav R. Menzhinskii, forwarded the interrogation records of the two men to Stalin, who took the possibility of perfidy by Tukhachevsky seriously and related it to the readiness of the Party's defeated right wing to countenance a military dictatorship if this would free the country "from the [Central Committee], from kholkozes and sovkhoses, from Bolshevik tempos of industrial development." The matter progressed to such an extent that Gamarnik, Iakir, and Dubovoi were questioned about Tukhachevsky, who also faced his accusers before the Politburo. There it died.<sup>63</sup>

This episode seems to have been the most harrowing incident involving state security that Tukhachevsky confronted before 1937, but for more than a decade he and other top officers were slandered by one particularly malicious and persistent secret informant. Even though the head of the central Special Department characterized a report from this agent about a military plot to shoot Stalin as the "ravings of a stupid old woman who has lost her mind," state security nevertheless retained her as an informant uninterruptedly from 1922 to 1937. Indeed, it appears that *every* high-ranking Soviet officer—even such old Stalin cronies as Budenny and Voroshilov—was spied on by agents who reported rumors, gossip, and compromising information of every sort to the Special Department.<sup>64</sup> Voroshilov is said to have been watched for a time by an agent placed in his office; the operative handled Voroshilov's daily correspondence and "had a selection of it photostated for Stalin's private files."<sup>65</sup> The scurrilous information on military leaders amassed by the Special Department doubtlessly was catalogued and preserved for later use as necessary, such as during the months of preparation preceding

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 103-05. The cited note by Stalin is dated 24 September 1930.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 100-02, 107-110.

<sup>65</sup>Krivitsky, *In Stalin's Secret Service*, 193.

Tukhachevsky's arrest.<sup>66</sup> The accumulation of a great mass of sundry personal dirt in Special Department files was foreordained, as operatives surely felt pressure to find evidence of wrongdoing so that they could appear effective and themselves avoid the damning charge of political laxness or even treachery.

State security's web of surveillance around Tukhachevsky and other members of the high command was central to its military activities, as top commanders potentially had the ability to mount an insurrection against a regime whose policies were embraced by only a minority of the population. However, despite the Special Department's possession of files bulging with years of reporting on the supposed disloyalty of leading commanders, only one was arrested before 1937—persuasive evidence that any high-level military opposition to Stalin's policies earlier in the decade remained inchoate if it existed at all.<sup>67</sup> Yet even as the standing and authority of the high command and the higher command staff grew, subordinate commanders (together with ordinary soldiers) suffered routinely from the combination of close Party oversight and security service surveillance which permeated the Red Army. In March 1935, for example, the assistant to the commander of a cavalry regiment in the Ukrainian Military District complained in a letter to Voroshilov that the unit's NKVD representative was trying to drum up evidence to support his accusation that the letter-writer, an ethnic German, was a spy. The outraged author declared that the state security man's trouble-making had "undermined the

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<sup>66</sup> See, for example, Orlov, *Secret History*, 257-58, on Iagoda's supervision of the collection of compromising personal information on Soviet leaders.

<sup>67</sup> Gaia D. Gai (Gaik Bzhishkian), an Old Bolshevik from the Caucasus who was commanding a Red Army division already in 1918, was arrested in July 1935 and shot in December 1937. Had Gai not been arrested, he probably would have received the senior rank of corps commander in autumn 1935, but he cannot be considered a leading commander. He was occupied mainly with military-historical work after the Civil War, and was serving as chief of the military history department at a military academy when he was seized. (Suvénirov, *Tragediia RKKK*, 377; N. N. Azovtsev, "Komkor G. D. Gai," *Voenna-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1987, no. 2: 85-87.) It seems that Gai was victimized due to his close association with the Society of Old Bolsheviks, which Stalin abolished in May 1935, and with Avel' S. Enukidze, a Georgian revolutionary and high-ranking regime official who had fallen rapidly into disgrace in 1935. (Boris Orlov, "Nakanune bol'shogo terrora: Armiia i oppozitsiia," *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique* 32, no. 3 [July-September 1991]: 418; Conquest, *Great Terror*, 71, 76-77.)

authority of the commander-Party member"; he requested that, once exonerated, he be sent to a military district in which he was not known or be discharged from the army.<sup>68</sup>

In another case that followed Kirov's murder and almost certainly reflected a new drive by the *osobisty* to uproot "enemies" inside the Red Army, on 12 December 1934 the chief of the Special Department, Mark I. Gai, reported to Voroshilov that a "counter-revolutionary group" that had been "sharply criticizing" the Party and government had been exposed in Moscow. According to Gai, the investigation had revealed the involvement of an officer assigned to the Military Medical Academy, who had taken "anti-Party positions" in discussing agricultural productivity and worker living conditions. Gai asked Voroshilov to agree to the officer's dismissal from the Red Army and his arrest. By 1938, this procedure had become a mere formality, Voroshilov readily providing his assent. In this instance, though, he asked Gamarnik for his opinion before agreeing to Gai's request on 26 December.<sup>69</sup> In a February 1935 note, Gai asked Voroshilov for permission to arrest a mid-level commander, expelled from the Party for "right opportunism" in 1932, who recently had expressed sympathy for the Zinovievite opposition. "It is not obligatory to arrest every fool, you know," Voroshilov answered, "one simply can expel [him] from the RKKA [Red Army]."<sup>70</sup> In May 1936 Voroshilov advised Gai that surveillance rather than arrest was the proper response in the case of a senior lieutenant who had praised Hitler's political acumen.<sup>71</sup> The latter two responses suggest that in 1935-36 the defense commissar was not yet willing (as he certainly was

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<sup>68</sup>L. I. Fikh, assistant to the commander of the 26th Cavalry Regiment, to Voroshilov, 16 March 1935, Volkogonov Papers, reel 14, frames 164-65.

<sup>69</sup>"Donesenie nachal'nika Osobogo otdela Glavnogo upravleniia gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti NKVD SSSR M. I. Gaia K. E. Voroshilovu o raskrytii kontrrevoliutsionnoi gruppy v Moskve i sanktsii na arest uchastnika etoi gruppy ad'iunkta Voennno-meditsinskoii akademii A. I. Sanaeva," 12 December 1934, in *Repressii v Krasnoi Armii*, 132-34.

<sup>70</sup>"Zapros M. I. Gaia K. E. Voroshilovu o sanktsii na arest komandira bateriei 71 artilleriiskogo polka K. I. Fomina," 17 February 1935, in *Repressii v Krasnoi Armii*, 144. Orlov, *Secret History*, 259, maintains that Voroshilov "waged a tireless struggle against the Special Departments of the NKVD, ... which conducted constant inquiries in the army and navy." Orlov must have based this statement on hearsay he picked up as a high-ranking NKVD officer, but his sketch of an indomitable, unyielding Voroshilov seems overdrawn.

<sup>71</sup> Suvenirov, *Tragediia RKKK*, 53.

by June 1937) to accede to a state security rampage through the officer corps. But special department persecution of soldiers and officers who lacked the measure of protection still afforded by rank and position clearly was a routine occurrence in the Red Army under Voroshilov, Tukhachevsky, and Gamarnik.

In considering the repressive role of the special departments (as well as that of the army political organs), one must distinguish between three types of punitive action which commonly were taken against officers and soldiers: expulsion from the Party, dismissal from military service, and arrest. Prior to 1937, expulsion from the Party due, for example, to violations of Party or military discipline (a theme of the military portion of the Party membership purge of 1933-34) or apathy usually did not result in dismissal from the Red Army, much less arrest. For an officer, of course, expulsion from the Party was a serious blow, as promotion was tied to Party membership. But it was not necessarily the end of a military career.<sup>72</sup> The purge of 1929-30 was conducted so as to minimize the loss of specially trained and qualified military personnel to the Party.<sup>73</sup> The 1933-34 purge resulted in the ejection of 3,328 members from military Party organizations, of whom 555 were removed for "Trotskyism and counter-revolutionary agitation." Some 400 of the 555 were discharged immediately from the Red Army.<sup>74</sup> Hence deprivation of Party membership entailed quick dismissal from military service for only twelve percent of those purged in 1933-34. In a 1935 case, the Soviet naval attaché in Sweden, who had served in the Red Army and Navy since 1917 and been a Party member since 1919, was reprimanded (rather than expelled from the Party) by the Party Control Commission for having concealed the fact that his father had been a landowner.

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<sup>72</sup> Reese, *Stalin's Reluctant Soldiers*, 79, 137.

<sup>73</sup> Merle Fainsod, *Smolensk Under Soviet Rule* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), 219.

<sup>74</sup> "Plenum: Stenograficheskii otchet," 22. One of the standard reasons for expulsion from military Party organizations in 1933-34 was "double-dealing" (*dvurushnichestvo*), a term connoting Trotskyism or other oppositionist activity. See, for example, "Otchetnye materialy Politicheskogo upravleniia RKKA o khode chistki v partiinykh organizatsiakh RKKA na 1 noiabria 1933 g.," 14 November 1933, in *Repressii v Krasnoi Armii*, 82-84.

The reasons cited for this relatively lenient treatment were his “unblemished” military service and his participation in the Civil War.<sup>75</sup>

In contrast, severe sanctions were the rule in 1937-38: exclusion from the Party during the *Ezhovshchina* almost always triggered discharge from the Red Army, which, in turn, made a man especially vulnerable to arrest. Conversely, any officer or soldier arrested by state security was expelled from the Party and the Red Army immediately. In other words, whereas exclusion from the Party, discharge from the military, and arrest were separate punitive actions which generally were not linked serially before June 1937, they became “intertwined” after Stalin, Voroshilov, and Ezhov exhorted primary Party organizations and state security to find the “enemies of the people” in their midst.<sup>76</sup> Expulsion, discharge, and arrest were linked to effect the “cleaning out of the army” (*ochistka armii*), the label an enthusiastic top purger applied to the military part of the *Ezhovshchina*.<sup>77</sup> This characterization shows that the process that began in earnest within the Red Army in June 1937 was conceived as a far more extensive operation than previous formal purges of the Party’s military members. The latter were limited to

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<sup>75</sup>Excerpt from Protocol of the Party Collegium of the Party Control Commission, 26 July 1935, Volkogonov Papers, reel 14, frame 175.

<sup>76</sup>Reese, *Stalin's Reluctant Soldiers*, 132-35. Reese’s discussion of the *Ezhovshchina* as “a deadly *chistka*” is insightful, but he fails to consider the implications of the fact that men discharged from the Red Army sometimes were arrested subsequently. For example, G. G. Klein, *Put' boevogo ofitsera* (Tel Aviv: “Iakov-press,” 1986), 71, states: “Many were discharged (demobilized) from the army, expelled from the Party, and then arrested, others were seized immediately.” Brigade Commander Aleksandr V. Gorbato, for one, was arrested in October 1938, a few weeks after his involuntary discharge from military service. (Gorbato, *Gody i voiny*, 120.) Hence the arrest figures cited in military documentation from the period almost certainly are understated. As Klein’s autobiographical account demonstrates, an unknown number of officers were arrested *after* discharge from the military, and therefore would not have shown up as “arrested” in the Red Army’s accounting of discharges. Consequently, Reese’s assertion that “thousands of officers thought to have been lost in the purge due to arrest turned out not to have been arrested but discharged from the army for having been expelled from the Communist party” is somewhat misleading. (Reese, *Stalin's Reluctant Soldiers*, 132.) Finally, it should be noted that, as the Red Army did not possess its own military police force, the special departments routinely arrested officers and soldiers for non-political crimes such as murder and rape. Consequently, the thousands of officer arrests tallied for the years 1937-38 included many hundreds for a variety of non-political offenses. (Ibid., 133; Ukolov and Ivkin, “O masshtabakh repressii,” 57-58.)

<sup>77</sup>“O rabote za 1939 god,” 188; Reese, *Stalin's Reluctant Soldiers*, 140.

military Party organizations, whereas the hunt for “enemies of the people” in 1937-38 was, as Voroshilov put it, “radical and comprehensive.”<sup>78</sup>

Even before the *Ezhovshchina*, thousands of officers were discharged from the Red Army every year, many on the sort of political grounds which carried great risk of arrest in 1937-38. Naturally, the special departments were instrumental in ferreting out information concerning officers’ social or political backgrounds or the circumstances of crimes or other unacceptable activities on which punitive actions such as discharge were based.<sup>79</sup> Forty-seven thousand officers were separated from military service for all reasons (e.g., ill health, death, unfitness for military service, arrest, political unreliability) from the Red Army from 1925 to 1936.<sup>80</sup> Annual discharge figures for the mid-1930s suggest that, as a matter of course, hundreds of officers were dismissed from the Red Army for political reasons or were arrested on political charges yearly before 1937.<sup>81</sup> Despite a perennial shortage of officers due to the army’s steady expansion, 9,642 (not including the political staff) were discharged in 1933; 7,110 in 1934; and 8,560 in 1935, that is, a total of 25,312 officers were lost in only three years. However, the number discharged declined (by one official accounting) to 4,918 in 1936, before shooting up to 18,658 in 1937 and 19,694 in 1938. (The latter two figures apparently include political officers.)<sup>82</sup> About two-thirds to three-quarters of the dismissals from military service in

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<sup>78</sup>“Pobezhdat’ vraga maloi krov’iu,” 67.

<sup>79</sup>Reporting on the Red Army’s Political Directorate in May 1940, Mekhlis blamed the legions of mistaken expulsions from the Party and discharges from the army that had been and were being reversed mainly on the “uncritical attitude of military councils and the Red Army Political Directorate toward the material of the special departments, in which enemies of the people were present at that time.” This shows that the special departments routinely fed compromising information to the political organs and military councils. (“O rabote Politicheskogo Upravleniia Krasnoi Armii. Iz doklada Politicheskogo Upravleniia Krasnoi Armii Tsentral’nomu Komitetu VKP[b] o rabote Politicheskogo Upravleniia Krasnoi Armii. 23 maia 1940 g.,” *Izvestiia TsK KPSS*, 1990, no. 3: 193.)

<sup>80</sup>“Plenum: Stenograficheskii otchet,” 20.

<sup>81</sup>Suvenirov, *Tragediia RKKA*, 51, states that 2,811 and 2,390 servicemen were arrested for “counter-revolutionary crimes” in 1932 and 1933, respectively. At least a few hundred must have been officers.

<sup>82</sup>“Spravka o chisle uvolnennogo komnachsostava RKKA v 1934, 1935 i 1936 gg. (bez politsoštava),” [no date] June 1939, and “Spravka o chisle uvolnennogo komnachsostava RKKA v 1937, 1938 i 1939 gg. po I iuniu,” 5 June 1939, in “Statistika antiarmeiskogo terrora,” 114. The statistics contained in both of these documents differ somewhat from those in Shehadenko’s May 1940 report (“O rabote za 1939 god,” 188). The latter, for example, (continued next page)

1937-38 probably can be considered political in origin: that is, as a result of arrest for offenses other than violent or other overtly non-political crimes (e.g., embezzlement), expulsion from the Party, association with “the conspirators,” or (in 1938) ethnic minority origin.<sup>83</sup>

In general, surges in dismissals and arrests were responses to broader ideological and political currents in society. The 1928 Shakhty show trial and its follow-ons, for example, “conveyed the overt message that, despite its claims of loyalty to Soviet power, the bourgeois intelligentsia remained a class enemy, untrustworthy by definition.”<sup>84</sup> Afterwards, the OGPU persecuted many of the thousands of ex-Imperial officers who had climbed from the secondary status of military specialist to that of Red Army commander or one of the other officer classifications: more than three thousand are reported to have been seized in an operation code-named *Vesna* (Spring), among them

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provides a total of 16,362 (rather than 19,694) discharges in 1938, which includes 3,282 political officers. However, the data for discharges in 1937 in the 5 June 1939 report and in Shchadenko’s 1940 report are identical. This suggests that the 1939 report’s figures include political officers, as they clearly are accounted for in Shchadenko’s 1940 report.

<sup>83</sup> According to the summary of 5 June 1939 (“Spravka o chisle uvolennogo komnachsostava RKKA v 1937, 1938 i 1939 gg. po 1 iunija”), 4,474 and 5,426 officers were discharged due to arrest in 1937 and 1938, respectively; 11,104 and 8,341 for “political reasons” (such as expulsion from the Party or association with “the conspirators”) in 1937 and 1938, respectively; 1,139 and 2,671 for drunkenness, misappropriation of state property and other moral failings in 1937 and 1938, respectively; 2,315 due to their German, Polish, Baltic, Korean, or other ethnic minority origin in 1938 (discharges for this reason were not made before June 1938); and 1,941 and 941 due to death, disability, and age in 1937 and 1938, respectively. These figures are not definitive, as they differ from the May 1940 report by Shchadenko cited previously. However, they do provide a more solid sense of scale than previous scholarly assessments of the purge, which necessarily were highly speculative. Even so, quantitative assessment of the military purge’s effect is not, by any means, a straightforward exercise: there are inconsistencies among contemporary documents; arrest figures include officers who were detained for crimes such as murder, rape, and embezzlement; officers who were discharged on political grounds sometimes (often?) were arrested later; the number of rank-and-file soldiers who were arrested or discharged remains unknown; and thousands of officers who were discharged later were reinstated in the Red Army. For example, the June 1939 summary stated that 5,570 officers had been reinstated as of 1 June; it explained: “Reinstatement in the RKKA of those discharged is carried out primarily on the basis of those discharged for political reasons and as a result of arrest, in connection with their reinstatement in the Party, release from arrest, and full rehabilitation.” Hence, as stated by Reese, *Stalin’s Reluctant Soldiers*, 133-34, such figures as the ones cited above “are not a basis for determining how many men the NKVD arrested in the *Ezhovshchina*.” Still, they represent a rough yardstick for the tsunami of repression that swept the Red Army in 1937 and ebbed at the end of 1938, especially as comparative (and much lower) figures for 1939 are available.

<sup>84</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 122.

Svechin, the strategist whose views were attacked savagely by Tukhachevsky.<sup>85</sup> Measured in terms of simple economic and administrative rationality, this campaign cost the Red Army dearly at a time when its need for “experts” was rising (paralleling the national economy’s need for engineers), but Stalin’s regime now demanded that Soviet managers and officials adopt a fundamentally new approach to their work: they were to become “heroes with a revolutionary orientation” toward the mundane constraints of time on ordinary productive activity.<sup>86</sup> Like their “bourgeois” civilian counterparts who had reacted skeptically to the drive to fulfill the First Five-Year Plan in four years, ex-Imperial officers (exemplified by ex-generals who remained aloof from the Party) apparently were considered an impediment to pell-mell modernization and the elaboration of combat principles suited for a revolutionary army of workers, peasants, and machines.

A 1931 case involving a victim of the *Vesna* operation provides an early illustration of the capriciousness, cruelty, and cynicism of both the *osobisty* and Voroshilov, who apparently cooperated amicably in this instance. Aleksandr I. Verkhovskii was an ex-Imperial major-general, former war minister of the Provisional Government, and military historian who was appointed chief of staff of the North Caucasus Military District in 1929. Upon Verkhovskii’s arrest in February 1931, the Special Department accused him of being an enemy of Soviet power from the time of his entry into the Red Army in 1919 and of plotting insurrections in Moscow and in southern Russia during assignments there. His death sentence, however, was commuted to ten years’ imprisonment. Despite otherwise harsh conditions of confinement, Verkhovskii was allowed to work on a book and a few articles that were forwarded through the Special Department to Voroshilov. In May 1934 Voroshilov wrote Stalin that he believed Verkhovskii could be freed to carry on his research without undue risk, as he had not been an “active counter-revolutionary” though neither had he been “our

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<sup>85</sup>“Spravka o proverke,” 102; Aleksei Khorev, “Vozvrashchenie Svechina,” *Krasnaia zvezda*, 5 December 1992.

<sup>86</sup>Hanson, *Time and Revolution*, 154, 161-62.

friend.” Released in November 1934, Verkhovskii sought Voroshilov’s protection and support for a work in which he critically evaluated the “heritage of bourgeois military science” in light of the “creation of the new operations and tactics of the army of the proletarian revolution.” Verkhovskii emphasized that the book reflected four years of study of the “classics of Marxism-Leninism” and would follow the course blazed by Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin in assisting comrades who had not had as much “free time” as he in “overcoming the ‘bourgeois worldview’ (military).” Voroshilov responded positively to this affirmation of his readiness to promote a Marxist-Leninist military science (despite his non-Party status), and Verkhovskii was given a teaching position. He then was awarded the rank of brigade commander and posted to the General Staff Academy in Moscow. In March 1938, however, Verkhovskii was arrested and accused of planning acts of terror; he was shot in August. One of the pieces of evidence adduced in support of the charge was a pistol found among Verkhovskii’s possessions: he had received it in 1916 from Nicholas II for bravery in battle. Verkhovskii’s 1938 arrest actually was his third by Soviet state security. His first had occurred in 1919 as a result of his Socialist Revolutionary sympathies.<sup>87</sup> As a high-ranking ex-Imperial career officer and an adherent, if only briefly, of a socialist rival to the Bolsheviks, Verkhovskii clearly had been under especially close scrutiny by the *osobisty* throughout his two-decade Red Army career.

Despite the corrosive effects such cases must have had on the self-confidence and authority of the command staff, which the regime was striving to cultivate, one would be mistaken to view the *osobisty* solely as predators stalking a defenseless, protesting soldiery. Long before the Great Purges, the high command had accepted the principle that “class-alien” origin and political deviance (however currently defined) in the ranks

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<sup>87</sup>M. M. Bondar’, “Golgofa generala Verkhovskogo,” *Voenna-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1993, no. 10: 68-73; Suvenirov, *Tragediia RKKK*, 159-60. The Bondar’ article includes letters from which the quotations are drawn. For the similar case of Andrei E. Snesarev, an ex-Imperial lieutenant-general, see Gennadii Zhavoronkov and Vladimir Pariiskii, “V nemilost’ vpavshii,” in *Fakel. 1990: Istoriko-revoliutsionnyi al'manakh*, ed. Iu. V. Davydov et al. (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1990), 154-62.

warranted repression.<sup>88</sup> Having recognized state security's role within the Red Army as necessary and appropriate, even if the behavior and tactics of the *osobisty* in particular circumstances might be questionable, the marshals and army commanders who succumbed in 1937-38 could only protest individually that their own cases were ones of mistaken identity. Assent to innumerable acts of special department-instigated repression that antedated the Great Purges left the command elite's leaders disarmed morally when the *osobisty* spearheaded Stalin's deadly attack on them in 1937.

In the remainder of this chapter, I consider Stalin's purposes in undertaking such a risky operation—a matter of enduring interest and boundless speculation—and review the early stages of the NKVD's elaboration of the Tukhachevsky-led "military conspiracy" in 1936. I examine questions of timing in detail, as they bear directly on Stalin's calculus and on the controversial issue of the role, if any, in Tukhachevsky's demise played by documents allegedly forged by the Nazi Party security service to implicate the marshal in treasonous trafficking with his German counterparts.

### III

Khrushchev likened Tukhachevsky's arrest to "a thunderbolt out of a clear blue sky."<sup>89</sup> In reality, the atmosphere in the capital had darkened steadily in the months preceding the official announcements of 11-12 June 1937 that heralded Tukhachevsky's destruction, a change of which Khrushchev, then head of the Moscow Party organization, could hardly have been unaware. There were ample indications during the late winter and spring of 1937 that some sort of high-level intrigue against the professional nucleus of the high command had been set in motion. Whereas thousands of officers were victimized by the special departments and Party organizations of their own formations and units during

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<sup>88</sup> Reese, *Stalin's Reluctant Soldiers*, 142.

<sup>89</sup> Nikita S. Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, trans. and ed. Strobe Talbott (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1970), 85.

the second half of 1937, the arrests of the top commanders who fell in the months leading up to Tukhachevsky's arrest show every sign of having been deliberately and carefully plotted in the Kremlin and the NKVD's Lubyanka headquarters. The *Pravda* communiqués of 11-12 June merely marked the denouement of a scheme contrived many months earlier.

The Tukhachevsky case was a spectacular milestone in the uncoiling of the Great Purges, but interpretations of its catalyst and aims continue to vary widely. Analysis of (and musing about) Stalin's purposes in decimating the Red Army's command elite traditionally has followed several themes: the potential threat the leading generals posed to the consolidation of Stalin's personal dictatorship; high-level military opposition to collectivization; the Trotskyite sympathies of some senior officers; policy disputes over military doctrine and development; ranking commanders' dismay over the fanciful chronicles of Stalin's role in winning the Civil War; Stalin's acceptance of falsified evidence from Germany of a Tukhachevsky-led military conspiracy; his envy of his top generals' popularity; disgruntlement on the part of Tukhachevsky and his associates with Voroshilov's incompetence and pretensions; and, finally, the existence of a genuine military conspiracy to overthrow Stalin.<sup>90</sup> The relative paucity of direct evidence on Stalin's thinking in relation to the military command in 1936 and early 1937 has contributed to such variability in interpretation and unalloyed speculation.

In seeking the impetus for the Tukhachevsky case and Stalin's motives in authorizing the NKVD to develop it, one must consider the history of the NKVD's behind-the-scenes scripting of the vast Red Army conspiracy allegedly headed by Tukhachevsky, an effort that began in 1936. The NKVD's machinations during this early phase are crucially important to the examination of Stalin's intentions toward the high

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<sup>90</sup>Mel'tiukhov, "Repressii v Krasnoi Armii," 110. The author observes that Vadim Rogovin, *1937* (Moscow: Novosti, 1996), 363-75, cites no less than seven "reasons for the execution of the generals."

command's professional core: absent Stalin's approval, it is inconceivable that Ezhov and Iagoda would have pursued an investigation of high-level military sedition, an extremely sensitive prospect that was surfaced deliberately at the August 1936 trial of Zinoviev and Kamenev. The NKVD's activities during this preparatory stage therefore are a vital gauge of Stalin's intentions, but little authoritative information about them in relation to the military was available until recently. Our main sources prior to the late 1980s had been official announcements, the scripted testimony presented at the Moscow public trials, and the accounts of two NKVD defectors (Krivitsky and Orlov). Thanks to the release of the findings of the Khrushchev- and Gorbachev-era commissions that investigated the affair, key aspects of the Tukhachevsky case's development are clearer now. The reports of the Shvernik and Iakovlev commissions document crucial events in the largely clandestine evolution of the Tukhachevsky affair.<sup>91</sup>

This somber and treachery-clouded ground is surveyed in the rest of this chapter. The final sections detail the timing of the NKVD's initial blows to the Red Army's higher command staff, as these also concern the relevance of the documents supposedly falsified by the Nazi Party security service to incriminate Tukhachevsky<sup>92</sup> and on the recently-revived notion that a military conspiracy to overthrow Stalin actually existed.<sup>93</sup> Equally

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<sup>91</sup> See "Spravka o proverke" and "Delo." The report of the Shvernik commission was completed in 1964 and published in its entirety only in the late 1990s (excerpts were published in 1993); the Iakovlev commission's report was published in 1989.

<sup>92</sup> Krivitsky, *In Stalin's Secret Service*, 212-13, 236-40, makes the original claim concerning Stalin's use of forged documents in the affair and of the secret role of an NKVD agent (Nikolai Skoblin) in their origination. Recent statements of the conventional wisdom that President Benes of Czechoslovakia served as an unwitting middleman between the Nazi Party security service (the Sicherheitsdienst or SD) and Stalin include Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB*, 139 ("...the Gestapo had tried to exploit Stalin's paranoia by planting forged documents in Czechoslovakia that appeared to show a plot by Tukhachevsky to carry out a coup d'état with German support...the imaginary military plot...was brought to [Stalin's] attention by President Benes of Czechoslovakia."); Rogovin, *1937*, 382; John Costello and Oleg Tsarev, *Deadly Illusions* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1993), 369-70; and Evgenii Plimak and Vadim Antonov, "Nakanune strashnoi daty," *Oktiabr'*, 1997, no. 2: 154-55. Walter Laqueur, *Stalin: The Glasnost Revelations* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1990), 85-90, provides a judicious overview of the issue.

<sup>93</sup> A handful of historians are inclined to believe that Tukhachevsky *did* head a military conspiracy involving Iakir, among other top officers. (Rogovin, *1937*, 413-34; E. G. Plimak and V. S. Antonov, "Taina 'zagovora Tukhachevskogo,'" *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, 1998, no. 4: 123-38; Abraham Brumberg, review of *1937*, by Vadim Z. Rogovin, *The Times Literary Supplement*, December 11, 1998: 8, has written: "...there exists sufficient evidence to assume that Tukhachevsky et al. were indeed plotting some action against Stalin...to remove a leader (continued next page)

intriguing but far more likely is the possibility that the NKVD's opening blows against ranking commanders were triggered inadvertently by Tukhachevsky himself. For these reasons, the NKVD's early attacks on the higher command staff represent a crucial clue regarding the grounds for Stalin's decision to move against Tukhachevsky and his associates.

Reports concerning the existence of an extensive, high-level military conspiracy appeared in the emigré press in Prague and Paris in late 1935 and early 1936.<sup>94</sup> As this material almost certainly was planted by NKVD agents, it raises the possibility that Stalin was seriously disgruntled with Tukhachevsky in 1935, notwithstanding the conferring of a marshal's gold chevrons and stars on him in November of that year. But the first actual arrests in the chain that ultimately dragged down the Tukhachevsky group occurred in early July 1936 in the Ukrainian Military District, which had been commanded by Iakir since 1925. Major Boris I. Kuz'michev, the chief of staff of an

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whose reign they considered disastrous for the country"—a highly debatable assertion.) Rogovin, Plimak, and Antonov focus on an NKVD officer's supposed discovery in 1936 of documents showing that Stalin had been an Okhrana informant who had betrayed Lenin and other Bolshevik leaders; this proof of Stalin's treachery allegedly was passed to Iakir and then to Tukhachevsky, and caused them to conclude that Stalin must be ousted. These claims originally were made by NKVD defector Alexander Orlov in an article published in an American popular magazine two months after Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin at the Party's Twentieth Congress in February 1956. (Alexander Orlov, "The Sensational Secret Behind the Damnation of Stalin," *Life* 48, no. 17 [23 April 1956]: 34-45.) But Orlov's dramatic tale seems unlikely for the following reasons: first, had a genuine military plot existed, the GUGB's thorough penetration of the military establishment probably would have revealed it long before May 1937; second, an apprehensive Stalin almost certainly would have had the conspirators seized and isolated immediately (rather than running unnecessary risks by biding his time in quashing the plot) after information concerning its existence reached him; third, as will be shown later in this chapter, the first moves to arrest or undermine high-ranking commanders occurred in summer 1936, that is, before the alleged military plot even had materialized; and lastly, aspects of Orlov's story are implausible. (For example, how likely is it that an experienced NKVD officer who had stumbled across such an explosive and potentially deadly secret would reveal it rather than keep it to himself? He would have had to possess an almost superhuman commitment to unmasking conspiracy whatever its origin or the personal risk involved!) Orlov's article may have been motivated simply by his manifest hatred of Stalin. Orlov may have believed that an accusation that Stalin was an Okhrana agent by a source (himself) who clearly possessed a wealth of privileged information would blacken irrevocably Stalin's image among Party members who still viewed him ambivalently in the aftermath of Khrushchev's attack. Orlov was eminently capable of sophisticated disinformation operations, as shown by Costello and Tsarev, *Deadly Illusions*.

<sup>94</sup>Laqueur, *Stalin*, 86-87; Igor Lukes, *Czechoslovakia between Stalin and Hitler: The Diplomacy of Edvard Benes in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 92-94, 108 n. 10.

aviation brigade, and Divisional Commander Dmitrii A. Shmidt both were in NKVD custody by 9 July.<sup>95</sup>

Virtually all of the ranking officers arrested in 1936 were connected in some way with Iakir or Corps Commander Vitalii M. Primakov, who himself would be arrested in August. The records of the senior commanders targeted initially were blighted by their association with the Trotskyite opposition during the 1920s: this provided the Special Department with a ready pretext for persecuting them years later. More important, their oppositionist past enabled the Special Department to use them to implicate figures in the high command proper in Trotskyite subversion. In particular, Corps Commanders Primakov and Vitovt K. Putna, prominent military supporters of Trotsky during the 1920s, apparently were selected for early arrest and subsequently included in the group shot with Tukhachevsky in order to give it a distinct Trotskyite hue. Consequently, the NKVD's first sallies against the higher command staff in 1936 appear to have had a definite, insidious aim: to extend the invented strands of treachery from ex-Trotskyite commanders to Tukhachevsky's camp.<sup>96</sup>

Kuz'michev evidently was thrust into the NKVD maw by his oppositionist past; a current assignment in Iakir's command; and his closeness to Primakov, the first corps commander to fall.<sup>97</sup> Shmidt was bigger game. Commanding a mechanized brigade and a

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<sup>95</sup>I. Dubinskii, *Naperekor veteram* (Voennoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1964), 243. Dubinskii states that Shmidt was seized on 5 July, but Suvenirov, *Tragediia RKKK*, 392, gives Shmidt's arrest date as either 6 or 9 July. Suvenirov's register of ranking victims is authoritative and comprehensive. The date of Kuz'michev's arrest (7 July) appears in Ukolov and Ivkin, "O masshtabakh repressii," 63 n. 22, and Suvenirov, *Tragediia RKKK*, 459. A brigade commander assigned to the staff of the Frunze Military Academy was arrested on 28 May 1936 for having opined that Hitler embodied the German people's aspirations, which contradicted the Party's official position at that time. (Suvenirov, *Tragediia RKKK*, 54.) This arrest of a member of the higher command staff was triggered by the victim's own act, however harmless, in contrast to the wholly fabricated case against Shmidt.

<sup>96</sup>Orlov, "Nakanune bol'shogo terrora," 411-12, 417-21.

<sup>97</sup>Voroshilov accused Kuz'michev of having been an "active participant in Trotskyite forays against the Party" during the mid-1920s. ("Materialy fevral'skogo-martovskogo plenuma TsK VKP[b] 1937 goda" [hereafter "Materialy plenuma"], comp. L. P. Kosheleva, O. V. Naumov, and L. A. Rogovaia, *Voprosy istorii*, 1994, no. 8: 6.) According to Orlov, "Nakanune bol'shogo terrora," 413-14, Kuz'michev not only was Primakov's former aide, close friend, and fellow oppositionist, he also was a relative: he had married Primakov's sister.

Party member since 1915, he was “swashbuckling, simple, frightened of nothing, a true product of the Civil War.”<sup>98</sup> Shmidt had flirted with the Trotskyite Left Opposition and the flimsy United Opposition of 1926-27. He also is said to have insulted Stalin during a chance encounter at the Fifteenth Party Congress in December 1927. Showered with Shmidt’s curses, Stalin reportedly remained mute, tight-lipped and pale with rage.<sup>99</sup>

Iakir was neither consulted nor informed in advance that two of his underlings were slated for arrest. The news of Shmidt’s seizure caused consternation among his colleagues and subordinates, who were puzzled and alarmed by the jailing of an officer so senior.<sup>100</sup> Iakir was horrified to learn that Shmidt and Kuz’michev had been accused of plotting to assassinate Voroshilov during his upcoming visit to observe a district exercise. The ostensible basis for the charge was Shmidt’s possession of Voroshilov’s schedule for the maneuvers, although copies had been issued to all formation commanders in the district. What Iakir could not know was that top GUGB officials, among them the Special Department’s chief, Commissar of State Security Grade 2 Gai, were pressuring Shmidt to affirm that he had planned to kill Voroshilov so that Iakir could replace him as defense commissar! Failing that, they then tried to force Shmidt to confess that Iakir had ordered him to prepare his brigade for an insurrection.<sup>101</sup>

Iakir set off for Moscow. He hoped to interview Shmidt in order to judge for himself whether he was indeed culpable and, in addition, to gain an audience with Stalin. Iakir did not see Stalin; instead, Ezhov showed him falsified evidence that implicated

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<sup>98</sup>Conquest, *Great Terror*, 188-89.

<sup>99</sup>Barmine, *One Who Survived*, 90.

<sup>100</sup>Dubinskii, *Naperekor vstram*, 245-48; Klein, *Put’ boevogo ofitsera*, 68-69. Klein was an officer in Shmidt’s brigade when Shmidt was arrested.

<sup>101</sup>Dubinskii, *Naperekor vstram*, 247-48, 261; P. I. Iakir, “‘Bud’ nastoiashchim, syn!’” in Iakir and Geller, *Komandarm Iakir*, 224. According to Iakir’s son, NKVD investigators alleged that Voroshilov’s assassination was to have been staged in Iakir’s office.

Shmidt.<sup>102</sup> Nevertheless, Iakir persevered and succeeded in speaking with Shmidt. According to Iakir's son, his father was shaken by the transformation his subordinate had undergone since his arrest. Emaciated and listless, Shmidt resembled "a Martian." Yet he managed to alert Iakir to the fact that the charges against him were invented: by one account, Shmidt orally confirmed the deposition extracted from him by torture, but slipped Iakir a note for Voroshilov that asserted his innocence. Iakir gave the note to Voroshilov and declared that he did not believe that Shmidt was guilty. Iakir then returned to Kiev, confident that his intervention would result in Shmidt's exoneration. Shortly after his arrival, he received a telephone call at home from Voroshilov, who informed him that Shmidt had admitted that he had tried to deceive them both. Iakir is said to have reacted to Voroshilov's ruse with chain-smoking and silent, agitated pacing. He reportedly remained convinced to the very end that Stalin remained ignorant of the whole affair.<sup>103</sup> The import of Shmidt's arrest and Iakir's deception by Ezhov and Voroshilov is that scheming to subvert Iakir was underway nearly a year before he was slain.<sup>104</sup>

As for Kuz'michev, by late August he had agreed to implicate Corps Commander Semen A. Turovskii, the deputy commander of the Kharkov Military District, in the "terrorist action" against Voroshilov. Kuz'michev was forced to say that Turovskii had provided him with a pass to gain admittance to the exercise review, where he intended to shoot the defense commissar.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup>Dubinskii, *Naperekor veteram*, 248.

<sup>103</sup>Iakir, "'Bud' nastoiashchim, syn!,'" 225; idem, *Detstvo v tiur'me: Memuary Petra Iakira* (London: Macmillan, 1972), 99; Anna Larina, *This I Cannot Forget: The Memoirs of Nikolai Bukharin's Widow* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993), 286-87.

<sup>104</sup>Curiously, the visitor log for Stalin's Kremlin office shows that one Shmidt met for more than two hours with Stalin on 8 February 1936. ("Posetiteli," 1995, no. 4: 19.) The log shows that Voroshilov arrived fifteen minutes before Shmidt and departed thirty-five minutes after him. Was this Shmidt the divisional commander? Or was it O. Iu. Shmidt, who saw Stalin on 14 June and 4 July? (Ibid., 27-28.) If Stalin's 8 February visitor was the military commander, was there a causal link between this conference and Divisional Commander Shmidt's arrest five months later? To speculate a bit, perhaps Stalin and Voroshilov suggested to Shmidt that he could help the NKVD to expose "Trotskyism" in the Red Army by testifying against old comrades—and he refused.

<sup>105</sup>"Materialy plenuma," 1994, no. 8: 7; "Plenum: Stenograficheski otchet," 12-13.

Two more high-level military arrests followed in mid-August, and coincided with public testimony at the trial of Zinoviev and Kamenev that a counter-revolutionary underground existed in the Red Army. Both of the new prisoners were among the Red Army's command elite. Primakov, the deputy commander of the Leningrad Military District, was even a member of the Military Council, Voroshilov's "advisory" board.<sup>106</sup> He was detained on 14 August and brought to Moscow for interrogation. Meanwhile, Putna, the military attaché in London, was recalled and arrested in Moscow on 20 August.<sup>107</sup> Given their background, assignments, and status as upper-tier commanders, Primakov and Putna were well suited to be portrayed as "the leading representatives of the old Trotskyite cadres" in the military.<sup>108</sup>

The early vulnerability of Primakov and Putna was due to their past support for the Trotskyite opposition and their disdain for Voroshilov. Moreover, their prolonged service abroad would enhance the plausibility of the crimes with which they were to be charged. Primakov had served as military attaché in Japan and Afghanistan; like Iakir, he also had attended the German General Staff Academy prior to the rupture in Soviet-German military collaboration in 1933. Putna had even more extensive foreign assignments, having spent the years 1927-31 as military attaché in Japan, Finland, and Germany. He was sent to Britain in that capacity in 1934.<sup>109</sup> To the inquisitors of state security, knowledge and experience of the non-Soviet world were tantamount to proof that one had ties to a foreign intelligence service or to Stalin's arch-enemy Trotsky.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>106</sup>"Sostav Voennogo soveta pri Narkome oborony SSSR (Fevral' 1936 g.)," ed. V. Vinogradov and Iu. Razboev, *Izvestiia TsK KPSS*, 1989, no. 4: 78.

<sup>107</sup>"Delo," 44.

<sup>108</sup>"Plenum: Stenograficheskiĭ otchet," 10, 14.

<sup>109</sup>Orlov, "Nakanune bol'shogo terrora," 411-12; "Delo," 71-72; *Sovetskaia Voennaia Entsiklopediia*, s.v. "Primakov" and "Putna." I. Dashichev, "Komkor V. K. Putna," *Voenna-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1963, no. 4: 127-28, and B. A. Viktorov, *Bez grifa "Sekretno": Zapiski voennogo prokurora* (Moscow: "Iuridicheskaia literatura," 1990), 219, report that Putna also had sided with the "anti-Party opposition," that is, with Trotsky, in 1923, when the latter's control of the Red Army was being challenged. Primakov's and Putna's antipathy for Voroshilov is documented below.

<sup>110</sup>Donald Cameron Watt, *How War Came: The Immediate Origins of the Second World War, 1938-1939* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989), 112.

Predictably, Putna was accused of having coordinated a plan for subversive action inside the Red Army with Lev Sedov, Trotsky's son, while stationed in Berlin in 1931.<sup>111</sup>

What explains the timing of this series of blows to the higher command staff? The pretext for Shmidt's arrest may have been a statement attributed to Richard V. Pikel', reportedly Zinoviev's former secretary: on 4 July he supposedly confirmed the existence of a subversive military organization involving Shmidt and Putna.<sup>112</sup> More broadly, Tukhachevsky's assertive efforts to overshadow Voroshilov may well have triggered the military arrests of July-August 1936, and contributed to Stalin's ominous decision to allow them to steep in the foulness of the Zinoviev-Kamenev case. By 1936 Tukhachevsky was no longer deferring to Voroshilov, as he had, according to Barmine, during the early 1930s; on the contrary, he could not resist the temptation to mock Voroshilov before their subordinates, as attested by an incident Zhukov witnessed.<sup>113</sup> Sometime in early 1936, possibly at a reception in Voroshilov's apartment following the May Day parade, Tukhachevsky intemperately had attacked the defense commissar in the presence of Stalin and other Politburo members—an episode that so rankled Voroshilov that he cited it at the June 1937 Military Council meeting at which he and Stalin reviewed the Tukhachevsky group's alleged treason. Tukhachevsky, according to Voroshilov, had accused him of using a clutch of cronies to control the military establishment. A Politburo meeting reportedly was called to consider Tukhachevsky's grievances against Voroshilov, who asserted later that Iakir and Uborevich had behaved "quite aggressively" toward him at the session.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> "Plenum: Stenograficheskii otchet," 16.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 15. Biographical data on Pikel', who was first expelled from the Party in 1927 for oppositionist activities, appear in "O tak nazyvaemom 'antisovetskom ob''edinennom trotskistsko-zinov'evskom tsentre,'" 80.

<sup>113</sup> Barmine, *One Who Survived*, 220; K. M. Simonov, *Glazami*, 338.

<sup>114</sup> "Delo," 53. The meeting in question may have been a Politburo session in only the loose sense that it included a few Politburo members. If it was held in Stalin's office, as seems likely, the visitor log presumably would record the attendees. Voroshilov said the incident occurred in May 1936, and the subsequent meeting's participants must have included at least Voroshilov, Tukhachevsky, Iakir, Uborevich, and Gamarnik. But the only date that year on which are recorded appearances by Voroshilov, Tukhachevsky, Gamarnik, Iakir, and (continued next page)

The gist of Voroshilov's account is supported by Pavel Sudoplatov, a top Stalin-era intelligence officer and Beria confederate, who unsympathetically concluded that Tukhachevsky had gone "too far" for Stalin. Beria and Viktor S. Abakumov, chief of military counter-intelligence from 1943 to 1946, told Sudoplatov that Tukhachevsky and his allies had dared to think that they could propose Voroshilov's removal:

During frequent meetings with Stalin, Tukhachevsky had criticized Voroshilov; Stalin encouraged this criticism, calling it "constructive," and loved to discuss different plans for new appointments and dismissals. He also liked to examine different approaches to military doctrine. Tukhachevsky allowed himself to discuss freely all of this not only behind closed doors, but spread rumors about supposedly impending changes and moves in the leadership of the People's Commissariat of Defense.

Beria reportedly remarked that Tukhachevsky's pressure for Voroshilov's removal showed that the military had transgressed its sphere of authority and impinged on that of the Politburo, which alone had the power to consider such a matter. In Sudoplatov's view, Tukhachevsky was indiscreet and much too free with criticism and advice.<sup>115</sup> (Perhaps this is why Kaganovich ascribed "Bonapartist moods" to Tukhachevsky, whom he described as a "refined nobleman, handsome, literate, intelligent, capable.")<sup>116</sup> Sudoplatov's story is plausible; if it is true, Stalin must have viewed Tukhachevsky's readiness to challenge Voroshilov, a Politburo member, as an unwarranted intrusion into the high politics of the regime's leadership. And Stalin, in all likelihood, remained wary of the marshal's "leftist" sentiments, which Stalin had condemned as a symptom of Tukhachevsky's immature Marxism during the nasty dispute over industrial policy in 1930 (as discussed below). It would be natural, then, for the malignantly suspicious

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Uboevich (together with Egorov, Corps Commander Ivan S. Kutiakov, Molotov, and, briefly, Mikoian) at Stalin's office is 29 March 1936. ("Posetiteli," 1995, no. 4: 22.) Hence the log is consistent with an unusual meeting of the sort Voroshilov described, but not in May or June 1936.

<sup>115</sup>Pavel Sudoplatov, *Spetsoperatsii. Lubyanka i Kreml' 1930-1950 gody*. (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "OLMA-PRESS," 1997), 135-37.

<sup>116</sup>Feliks Chuev, *Tak govoril Kaganovich: Ispoved' stalinskogo apostola* (Moscow: Rossiiskoe tovarichestvo "Otechestvo," 1992), 45, 100. From December 1986 until his death in July 1991 at the age of ninety-eight, (continued next page)

dictator to see Tukhachevsky not merely as an inordinately bumptious general, but as one eminently capable of turning from a personal contest with a superior (and a Stalin confederate besides) to another battle over policy, socio-economic or foreign. It has been suggested that Stalin was moved to orchestrate the first phase of the Great Purges (which centered on the public trial of Zinoviev and Kamenev) in 1936 in order to bolster his regime in light of the worsening international situation and the potentially broad appeal within the Party of “a literal interpretation of the Popular Front as antifascist revolutionism,” which “might push the Soviet state towards dangerous foreign entanglements.” In this view, Stalin probably feared that Tukhachevsky’s combination of revolutionary internationalism and nerve could foster a lobby for an adventurist stance internationally at a time when Soviet security policy had to be supple: in Stalin’s mind, the USSR needed to be able to thread its way without undue encumbrance around Germany’s resurgence, the advent of a Popular Front government in France, and the outbreak of civil war in Spain.<sup>117</sup>

Incidentally, contempt for Voroshilov seems to have been common among Tukhachevsky’s associates and the other senior commanders shot with him. Iakir is reported to have signed a petition calling for Voroshilov’s ouster as early as 1927, and Primakov admitted that he had engaged in discussions with friends (themselves arrested) that constituted “a Trotskyite slander on Voroshilov.... There were conversations to the effect that the Central Committee itself sees Voroshilov’s uselessness....”<sup>118</sup> Uborevich

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Kaganovich (like Molotov) discussed his career as Stalin’s main troubleshooter with Chuev, a sympathetic listener and dedicated Stalinist himself.

<sup>117</sup> Malia, *Soviet Tragedy*, 250-52. See also Jonathan Haslam, “Political Opposition to Stalin and the Origins of the Terror in Russia, 1932-36,” *The Historical Journal* 29, no. 2 (1986): 410-18. Haslam is unequivocal: “It was events from abroad which proved the catalyst to the terror.” (Ibid., 415.) Whereas this interpretation stresses the pressure of foreign events (especially in France and Spain in 1936) in impelling Stalin to commission the Great Purges, I concentrate on internal political and ideological developments (e.g., conflicts within the high command, the claimed need for cadre renewal due to the supposed success of Stalin’s program to create a socialist system in the USSR) in exploring the roots of the military purge and, in particular, the origins of the Tukhachevsky affair. If foreign policy concerns did enter Stalin’s calculations substantially in 1936, they probably added to existing (and growing) doubts on his part about the Tukhachevsky group.

<sup>118</sup> Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 350; Khorev, “Kak sudili Tukhachevskogo.”

wrote to People's Commissar for Heavy Industry Ordzhonikidze on 17 August 1936 in order to request his support in fending off Voroshilov, who recently had told Uborevich of plans to bring him to Moscow from Smolensk (location of the Belorussian Military District's headquarters) and place him in charge of military aviation. Having been armaments czar and RVS's deputy chairman in 1930-31, Uborevich cringed at the prospect of frequent, close contact with Voroshilov once again. His candid letter not only expresses his personal resentment of Voroshilov, but alludes to the broader tensions and rivalries inside the high command—especially between Voroshilov and Tukhachevsky—at the very time that Tukhachevsky's fall was beginning to be plotted.

Voroshilov does not consider me able to perform major military and government tasks. He has said this to Tukhachevsky repeatedly, especially at the time when ranks were being awarded, equating me to [Army Commander Grade 1 Ivan P.] Belov and [Army Commander Grade 1 Boris M.] Shaposhnikov. Here it must be said that he evaluates Tukhachevsky even more poorly. In my view, Tukhachevsky has lost much of his previous capacity for work. The Party has set up Voroshilov as an exceptional authority in the country, and his evaluations are very weighty and significant... Voroshilov, if he considers the accomplishments of the B. V. O. [Belorussian Military District] to have taken place, in no way attributes them to my work. If Comrade Voroshilov considers me a commander who is ill-suited for significant work, then I speak harshly about his views on the most important present-day military problems to his face and in his absence.

If Uborevich was to be transferred from Smolensk, he wanted to be sent to a place “a little farther” from Moscow and Voroshilov, for example, to Siberia or Turkestan.<sup>119</sup> The timing of Voroshilov's initiative to reassign Uborevich, which coincided with the first concerted blows against the higher command staff, strongly suggests that it was part of a larger move to rein in and undercut Iakir and Uborevich. Both looked for stimulation and

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<sup>119</sup>“Pis'mo 1936-go: I. P. Uborevich – G. K. Ordzhonikidze,” ed. A. P. Nenarokov and N. V. Orlova-Chernysheva, in *Fakel*. 1990, 237-38.

direction to Voroshilov's deputy, Tukhachevsky, rather than to the unfit and banal defense commissar, with whom their relationship had long been poor.

Primakov, a well-known cavalry commander, saw Budenny, a staunch Voroshilov ally and Civil War cavalry legend, in the same baleful light. It seems that Primakov had grumbled that Budenny and his comrades from the First Cavalry Army dominated the cavalry arm.<sup>120</sup> The First Cavalry Army's patron was Stalin, and, in general, veterans of that storied troop remained immune to the NKVD's depredations.<sup>121</sup> Putna is said to have signed the same anti-Voroshilov petition as Iakir and Primakov in 1927.<sup>122</sup>

Tukhachevsky's struggle with Voroshilov was played out against the backdrop of his bruising 1930 collision with the defense commissar and Stalin over defense-industrial planning and military development, a quarrel whose ideological overtones Tukhachevsky appears to have overlooked. Although Tukhachevsky was a technophile and modernizer, he was not a sober technocrat. His strategic views were, at times, decidedly "leftist." His extravagant armaments scheme of 1930, a reflection of his zest for revolutionary war and a staunchly offensive strategy, had implications for Soviet socio-economic development which Stalin had grasped immediately. Stalin had objected that Tukhachevsky's proposal to impose a stupendous weapon production capability on the infant defense industry would disrupt "the balance between the army as a part of the country and the country as a whole." Stalin expressed surprise that a Marxist would advance such a "fantastic 'plan,'" which connoted a narrowly military viewpoint. "I think," he continued in a note to Voroshilov, "that the 'plan' of comrade Tukhachevsky

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<sup>120</sup>Viktorov, *Bez grifa "Sekretno"*, 218; "Materialy plenuma," 1994, no. 8: 8. In the official version of Voroshilov's report, Primakov is said to have complained that Budenny et al. held all of the leading positions "in the army" rather than in just its cavalry arm—which would have been a great exaggeration. ("Plenum: Stenograficheskii otchet," 14.)

<sup>121</sup>See, for example, I. V. Stalin, "Privetstvie k piatnadsatiletiiu Pervoi Konnoi armii," 24 February 1935, in *Sochineniia*, vol. 1 (14), 55; Erickson, *High Command*, 506.

<sup>122</sup>Deutscher, *Prophet Unarmed*, 350.

is the product of a fashionable enthusiasm for the 'left' phrase, the product of an enthusiasm for a paper, office-bound Marxism."<sup>123</sup> In other words, Stalin saw Tukhachevsky's proposals as tantamount to placing the professional military command in charge of economic planning and industrial production, thereby putting his own ambition of building a socialist order (as opposed to a garrison state) at risk. Yet Stalin soon also realized that he needed Tukhachevsky's all-round expertise if the USSR was to build the large, modern army he held it must possess. Nevertheless, by 1936, that is, after Tukhachevsky's five-year tenure as armaments chief, the marshal's relative value, in Stalin's eyes, probably had waned. (In fact, the armaments position was abolished, and Tukhachevsky became chief of the new Red Army Combat Training Directorate in April 1936.)<sup>124</sup> Tukhachevsky's ill-advised contest with Voroshilov for supremacy within the military establishment would have tried the irascible tyrant's patience, and the marshal's outburst against the defense commissar may have dissolved any residual restraint to terminal action on Stalin's part.

In this connection, it is pertinent to cite remarks on the Tukhachevsky affair by Lieutenant-General Vadim A. Kirpichenko, a top Soviet intelligence officer who has been assisting the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service in the publication of its flattering official history. Kirpichenko told an interviewer that he had read "materials" showing that Tukhachevsky had tried to "expose" Voroshilov by submitting, together with sensible proposals, unrealistic and unsound schemes while also attacking him constantly. Tukhachevsky's allies, Kirpichenko believes, discussed Stalin's despotic qualities and Voroshilov's incompetent direction of the Red Army among themselves. Stalin and

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<sup>123</sup> Stalin to Voroshilov, 23 March 1930, Volkogonov Papers, reel 4, frames 282-83.

<sup>124</sup> Zakharov, *General'nyi shtab*, 45; N. I. Koritskii, S. M. Mel'nik-Tukhachevskaiia, and B. N. Chistov, comps., *Marshal Tukhachevskii. Vospominaniia druzei i soratnikov*. (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1965), 234.

Voroshilov would have considered such conversations (likely to have been reported to the Special Department) “criminal” and tantamount to “a coup attempt.”<sup>125</sup>

It would be ironic if the rift between Tukhachevsky and Voroshilov truly was the catalyst for the plotting in the Kremlin and the Lubianka that brought down Tukhachevsky, as his “political weight was insignificant.”<sup>126</sup> The crux of the matter seems to be that Stalin and Voroshilov disliked and distrusted the irksome marshal, and came to see him as a budding turncoat. A contributing factor almost certainly was the 1930 wrangle over armaments planning, which Stalin then probably considered a perfidious attempt by Tukhachevsky to subvert his chosen strategy of “socialist construction.” It is noteworthy that on 5 June 1937, that is, several days before Tukhachevsky’s execution, the chief of the GUGB’s Special Department was seeking to obtain two letters to Stalin written by Tukhachevsky in 1930, as well as a few other pieces of his correspondence to Voroshilov and Stalin from the early 1930s.<sup>127</sup>

As for Iakir, plainly a target of the Shmidt case, he was close to Tukhachevsky, scorned Voroshilov, and is said to have thought for himself.<sup>128</sup> Moreover, Iakir had been in place in the Ukraine for years, as had Uborevich in Belorussia and Bliukher in the Far

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<sup>125</sup>V. A. Kirpichenko, “Razvedka vykhodit iz zony molchaniia,” *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1995, no. 2: 83.

<sup>126</sup>Orlov, “Nakanune bol'shogo terrora,” 417.

<sup>127</sup>I. V. Smorodinov to Voroshilov, 5 June 1937, Volkogonov Papers, reel 14, frame 100. (This document also appears in *Fashistskii mech kovalsia v SSSR*, 348-49.)

<sup>128</sup>According to Cherednik-Dubovaia, “Kommunista vse kasaetsia,” in Iakir and Geller, *Komandarm Iakir*, 111-12, at the height of the Ukrainian famine in 1933, Iakir and several local officials appealed to Moscow for relief. They already had been rebuffed by the Ukrainian Party leadership. Voroshilov supposedly conveyed Stalin’s angry retort to Iakir: “The military should tend to their own business, and not debate matters which do not concern them.” The same account asserts that in 1930 Iakir had interceded on behalf of a group of ex-Imperial officers arrested on false charges of counter-revolutionary plotting by the OGPU’s Ukrainian branch, doubtlessly as part of the *Vesna* operation discussed earlier in this chapter. Iakir persisted even though he was warned off by Kaganovich, who had headed the Ukrainian Party from 1925 to 1928. (*Ibid.*, 109-11.) The author learned of these episodes from her husband, Ivan N. Dubovoi, who became Iakir’s assistant in October 1929 and was named deputy district commander in December 1934. As these stories appear in a laudatory volume of biographical sketches published while Khrushchev was in power, one wonders if they were embellished to bolster an anti-Stalin image of principled military martyrdom.

East. Stalin may well have brooded that overt opposition might arise someday from such military fiefdoms, especially ones under Tukhachevsky protégés.<sup>129</sup>

#### IV

These early arrests of senior commanders were merged into the NKVD's far-reaching probes of subversion and treason that flowed from Kirov's murder: for the first time, a high-level military element was injected into them.<sup>130</sup> The Zinoviev-Kamenev case, the development of which was proceeding intensively within the GUGB in the spring and early summer of 1936, supplied a larger landscape of treachery in which to situate the military cases. The emergence of "military conspiracy" as an investigative theme for the GUGB at this time and the decision to graft it onto the "Anti-Soviet United Trotskyite-Zinovievite Center" featured at the Zinoviev-Kamenev trial shows indubitably that the Red Army's generals had fallen under a pall of suspicion.<sup>131</sup>

The trial of Zinoviev, Kamenev, and a number of former Trotskyites and Zinovievites opened in Moscow on 19 August and concluded in the small hours of the

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<sup>129</sup>Nation, *Black Earth, Red Star*, 92. Iakir's long tenure was equalled by some of his subordinates: two division commanders in one of the Ukrainian Military District's cavalry corps remained in their positions for twelve and thirteen years. Commanders of regiments in those two divisions served for seven or eight years. Officers who were transferred to other military districts "tried to return 'home' to Iakir at the very first opportunity." (A. V. Gorbatov, "Shkola Iakira," in Iakir and Geller, *Komandarm Iakir*, 170.)

<sup>130</sup>In early 1935 a few mid-level officers with Moscow assignments were accused of forming a "counter-revolutionary Trotskyite terrorist group" that sought to kill Stalin. This subversive group allegedly was linked to a larger one in the headquarters of the Kremlin commandant. The elaborate plot behind the so-called Kremlin Affair was manufactured by the GUGB to justify a purge of low-level Kremlin service employees in the months after Kirov's murder, as a result of which dozens of employees, their family members, and acquaintances were arrested. The main villain in the affair was held to be Kamenev, who was charged with incitement to commit a terrorist act and sentenced to ten years' imprisonment in July 1935. M. K. Chernaevskii, assigned to the Red Army's Intelligence Directorate, was sentenced to death. This case can be seen as an antecedent to the military arrests of 1936 in that its military victims were accused of plotting to assassinate Stalin. However, they were few in number, virtual unknowns, not identified with more senior commanders, and the military aspect of the Kremlin Affair evidently proceeded no further within the GUGB. Very little was known about the case until Soviet publications addressed it in 1988-89. ("O tak nazyvaemom 'Kremlevskom dele.' Spravka Prokuratury SSSR i KGB SSSR," *Izvestiia TsK KPSS*, 1989, no. 7: 86-93; Conquest, *Great Terror*, 76, 78.)

<sup>131</sup>"O tak nazyvaemom 'antisovetskom ob''edinennom trotskistsko-zinov'evskom tsentre,'" *Izvestiia TsK KPSS*, 1989, no. 8: 78-94.

twenty-fourth with the pronouncement of death sentences on all sixteen accused. This spectacle unveiled publicly the set of charges that was to figure, with variations and differences in emphasis, at all subsequent proceedings (closed as well as public) against present or former regime notables. Zinoviev and Kamenev, who both had been on Lenin's Politburo, were alleged to have connived with Trotsky to murder top Party and state leaders; engaged in espionage for a ludicrous array of foreign intelligence services; and sabotaged sundry agricultural, industrial, and transportation facilities.<sup>132</sup>

In the months leading up to the trial, several of the accused, at the direction of Ezhov, then still the Central Committee's overseer of the NKVD, were forced to attest to the existence of a clandestine Trotskyite-Zinovievite organization inside the Red Army.<sup>133</sup> For example, the record of a 28 July interrogation has Zinoviev implicating Putna: "At the end of 1928," Zinoviev ostensibly volunteered, "Putna voiced his agreement to me concerning the double-dealing position in relation to the Party which I held."<sup>134</sup> On 10 August Kamenev signed a statement asserting that Radek (a clever, cynical ex-Trotskyite tried in January 1937) had told him that "there remained people loyal to Trotsky in the army. As an example [Radek] named Shmidt, whom he described as an audacious man, absolutely loyal to Trotsky."<sup>135</sup> On 19 August, the trial's first day, Sergei V. Mrachkovskii, who was imprisoned in 1927 for running a clandestine printing-press for Trotsky, testified that Shmidt had led a group of officer-assassins. Shmidt's case was reserved for trial at a later date so that the NKVD's inquiry could proceed further.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>132</sup>Laqueur, *Stalin*, 62-63.

<sup>133</sup>"Delo," 44.

<sup>134</sup>"Protokol doprosa Zinov'eva, Grigoriia Evseevicha ot 28-29 iul'ia 1936 goda," Volkogonov Papers, reel 2, frame 700.

<sup>135</sup>"Protokol doprosa arestovannogo Kameneva, L'va Borisovicha ot 10-go avgusta 1936 g.," Volkogonov Papers, reel 2, frame 706.

<sup>136</sup>Conquest, *Great Terror*, 94, 189.

A more dire hint of trouble for the military command surfaced later in the trial. Efim A. Dreitser, a minor figure and former Trotskyite who finished his testimony on 19 August, was recalled at the end of the evening session on the twenty-first (the last day on which evidence was given) to declare that Putna had used his posting abroad to carry instructions from Trotsky to Dreitser for transmission to Ivan N. Smirnov, another defendant. In response to Dreitser's assertions, Smirnov denied that Putna was a Trotskyite, but three other defendants affirmed Dreitser's statement.<sup>137</sup> The trial declarations concerning Shmidt and Putna clearly were intended to provide a basis for a special examination of the military establishment.

Dreitser's recall to impugn Putna obviously was arranged in response to Putna's arrest the previous day. A sinister suggestion of truly top-level military involvement emerged from the fact that Tukhachevsky had been in direct contact with Putna in London in February 1936, when the marshal had been a member of the Soviet delegation at the funeral of King George V. Then Putna accompanied Tukhachevsky on his journey back to Moscow, where they arrived on 20 February. The return trip included a week's stay in France, where Tukhachevsky was a guest of the French General Staff.<sup>138</sup> Hence Tukhachevsky had traveled for several weeks on foreign soil with a member of a gang of "despicable enemies" and "hired assassins."<sup>139</sup> It therefore comes as no surprise that Tukhachevsky was accused of having had a clandestine meeting with Sedov in a Paris cafe during his sojourn abroad; the liaison with Trotsky's son allegedly was arranged by Putna.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>137</sup>Ibid., 84, 94, 101, 190; "O tak nazyvaemom 'antisovetskom ob''edinennom trotskistsko-zinov'evskom tsentre,'" 80, 84.

<sup>138</sup>Dubinskii, *Naperekor vetram*, 242; Erickson, *High Command*, 411-13.

<sup>139</sup>"Plenum: Stenograficheskii otchet," 10.

<sup>140</sup>"Spravka o proverke," 59.

Meanwhile, GUGB interrogators were at work on their military prisoners. Putna and Primakov were charged with membership in the military arm of a “Trotskyite-Zinovievite counter-revolutionary organization.” In accordance with the testimony given at the trial, Putna was accused of contacts with Trotsky, from whom he was alleged to have received “terror directives.” After initially denying the allegations, Putna spoke of the existence of “union-wide,” “parallel,” and “Moscow” centers within a far-flung “Trotskyite-Zinovievite bloc” on 31 August, during his second interrogation. Putna confessed that he and Primakov had been active members of a Trotskyite group of military officers, and said that his own involvement dated to 1926. Putna conceded that he had used his foreign assignments to meet clandestinely with Sedov, from whom he had received Trotsky’s instructions to assassinate Stalin and Voroshilov.<sup>141</sup> And Sedov supposedly had advised him that Mrachkovskii, who had testified publicly against Shmidt, was capable of organizing a subversive Trotskyite underground in the military, as he had led such a group in 1927 and had since maintained contact with its members. The organization’s main task consisted of “struggle against the leadership of the [Party] and the Red Army, and was aimed at effecting a change of that leadership.” Shmidt, according to Voroshilov, “acknowledged all of his vile deeds” a month after he had written the defense commissar a letter pleading for his life. Primakov, however, bravely defied his tormentors until May 1937; for nearly nine hellish months he categorically denied any involvement in treasonous or terrorist plotting.<sup>142</sup>

In the trial’s aftermath, the GUGB detained a few other high-ranking commanders. These arrests probably were intended to lend credence to the notion of a diffuse military conspiracy, to provide additional sources of incriminating material, and to undermine and disconcert the prisoners’ superiors. Voroshilov reported at the Central Committee plenum of February-March 1937 that six “wreckers of general’s rank” had been jailed.

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<sup>141</sup>“Delo,” 44-45; Khorev, “Kak sudili Tukhachevskogo.”

<sup>142</sup>“Plenum: Stenograficheskii otchet,” 13, 16-17; “Delo,” 44.

Aside from Shmidt, Putna, Primakov, and Turovskii, he named Divisional Commander Iurii V. Sablin and Brigade Commander Mikhail O. Ziuk, all of whom were linked by friendship or service to Iakir, Primakov, or, in Turovskii's case, both men. All of these ranking commanders were arrested in July, August, or September 1936.<sup>143</sup>

Sablin was once a fanatical Left Socialist Revolutionary who, according to a comrade, had progressed from the "romance of terror to the romance of armed struggle" during the Civil War. He was appointed commander and military commissar of a rifle division in the Ukrainian Military District in 1926; in 1931 he returned to the district as commandant of one of the fortified areas built near the border with Poland and Romania, a position he held until his arrest. Iakir evaluated Sablin's performance positively on several occasions, affirming in one evaluation that he was qualified to command a corps.<sup>144</sup> Based on recently published excerpts from Tukhachevsky's prison writings, it appears that Ezhov and his GUGB henchmen decided to cast Sablin as Iakir's instrument for effecting "the traitorous delivery of the Letichev Fortified Area" to a German invader, thereby enabling the enemy to unhinge the entire system of frontier fortifications in the Kiev Military District.<sup>145</sup>

Turovskii, a Military Council member, Party member since 1911, and the second-in-command of the Kharkov Military District, also had served under Iakir in the adjacent Ukrainian Military District. That fact and his past criticism of Voroshilov may explain

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<sup>143</sup>"Materialy plenuma," 1994, no. 8: 6; Suvenirov, *Tragediia RKKA*, 380, 390, 405; Ukolov and Ivkin, "O masshtabakh repressii," 63 n. 20. Voroshilov was referring to officers with ranks of brigade commander and higher.

<sup>144</sup>V. Polikarpov, "Komdiv Sablin," *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1965, no. 8: 33-39. Sablin took part in the Moscow uprising of July 1918. In fact, it was Sablin and another Left Socialist Revolutionary who detained Feliks Dzerzhinskii at the start of that strange episode. Afterwards Sablin was treated with exceptional leniency: receiving only a one-year prison term, he was granted amnesty after two days in consideration of his prominent role in the Bolsheviks' Moscow insurrection in late October 1917. Sablin subsequently redeemed himself on several Civil War fronts, joined the Bolshevik Party in May 1919, and was decorated for his part in putting down the Kronstadt uprising.

<sup>145</sup>"Pokazaniia marshala Tukhachevskogo," pt. 2, 58, 63.

his early fall.<sup>146</sup> Perhaps Ezhov calculated that Turovskii could be coerced into implicating Iakir. Turovskii's interrogators sought to connect him with the copy of Voroshilov's schedule for the Kiev maneuvers found in Shmidt's possession. He too was accused of membership in a "Trotskyite gang." But Turovskii, like Primakov, resisted the brutes intent on crushing him.<sup>147</sup> Voroshilov later declared peevishly: "The most that [Primakov and Turovskii] have acknowledged is that they were not fond of Voroshilov and Budenny. And, they are sorry to say, they permitted themselves to sharply criticize both Voroshilov and Budenny until 1932-33."<sup>148</sup>

Turovskii and Primakov were expelled from the Military Council at the end of September 1936, the first of seventy-six officers from that august assembly of eighty-five to be "repressed."<sup>149</sup> Turovskii and the two divisional commanders from the Kiev Military District (Shmidt and Sablin) were sentenced to death without any publicity on 1 July and 19 June 1937, respectively.<sup>150</sup> In addition to their ties to Iakir, their swift execution once the Tukhachevsky case was wound up strongly suggests that the high command's professional core was the ultimate target of their arrests from the outset. Once Tukhachevsky and Iakir had been liquidated, Turovskii, Shmidt, and Sablin no longer were of any use to the GUGB.

Ezhov's installation as people's commissar for internal affairs on 26 September 1936 meant that for the first time since Dzerzhinskii's death a pitiless zealot, rather than a cynical, veteran Chekist, disposed of the regime's vast repressive and punitive

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<sup>146</sup>Dubinskii, *Naperekor vetram*, 249; Suvenirov, *Tragediia RKKA*, 380. B. N. Buisikh et al., *Kievskii Krasnoznamennyi* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1974), 92, indicates that Turovskii served under Iakir, as does Aleksandrov et al., *Komandarm Uborevich*, 260. For Turovskii's low opinion of Voroshilov, see "Materialy plenuma," 1994, no. 8: 8.

<sup>147</sup>Khorev, "Kak sudili Tukhachevskogo"; "Plenum: Stenograficheskii otchet," 10.

<sup>148</sup>"Materialy plenuma," 1994, no. 8: 8. In the official text of Voroshilov's report, the following sentence was inserted just prior to those cited: "Neither Primakov nor Turovskii has yet acknowledged their guilt." ("Plenum: Stenograficheskii otchet," 13-14.)

<sup>149</sup>"Sostav Voennogo soveta," 80.

<sup>150</sup>Suvenirov, *Tragediia RKKA*, 380, 390, 392.

resources.<sup>151</sup> Four days after Iagoda's removal, Kaganovich apparently alluded to Ezhov's assignment as Stalin's axeman in a letter to Ordzhonikidze: "Under Ezhov matters certainly will go well. With a few exceptions, even among Chekists the change in leadership is viewed favorably, according to my sources."<sup>152</sup> Working with the team he brought with him to the Lubyanka from the Central Committee Secretariat and consulting often with Stalin, Ezhov personally directed the fabrication of the histories of the various subversive "centers" that were produced to justify and underpin the Great Purges.<sup>153</sup> How these Byzantine tales of treachery related to the chosen victims' careers was a matter that required much thought and careful planning.<sup>154</sup>

The supposed military conspiracy was a locus of activity inside the GUGB during the last weeks of 1936. According to Major of State Security Zinovii M. Ushakov, among the most odious GUGB officers, the myriad details of the military plot to overthrow the regime preoccupied him after he arrived in the central Special Department in December 1936: "Literally from the first days of work I diagnosed the existence of a military-Trotskyite organization in the RKKA and Navy, and developed a precise scheme for exposing it...." Ushakov was brought to Moscow from the special department of the Belorussian NKVD's state security directorate by Commissar of State Security Grade 2 Izrail' M. Leplevskii, whom Ezhov placed in charge of the Special Department on 28 November. Leplevskii's plan for exploiting compromising information

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<sup>151</sup> After Kirov's assassination Ezhov wrote a "theoretical work" entitled "Ot fraktsionnosti k otkrytoi kontrrevoliutsii" ["From Factionalism to Open Counter-revolution"], whose themes were the alleged consolidation of the Trotskyite-Zinovievite and Right Oppositions and the rise of a "Zinov'evshchina." Ezhov asked Stalin to review the first chapter in May 1935. ("O tak nazyvaemom 'antisoetskomo ob'edinennom trotskistsko-zinov'evskom tsentre,'" 82; "O partiinosti lits, prokhodivshikh po delu tak nazyvaemogo 'antisoetskogo pravotrotskistskogo bloka,'" *Izvestiia TsK KPSS*, 1989, no. 5: 73.) Ezhov is said to have sung the *Internationale* on his way to execution. (Sudoplatov, *Spetsoperatsii*, 100.)

<sup>152</sup> Cited in O. V. Khlevniuk, *1937-i: Stalin, NKVD i sovetskoe obshchestvo* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Respublika," 1992), 127-28.

<sup>153</sup> Krivitsky, *In Stalin's Secret Service*, 146; Conquest, *Secret Police*, 24; "Delo," 44, 51. According to Orlov, *Secret History*, 215, the chief of the GUGB's Foreign Department told him that Ezhov brought three hundred officials from the Central Committee to the NKVD; Krivitsky places the number at two hundred.

<sup>154</sup> Erickson, *High Command*, 427.

collected by the GUGB's Foreign Department read in part: "Give special attention to the unmasking of fascist groupings among servicemen in Moscow as well as on the periphery."<sup>155</sup> Leplevskii, previously the head of the Belorussian NKVD, and Ushakov—a beast who later boasted of the "hundreds and thousands of conspirators" he had unmasked—were to be the principal falsifiers of the testimony that supported the Tukhachevsky case.<sup>156</sup> Their late 1936 summons from Minsk to Moscow, where they could work at Ezhov's elbow, signified that a grim scheme to eviscerate and renew the high command was being pursued in earnest.

## V

The organizational principles that were instituted during the Civil War to cement the Party's control of the Red Army worked during the 1920s to bring it under the sway of the Stalinist faction of the Party leadership. These principles defined the structure of Soviet military command and control, giving it three distinct yet intertwined hierarchies. The first consisted of the command staff: as the character of the command corps became more heavily Communist, especially at its upper levels, military administration and operational command increasingly became the province of the professional commander. Control was the business of the second and third hierarchies, which were not intrinsically military: the Political Administration, specializing in positive indoctrination and reinforcement; and state security's special departments, whose focus on surveillance and punitive action was decidedly negative.

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<sup>155</sup>"Spravka o proverke," 43-44, 111.

<sup>156</sup>Viktorov, *Bez grifa "Sekretno"*, 225; "O masshtabakh repressii v Krasnoi Armii v predvoennye gody," comp. A. S. Stepanov, V. I. Ivkin, and A. I. Kokurin, *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1993, no. 2: 78 n. 31, 80 n. 72; Conquest, *Secret Police*, 15, 26; Petrov and Skorkin, *Kto rukovodil NKVD*, 270. Ushakov's fall in September 1938 was a sign of Ezhov's decline and Beria's ascendancy. Ushakov finally was shot in February 1940. His rank (major of state security) was a senior one, equivalent to brigade commander in the Red Army.

**It is a hallmark of the Soviet military system that surveillance of military personnel was conducted exclusively by an outside agency—the state security service—for all but two brief periods. By the mid-1930s, and especially after the creation of a powerful GUGB as the core of a revived, expansive NKVD, state security’s role as an instrument of control within the Red Army effectively overshadowed that of the Political Administration.**

**The degree to which Soviet officers and conscripts were under hostile observation from inside the military establishment is striking. As a state security cell or representative was attached limpet-like to each major military headquarters, formation, unit, and establishment, the Red Army was laden with dangerous outsiders whose attitude toward servicemen was suspicious, intrusive, adversarial, and even contemptuous.**

**The counter-intelligence mission of the special departments was broad and flexible; in combating the phenomena of “counter-revolution” and “anti-Sovietism” in their myriad mutations, the special departments routinely engaged in repressive tasks whose character was inherently political. (Espionage was merely a particularly egregious type of counter-revolutionary activity.) Under Menzhinskii and Iagoda, the special departments were mobilized to identify military supporters of the intra-Party opposition movements; to persecute ex-Imperial officers who had not joined the Party; and to quash opposition to collectivization. Junior and mid-level officers, together with conscripts, suffered routinely from the political nature and arbitrariness of the internal controls that veined the Red Army. Hence the GUGB’s attack on leading commanders and on the higher command staff as a whole from mid-1936 to late 1938 represented an extension, albeit an extreme one, of purposes for which its military arm had long been employed.**

**The center’s June 1937 call for the exposure of “enemies of the people” in uniform enabled the special departments to fix their sights squarely on the higher**

command staff and entailed, for a time, a wholesale relaxation of any constraints on their operatives, who were encouraged, in effect, to run rampant. The special departments did not work unilaterally, however: by acting in tandem with the military's political organs, the previously separate processes of expulsion from the Party, discharge from military service, and arrest were linked. This wedding of Party purge with arbitrary imprisonment, coercion, and execution was a distinctive feature of the *Ezhovshchina*.

Given the degree to which Tukhachevsky and other top commanders lived and worked within a cocoon of attentive, unfriendly surveillance, they were easy prey once Stalin authorized Ezhov to prepare their fall. Their written correspondence and telephone conversations assuredly were monitored, and they probably were under round-the-clock observation as well. Moreover, the military elite had accepted the notion that a "class-alien" background or deviant political views generally disqualified one for military service and might merit punishment. The doomed marshals and army commanders stood disarmed morally in 1937-38: they were able only to object individually that the charges leveled in their own cases were mistaken.

The timing of the GUGB's early moves against the higher command staff, whose real targets were Iakir and, it seems, Tukhachevsky, shows that the engine for the Tukhachevsky case and the ensuing mass military purge was entirely internal. It lay in Stalin's hardening intention to effect a destructive renewal of the leading officials of every Party and state institution, a subject taken up in the next chapter. In fact, the documents supposedly forged by the Nazi Party security service to incriminate Tukhachevsky were superfluous to the affair's origin and development.<sup>157</sup> The GUGB's scheming against

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<sup>157</sup> Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB*, 139, state that "the Gestapo plot...was unnecessary," as Stalin had decided to liquidate Tukhachevsky and his associates "unprompted by the Germans." But neither firsthand Soviet sources nor the Khrushchev- or Gorbachev-era investigative commissions have claimed that forgeries were a factor in Tukhachevsky's demise; in fact, Sudoplatov denied that any such documents even existed, and called the story of the Nazi forgeries a "myth." (Sudoplatov, *Spetsoperatsii*, 138.) Moreover, Stalin never mentioned any documentary "proof" of treason by Tukhachevsky et al. when he addressed the Military Council on the case on 2 June 1937. ("'Nevol'niki.'") And Lukes, *Czechoslovakia*, 102-06, argues persuasively that Benes did not (continued next page)

the higher command staff arose in the context of its assembly of a comprehensive case against Zinoviev and Kamenev in the spring and early summer of 1936. Putna's arrest occurred in the course of the trial itself, and testimony concerning his and Shmidt's alleged treachery was introduced purposefully into the trial record to justify a special probe of the military command. These events preceded the supposed appearance of the forgeries that implicated Tukhachevsky and their passage to Stalin by several months. Similarly, the NKVD had begun to undermine Iakir months before the general, according to Orlov's lurid 1956 story, decided to act against Stalin upon learning of his pre-Revolutionary past as an Okhrana informant.<sup>158</sup>

Instead, Stalin's attitude toward the professional commanders whose rise to prominence he had endorsed seems to have shifted from a posture of at least tacit support to one dominated by suspicion and enmity. This change must have taken place in 1935-36, and probably was prompted by the intersection of two developments: the threatening turn in Party life after Kirov's murder and the widening split in the high command between the Tukhachevsky group and Stalin's men. So severe was the souring of Stalin's relationship with his leading professional commanders that he began to plot their undoing and proceeded to decimate the entire higher command staff at the very time when Nazi Germany was becoming a genuine, imminent military threat, a trend that Tukhachevsky had described with alarm in a major, widely-noted 1935 article.<sup>159</sup> Answering the central question this conclusion poses—why Stalin commissioned and, indeed, welcomed the forcible displacement of the higher military command—continues to strain our powers of explanation and imagination, but Stalin's own commentaries at the time (discussed next) provide a singular standpoint for analysis of this issue.

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pass documents or information concerning Tukhachevsky to any Soviet official *before* the marshal's execution, an act that is central to accounts of the alleged forgeries and their role in Tukhachevsky's fall. In fact, this aspect of the Tukhachevsky affair is most interesting and significant as a case study that illustrates the sophistication and subtlety of NKVD disinformation, the purpose of which evidently was to fuel foreign speculation that there was a genuine anti-Stalin conspiracy at the top of the Red Army, thereby justifying the ruthlessness of Stalin's actions to suppress it.

<sup>158</sup>Orlov, "Sensational Secret."

## Chapter 4

### The Logic of Liquidation: The Larger Purposes of the Military Purge

Men without names—that's where our strength lies.

Stalin, addressing the Military Council of  
the Defense Commissariat, 2 June 1937

Chronologically and conceptually, the Tukhachevsky affair, the military aspect of the Great Purges, and the Great Purges as a whole nest together neatly: the Tukhachevsky case, heralding the onset of mass arrests and executions, is the single most dramatic episode of the military purge, which itself is an integral part of the Great Purges of 1936-38. In my view, it is fruitful to consider the latter as Stalin's response to deep-seated political and social tensions which he interpreted as manifestations of a sharpening class struggle. This chapter places the purge of the military command (as opposed to just the Tukhachevsky case, the subject of Chapter 3's final section) in this larger milieu in order to understand the political and ideological basis for a phenomenon that would seem, at first glance, to defy rational explanation. I rely especially on recent scholarship (exemplified by Martin Malia's *Soviet Tragedy*) that sees ideology—specifically, the imperative to found and defend socialism—as the engine of Soviet development; an overview of the Great Purges serves as my point of departure for a detailed analysis of the key evidence, much of it new, represented by speeches given by Stalin and his top lieutenants at the outset of the *Ezhovshchina* in 1937. These commentaries, viewed in conjunction with other types of evidence, furnish a coherent ideological and political rationale for the concerted attack on the military elite signaled by the removal and slaying of the Tukhachevsky command group.

In regard to the high command's violent transformation in 1937-38, the stalking and killing of Tukhachevsky, Iakir, and Uborevich in late spring 1937 were pivotal: they demolished at a stroke a magnet for antagonism and opposition to Voroshilov as well as the chief obstacle to the assembly of a high command dominated as never before by unalloyed Stalinists. The realignment of the high command to the quintessentially Stalinist form it took from 1938 to 1940 impaired top-level military administration and helped to derail strategic planning at a time of burgeoning crisis on both the USSR's European and Far Eastern borders. The virtually absolute preeminence of political soldiers and commissars within the high command from 1938 to 1940 proved a pernicious complement to the manifold structural, administrative, and human weaknesses that undermined the Red Army's ability to fight effectively.<sup>1</sup> In seeking to understand not only how but why the pre-purge high command's professional weight was largely dissipated, one must return to the military purge's larger purposes, which also governed the "destructive renovation" of other regime institutions.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the accessibility of millions of pages of previously secret official documents, the origins and purposes of the Great Purges remain a challenge to reconstruct.<sup>3</sup> Party and government documents declassified since the late 1980s have discredited claims that Stalin merely "sanctioned" rather than initiated and steered the *Ezhovshchina*, but they do not address directly the central issue of his motives in commissioning the systematic liquidation of thousands of the regime's leading officials.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>David M. Glantz, *Stumbling Colossus: The Red Army on the Eve of World War* (Lawrence, Kans.: University Press of Kansas, 1998) catalogues the Red Army's structural flaws in the years immediately preceding the Nazi invasion.

<sup>2</sup>Conquest, *Secret Police*, 13.

<sup>3</sup>Kotkin, "1991 and the Russian Revolution," 416. Much documentation, especially that generated by the NKVD's GUGB, remains inaccessible. Kotkin notes that the Politburo protocols "provide almost no evidence on [the origins of the Great Purges]."

<sup>4</sup>J. Arch Getty, *Origins of the Great Purges* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 195. See also Gábor Tamás Rittersporn, *Stalinist Simplifications and Soviet Complications* (Chur, Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1991), 184-85, which portrays Stalin as "merely the leader, and at times in a quite disadvantageous position, of one of the loose factions that were warring among themselves and against the rest of (continued next page)

This gap should not be too surprising: “a natural conspirator,”<sup>5</sup> Stalin almost certainly delivered his most secret and incriminating instructions to Ezhov, Iagoda, and other senior NKVD officials orally, either in his Kremlin office or over the secure telephone line between his office and the Lubyanka.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, the historian still must proceed mainly by deduction and inference, that is, in essentially the same way that his or her predecessor had to when only censored official materials and emigré accounts, supplemented by the regional records contained in the Smolensk Archive, were available for study.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, the new evidence, which consists not only of official documents but of firsthand accounts, is illuminating in important ways. Apart from demonstrating Stalin’s continuous, intimate involvement in directing, monitoring, and curtailing the Great Purges, they also bare their prodigious administrative machinery, which entailed joint action at all levels throughout the country by the Party *apparatus*, the state security service, and the judiciary.<sup>8</sup> Most significantly, perhaps, the new evidence

society.” As this quotation suggests, one of the leitmotifs of now-dated revisionist interpretations of the Great Purges is that they originated in a “center-periphery conflict in the party” which somehow spun out of control. (Getty, *Origins*, 197.)

<sup>5</sup>Kotkin, “1991 and the Russian Revolution,” 415. Tucker has observed that Stalin’s “mind worked conspiratorially and was at its most creative, so to speak, in so functioning.” (Robert C. Tucker, foreword to *Stalin’s Letters*, xi.)

<sup>6</sup>The log of visitors to Stalin’s office records 31 appearances by Ezhov in 1936; 20 by Iagoda the same year; 174 by Ezhov in 1937; and 104 in 1938. (Khlevniuk, *Politbiuro*, 290-91.) According to Orlov, *Secret History*, x, Stalin “personally gave” instructions to NKVD officials at “conferences in the Kremlin.” Another NKVD defector, Genrikh S. Liushkov, a top state security official who escaped to the Japanese in June 1938, corroborates Orlov’s statement in an unusual way. Liushkov was dispatched to the Far East in July 1937 to purge the region. In the course of his interrogation by the Japanese, Liushkov stated that he had met with Stalin, Molotov, Ezhov, and Voroshilov “at the end of July.” Stalin, according to Liushkov, directed him “to clean up the army and its rear in the most determined manner” in view of the danger of war with Japan, and that it was necessary “in cleaning up the rear to terrorize the district and the frontier so as to prevent any Japanese work.” (“Interrogation of Liushkov,” 12 May 1939, U.S. National Archives, Correspondence of the Military Intelligence Division Relating to General, Political, Economic, and Military Conditions in Russia and the Soviet Union, 1918-1941, RG 165, roll 17, frames 148-49; on Liushkov, see Alvin D. Coox, “L’affaire Lyushkov: Anatomy of a Defector,” *Soviet Studies* 19, no. 3 [January 1968]: 405-20.) The visitor log for Stalin’s office shows that Liushkov did meet with Stalin, Ezhov, Molotov, and Voroshilov for fifteen minutes on 28 July 1937. (“Posetiteli,” 1995, no. 4: 60.) Finally, there is no way to determine how often Stalin spoke with Iagoda, Ezhov, or Voroshilov over the telephone. Leading Party and government officials had their own secure telephone network, often referred colloquially to as the *VCh* (for *vysokaia chastota* or “high frequency”).

<sup>7</sup>Useful commentaries on the nature of this new evidence and associated methodological issues include Kotkin, “1991 and the Russian Revolution,” 387-92; David-Fox and Hoffmann, “Politburo Protocols”; and A. N. Artizov and O. V. Naumov, “Nekotorye problemy publikatsii dokumentov plenumov TsK VKP(b)-KPSS,” *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 1998, no. 4: 66-76.

<sup>8</sup>Suvenirov, *Tragediia RKKa*, details the workings of the machinery of terror within the Defense Commissariat.

supports the view that Stalin purposefully commissioned the *Ezhovshchina* to effect a wholesale turnover in an increasingly entrenched regime elite in order to cleanse and rejuvenate the basic institutions of the immature socialist order. In so doing, Stalin also managed to skirt fault lines in the regime and society opened or widened by his fantastic program to implant socialism in the USSR as rapidly as possible.

## I

Sweeping and cataclysmic, the Great Purges were rooted in the broader political and social processes of the time, namely, in the Stalin leadership's abiding commitment to the cause of "socialist construction" in the USSR and to continuing progress in the cultural transformation of society. Their genesis appears to lie in the social and economic upheavals to which the ascendant Stalinist faction of the Party leadership had subjected the country from 1929 to 1933. The Great Break, as the revolutionary initiatives of 1929 were christened, was a product of Stalin's determination to forge, quickly and forcibly, an entirely new social and economic order on the foundation of full collectivization of agriculture and planned industrialization. Evaluated in rational, economic terms, the industrialization drive at the core of the extravagant First Five-Year Plan was a mixed success; exorbitantly costly, wasteful, and cruel, it did establish major new industries that either did not exist previously or were present only in embryonic form. These industries were to prove vital to the country's decisive role in securing Nazi Germany's defeat during the Second World War.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, the simultaneous campaign of coercive, wholesale collectivization—in essence, the attempted "industrialization of agriculture"—was an unmitigated economic disaster and a vast human tragedy.<sup>10</sup> The

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<sup>9</sup>R. W. Davies, "Industry," 143; Mark Harrison, "The Soviet Union: The Defeated Victor," in *The Economics of World War II*, ed. idem (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 270-71.

<sup>10</sup>Malaparte, *Volga Rises*, 59-61, ruminates imaginatively on the military implications of collectivization. As an Italian war correspondent, he observed the Nazi advance into the Ukraine in summer 1941. For a careful economic assessment of Stalinist industrialization and collectivization, see Holland Hunter and Janusz M. (continued next page)

extent and gravity of the economic and social catastrophe in such regions as the Ukraine and Kazakhstan were such that the Party's depiction of the collectivization campaign as a glorious chapter in socialism's creation was nothing less than a patent, grotesque lie.<sup>11</sup> There also existed a jarring gap between the expectations of many Party members and the actual outcome of collectivization and, to a lesser extent, the First Five-Year Plan: social dislocation, famine, impoverishment, and, in the countryside, utter prostration. But Stalin could not admit that collectivization, in particular, was a tragic blunder, for that acknowledgment would have called into question his role as Party leader and even the basis of the Party's claim to rule. Despite mounting evidence of its economic debility, the kolkhoz, "canonized" as "the bedrock of the Soviet order" (in Malia's phrase), could not be forsaken "because to do so would be to repudiate the whole system."<sup>12</sup>

Still, the forced-march industrialization and blitzkrieg collectivization of the First Five-Year Plan were considered misconceived Stalinist adventures in some Party circles by 1932. The coercive savagery with which collectivization was carried out not only produced colossal losses in lives and property, but spawned massive peasant disaffection. Consequently, in a country still comprised largely of peasants, Stalin's policies were seen by some Party officials to have shaken the Party's position. But dissatisfaction with the regime seems to have been fairly widespread among workers as well, for the influx of millions of peasants into the Plan's industrial centers, new and old, had caused urban living standards to plummet.<sup>13</sup> Neither the Party's leadership nor its

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Szymer, *Faulty Foundations: Soviet Economic Policies, 1928-1940* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992).

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, "The Bolshevik Party in the Struggle for the Collectivization of Agriculture (1930-1934)," in *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course* (New York: International Publishers, 1939; reprint, San Francisco: Proletarian Publishers, 1972), 300-30.

<sup>12</sup> Malia, *Soviet Tragedy*, 216, 243-44.

<sup>13</sup> For a description of conditions in Moscow, see David L. Hoffmann, "The Urban Environment and Living Standards," in *Peasant Metropolis: Social Identities in Moscow, 1929-1941* (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994), 127-57; on Magnitogorsk, a new city, see Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, whose coverage verges on the encyclopedic. Worker attitudes during the first half of the 1930s are discussed in S. Davies, *Popular Opinion*, 23-31; Jeffrey J. Rossman, "The Teikovo Cotton Workers' Strike of April 1932: Class, Gender and (continued next page)

rank and file had foreseen these unpalatable byproducts of Stalin's program to create the economic and sociological base for Soviet socialism in one headlong revolutionary leap. Some Party officials and members were sufficiently troubled by the shocking misery around them to question the General Line of socio-economic policy or the manner of its implementation: their discontent centered on the imperious general secretary.<sup>14</sup>

In a regime lacking institutional mechanisms for channeling grievances, disquiet over the willful and mercurial nature of Stalin's leadership and its damaging effect on the Party's stature crystallized in the form of several covert opposition groups. All were ineffectual. One, led by Sergei I. Syrtsov, whom Stalin had just favored with promotion to candidate membership in the Politburo, and Central Committee member V. V. Lominadze, was exposed by the OGPU in 1930. Two others, both uncovered in 1932, also included prominent Party figures who had grown disillusioned with Stalin. The group led by A. P. Smirnov, an Old Bolshevik who had joined the Party in 1896, went so far as to discuss Stalin's removal before it was discovered. Significantly, none of the group's three principal figures—all of them Old Bolsheviks who had joined the Party between 1896 and 1907—was tainted by either a Trotskyite or Rightist past.<sup>15</sup>

Martem'ian N. Riutin, an Old Bolshevik, Rightist, and former candidate member of the Central Committee, led a ring composed of a number of like-minded minor officials. The Union of Marxist-Leninists, as they styled themselves, charged that Stalin had "established his personal dictatorship over the [Party] and the entire country, broken with Leninism, embarked on the path of the most unrestrained adventurism and wild personal arbitrariness, and put the Soviet Union on the brink of the abyss." Their polemic demanded a radical overhaul of Party policy, especially in the countryside, and

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Identity Politics in Stalin's Russia," *The Russian Review* 56, no. 1 (1997): 44-69; and Donald Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization* (London: Pluto Press, 1986), 76-102.

<sup>14</sup>Khlevniuk, *Stalin, NKVD i sovetskoe obshchestvo*, 11-16; Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, 205-212.

<sup>15</sup>Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, 209-11; Conquest, *Great Terror*, 23, 26-27.

called for the immediate removal of “Stalin and his clique.” Once the Riutin Appeal began to circulate and be discussed among ex-oppositionists, the OGPU quickly zeroed in on its primary author, whose sympathy for the Rightist critique of Stalin’s immoderate economic schemes had led to his expulsion from the Party and arrest in 1930. Rearrested in September 1932, Riutin was given a ten-year prison sentence for leading a “counter-revolutionary group.” (He was among the very first to be shot in 1937.) Stalin apparently viewed the Riutin Appeal’s call for his removal as tantamount to a plot to assassinate him, and is said to have reacted to the case with vindictive rage.<sup>16</sup>

The Riutin case figured in all of the great political trials of 1936-38: according to the testimony presented at these elaborately contrived spectacles, Riutin’s group allegedly brought together the various opposition groups of the late 1920s “on a terrorist basis” for the first time.<sup>17</sup> In this connection, the pretext for Riutin’s shooting on 10 January 1937 was a new charge of terrorism that was leveled against him (apparently in autumn 1936, that is, after Ezhov took charge of the NKVD) solely on the basis of the documents he had drafted in 1932.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, when Stalin installed Ezhov as commissar for internal affairs in September 1936, the dictator faulted Iagoda, Ezhov’s predecessor, by noting that the NKVD was “four years behind” in exposing the “Trotskyite-Zinovievite bloc.”<sup>19</sup> Rather than being an allusion solely to the Riutin case, it seems that this was a more general reference to what Stalin apparently saw as the

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<sup>16</sup>Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, 211-12; Conquest, *Great Terror*, 23-25, 147; Volkogonov, *Triumfi tragediia*, vol. 1, pt. 2, 86; “O dele tak nazyvaemogo ‘soiuza marksistov-lenintsev,’” *Izvestiia TsK KPSS*, 1989, no. 6: 103-7, 109, 111, 115, from which the quoted material is taken. Stalin supposedly demanded that the Politburo sanction Riutin’s execution, but it is said to have demurred on account of Riutin’s years of service to the Party. (Riutin joined the Party in 1914.) Khlevniuk, *Politbiuro*, 76-77, dismisses the supposed Politburo disagreement over Riutin’s fate as an unsubstantiated “legend.”

<sup>17</sup>Conquest, *Great Terror*, 25.

<sup>18</sup>“O dele tak nazyvaemogo ‘soiuza marksistov-lenintsev,’” 111-15.

<sup>19</sup>Volkogonov, *Triumfi tragediia*, vol. 1, pt. 2, 192.

coalescence of the remnants of the defeated opposition movements behind an anti-Stalin—and therefore counter-revolutionary—program.<sup>20</sup>

Ezhov made a similar declaration during his report on 2 March 1937 to the Central Committee plenum that preceded the NKVD's onslaught:

By the way, comrades, then [1932] the NKVD already knew of terrorist cases—for example, the Eismont [another Old Bolshevik and supposed Rightist] and Riutin case. In this regard, there were indeed conversations then that the Trotskyites, the Rightists, and the Zinovievites were uniting for joint active struggle. Despite all of these investigative materials it was apparent that the agent materials were not put to use. The testimony of Riutin, Eismont, and others was not put to use. As a result of all this we had such a situation in which all of the base work of the vile Trotskyites was not brought to light to a sufficient extent. Could the counter-revolutionary organization of Trotskyites and Zinovievites have been exposed at that time?

His response was categorical: "I maintain that all of the work of the center could have been exposed then, especially as one of the accused gave us testimony about terror." The menacing implication of Ezhov's pronouncement was that those Party members who had surreptitiously aligned themselves with the opposition and escaped exposure due to the

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<sup>20</sup>Getty has argued that Stalin's September 1936 reference to the NKVD being "four years behind" referred not specifically to the Riutin Appeal (as Conquest, *Great Terror*, 25, 138, has suggested), but to Trotsky's positive response to a proposal to establish an underground alliance that united Trotsky's followers with certain other anti-Stalin oppositionists inside the Soviet Union. The initiative for the formation of a united opposition group came from Trotskyite Ivan N. Smirnov, whose proposal was passed to Lev Sedov, Trotsky's son, in October 1932. (Getty, *Origins*, 119-21; idem, "The Politics of Repression Revisited," in *Stalinist Terror*, 60.) Robert H. McNeal, *Stalin: Man and Ruler* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 184-86, 189, takes the same view. In his report at the Central Committee plenum of February-March 1937, Ezhov does seem to link the "failure" represented by the four-year lag to a broad amalgamation of anti-regime groups under Trotsky's flag. ("Materialy plenuma," 1994, no. 10: 22-23.) Moreover, the plenum resolution on Ezhov's report states that "in 1932-33 the Secret Political Department [of the GUGB] had in its hands everything necessary to expose fully the monstrous conspiracy of the Trotskyites against Soviet power....From [agent] material it was evident that the Trotskyite center was setting up organizational links with in-place groups of Trotskyites and carrying out Trotsky's directive on the bloc with the Zinovievites and Rightists." (Ibid., 1995, no. 2: 24.) Clearly, Stalin and Ezhov saw the year 1932 (coincidentally, the de facto final year of the First Five-Year Plan) as a watershed in the growth of the Trotskyite specter.

NKVD's "intolerable laxity" under Iagoda would be unmasked at last.<sup>21</sup> And it is especially notable that Tukhachevsky, in his appearance before the tribunal that sentenced him to death, was forced to state that he considered the genesis of "our military conspiracy" to date to 1932. It supposedly was then that he had agreed to a proposal from Trotsky "to rally the Trotskyite cadres" in the army.<sup>22</sup> Hence 1932, in Stalin's mind, represented the date of Trotskyism's mutation from a misguided band of schismatics into a nefarious international conspiracy against his regime.

It seems, then, that Stalin's awareness and resentment of the antipathy within the Party aroused by the calamity of collectivization hardened into a determination to act against those he came to see as a brake on the next phase of historical development—namely, the period between the construction of a socialist order (a result supposedly achieved in its essentials by 1936) and the dawn of a fully communist society. Despite the inexorable enlargement of the state administration engendered by Stalinist collectivization and industrialization, Stalin "resisted the formation of a self-conscious governing stratum."<sup>23</sup> In his mind, as the work of building basic socialist institutions neared completion, the Bolshevik old guard and the state's entrenched managerial elite had come to weigh down the revolutionary movement's relentless movement forward and the realization of his charismatic, Marxian "vision of time transcendence in economic life."<sup>24</sup> Stalin had long held that "all of our movement ahead, each and any serious success of ours in the realm of socialist construction is the expression and result of the class struggle..." in the USSR; further, "the resistance of capitalist elements will increase, the class struggle will sharpen..." in concert with

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<sup>21</sup>"Materialy plenuma," 1994, no. 10: 22-23. By remarking "that's certainly not laxity" when Ezhov finished his explanation of the NKVD's "failure," Stalin implied that something far more serious and sinister than mere carelessness was involved.

<sup>22</sup>"Spravka o proverke," 59.

<sup>23</sup>J. Arch Getty, "Samokritika Rituals in the Stalinist Central Committee, 1933-38," *The Russian Review* 58, no. 1 (1999): 69.

<sup>24</sup>Hanson, *Time and Revolution*, 168-69.

revolutionary progress toward socialism. Accordingly, he evidently resolved to use the power of the state to stoke such conflict and smash the internal restraints to further advances that, according to Stalinist theory, would come to the fore.<sup>25</sup> By the time of the Central Committee plenum of February-March 1937, Stalin clearly had determined to sweep clean the leading positions in virtually every institution of the Party and state, an extraordinary and hazardous (because the armed forces and state security service themselves were purged unsparingly) aim which was indeed accomplished by the end of 1938. The manic national crusade against “enemies of the people” can be seen as a perilous Stalinist initiative to purify the Party and state machines and propel them forward after a period of stasis; as such, it represented a momentous new phase in the revolutionary socio-economic offensive launched in 1928.<sup>26</sup>

Ezhov was appointed people’s commissar for internal affairs at the end of September 1936, and his fanaticism probably contributed to the ferocity and breadth of the terror campaign between spring 1937 and autumn 1938 that bears his name. He supervised the details of the NKVD’s far-flung operations, but it was Stalin who was responsible for what Robert H. McNeal has termed the *Ezhovshchina*’s “design.”<sup>27</sup> None other than Molotov endorsed this very point: “Ezhov [whom Stalin replaced with Beria in November 1938] was not hostile, he just overdid it—Stalin had demanded an

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<sup>25</sup>I. V. Stalin, “Ob industrializatsii i khlebnoi probleme,” 9 July 1928, in *Sochineniia*, vol. 11 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1949), 171. This statement, which Stalin made in reference to the difficulties expected to arise from simultaneous forced collectivization and rapid industrialization, expresses the same idea he set forth (albeit more dramatically and fully) in his speech of 3 March 1937. The latter was delivered at the Central Committee plenum that immediately preceded the onset of mass purging.

<sup>26</sup>Malia, *Soviet Tragedy*, 249; Rees, “Stalinism,” 59, 62. The latter, 62, comments: “The transformation of cadres in these [Soviet] institutions was [the *Ezhovshchina*’s] principal achievement.” Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 286-354, sees the mass terror’s origins in the Party’s frenzied quest for internal purity, which grew out of its roles as guide and monitor to the state administration and society at large. See also the thought-provoking remarks in Igal Halfin and Jochen Hellbeck, “Rethinking the Stalinist Subject: Stephen Kotkin’s ‘Magnetic Mountain’ and the State of Soviet Historical Studies,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, n.s., 44, no. 3 (1996): 460-62.

<sup>27</sup>McNeal, *Stalin*, 191, 200.

increase in the pressure.”<sup>28</sup> Stalin approved at least 383 lists of recommended sentences sent to him by Ezhov in 1937-38; the rosters covered some 44,000 people, to whom “first category” punishment—shooting—was meted out to 39,000. (One such list sent 3,167 to their deaths. Stalin signed 362 of them; Molotov, 373; Voroshilov, 195.) Furthermore, in 1937, at least, the GUGB apparently required Stalin’s express permission to arrest, let alone execute, ranking officials.<sup>29</sup> Yet the *Ezhovshchina* quickly acquired a dynamic and propulsive mechanism of its own: denunciations and investigations resulted in arrests, which, in turn, almost invariably generated coerced confessions which implicated a victim’s friends, acquaintances, and colleagues. Hence, once the center set the state security machine in motion across the country, its operations became largely self-sustaining.

The *Ezhovshchina* struck several groups within society with particular force. Supporting the view that the *Ezhovshchina* was inspired by Stalin’s judgment that disciplined, continuous revolutionary advance required a broad renewal of the regime’s leading cadres, its foremost target was the ruling elite: the higher officials who managed the parallel bureaucracies of the Party and state in Moscow and the provinces, commanded the armed forces, and ran the state security service.<sup>30</sup> Members of the Party’s Central Committee; secretaries of republic, *oblast’*, and city Party committees; and commissars and members of the collegiums of ministries and other state agencies were

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<sup>28</sup>F. Chuev, *Sto sorok besed s Molotovym: Iz dnevnika F. Chueva* (Moscow: Izdatel’skii tsentr “TERRA,” 1991), 400.

<sup>29</sup>Volkogonov, *Triumfi tragediia*, vol. 1, pt. 2, 241-42, 301; “Ob antikonstitutsionnoi praktike 30-40-x i nachala 50-x godov,” in “‘Massovye repressii opravdany byt’ ne mogu,” *Vestnik Arkhiva Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, supplement to *Istochnik*, 1995, no. 1: 124. The documents published in “Rasstrel, po raznariadke, ili Kak eto delali bol’sheviki,” *Trud*, 4 June 1992; and “Iosif Stalin: ‘Vinovnykh sudit’ uskorenno. PRIGOVOR—RASSTREL,” ed. Tamara Zamiatina, *Izvestiia*, 10 June 1992, highlight Stalin’s role as orchestrator and director of the *Ezhovshchina*.

<sup>30</sup>A. L. Unger, “Stalin’s Renewal of the Leading Stratum: A Note on the Great Purge,” *Soviet Studies* 20, no. 3 (January 1969): 326.

foremost among the civilian officials who fell in droves in 1937-38.<sup>31</sup> It was principally from this elite that the delegates to the Seventeenth (1934) Congress had been drawn. Of 1,966 delegates to the Congress, 1,108 were arrested, of whom the vast majority assuredly were shot. A Central Committee of 139 was selected in 1934; ninety-three members perished from 1937 to 1939. Five more members killed themselves between 1936 and 1941. All but two had joined the Party before 1920.<sup>32</sup> Their places were taken by a "second generation of Stalinists" raised from obscurity at the Eighteenth Congress in 1939; half were not even Party members fifteen years earlier, that is, at the time of Lenin's death.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, inside the military, most of the slain generals were Party veterans: 378 of 657 ranking officers rehabilitated by April 1963 had entered the Party before 1920.<sup>34</sup>

Such statistics point to the core rationale for the *Ezhovshchina*: it enabled Stalin to staff the higher *nomenklatura* (encompassing the Party *apparat*, the state administration, the armed forces, and the state security service) with thousands of new officials, most of whom were products of Soviet institutions and the five-year plan culture of unremitting mobilization and class combat. Drawn from the peasantry or rapidly expanding working class, the promotees typically were the technically educated beneficiaries of the "proletarian dictatorship." Unlike the seasoned cadres of Stalin's generation, they possessed little adult experience of the world before the Revolution.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>J. Arch Getty and William Chase, "Patterns of Repression Among the Soviet Elite in the 1930s: A Biographical Approach," in *Stalinist Terror*, 230, 239, 242-44.

<sup>32</sup>Nikita S. Khrushchev, "Doklad na zakrytom zasedanii XX s'ezda KPSS," in *Khrushchev o Staline*, 2d ed., comp. A. Serebrennikov (New York: Teleks, 1989), 20; "O sud'be chlenov i kandidatov v chleny TsK VKP(b), izbrannogo XVII s'ezdom partii," comp. N. Mikhailov et al., *Izvestia TsK KPSS*, 1989, no. 2: 86-87.

<sup>33</sup>Rigby, "Was Stalin a Disloyal Patron?," 316. Unger, "Stalin's Renewal," 328, speaks of "the absorption of the second generation of the Soviet leading stratum into the ranks of the now refashioned party."

<sup>34</sup>"M. N. Tukhachevskii i 'voenno-fashistskii zagovor,'" ed. V. A. Lebedev, in *Voенно-istoricheskii arkhiv. Vypusk 2* (Moscow, 1997), 80. Of these 657 victims from the higher officer corps (not including the political staff), 553 were Party members. (This document is the second, final part of the 1964 Shvernik commission report whose first part is referred to earlier as "Spravka o proverke.")

<sup>35</sup>Malia, *Soviet Tragedy*, 248-49, 257; Fitzpatrick, "New Elite," 397-400. Kenneth C. Farmer, *The Soviet Administrative Elite* (New York: Praeger, 1992), 136-39, analyzes the magnitude of "the Stalinist (continued next page)

Moreover, the replacements must have understood that in a top-down, control-oriented system, their status rested on their ability to fulfill central directives without objection or vacillation, though the huge, intertwined Party and state bureaucracies remained, as before, unreliable and inefficient executors, requiring constant monitoring (*kontrol'*) and checking (*proverka*) via the rudimentary technical means then available or on-the-spot inspection.<sup>36</sup>

Although the ruling (as well as intellectual) elite was devastated, literally no one was safe. It apparently was Stalin's intention that society at large, which had proven disorderly and undisciplined, also be scoured forcefully. On 31 July 1937 he approved a plan that established control figures for summary executions and arrests of "former kulaks, criminals, and anti-Soviet elements" by republic and *oblast'*. At least 62,950 (and ten thousand more from the camp population) were slated for shooting.<sup>37</sup> A former NKVD communications officer has written that he handled "hundreds of signals to all parts of the Soviet Union" that mandated the execution of thousands of "enemies of the people" by *oblast'* or city. The target was established by NKVD Headquarters in Moscow; the directive was sent to the provincial internal affairs directorate; and then "the local officials would ransack their lists and records to collect every sort of incriminating trace; for example, 'associated with the White Army, bourgeois background, Trotskyist, Menshevik, Esdek, Nationalist.' Often they were hard put to fill out their quota; but they dared not fail to carry out Moscow's orders speedily and to the letter."<sup>38</sup> The proportions of the *nomenklatura* and the intelligentsia that were arrested,

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transformation" of the Party-state elite and the attributes of "the Brezhnev cohort," that is, "men who first accepted a Party or government position in the period 1936-1940."

<sup>36</sup>Rees, "Stalinism," 53. Rees also makes the important point that "administrative control from above was complemented by control from below through popular mobilization, and...the Stakhanovite movement." The systemic inefficiency started at the top, as the Politburo often submerged itself in trivial matters. See, for example, David-Fox and Hoffmann, "Politburo Protocols," 101-02.

<sup>37</sup>"Rasstrel, po raznariadke."

<sup>38</sup>Vladimir and Evdokia Petrov, *Empire of Fear* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1956), 73-74.

incarcerated, or executed were substantially higher than that for the general population, although the number of ordinary people who were persecuted probably greatly exceeded the number of victims from elite groups.<sup>39</sup> To the extent a policy of dealing death and social destruction on such a fantastic scale can be said to have served a rational political end, Stalin's aim must have been to remove prophylactically those considered to be troublemakers and potential subversives not only from positions of authority but from the general population. The NKVD's "mass operations for defeating and uprooting enemy elements" (as the terror campaign of 1937-38 was characterized officially) thereby would further the regime's policies and the attainment of its goals. Indeed, the Sovnarkom-Central Committee resolution of 17 November 1938 that reined in state security and the judiciary crisply expressed this very idea: "The removal of saboteur, insurgent, and spy cadres from the country has played its own positive role in supporting the future successes of socialist construction."<sup>40</sup> As the deepening of socialism would entail an elemental cultural transformation, the cleansing of the general population would hasten society's development and progression from communism's first or lower phase (socialism) to its higher one.<sup>41</sup>

Remarks made decades later by Molotov amplify the official line at the time of the Great Purges that they had fortified the regime. He maintained that Stalin had acted

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<sup>39</sup>Police and judicial records show that death sentences were passed on 681,692 in 1937-38 for crimes the authorities classified as overtly political, i.e., the offense fell under one of the sections of the infamous Article 58 of the Criminal Code. (J. Arch Getty, Gábor T. Rittersporn, and Viktor N. Zemskov, "Victims of the Soviet Penal System in the Pre-war Years: A First Approach on the Basis of Archival Evidence," *American Historical Review* 98 [October 1993]: 1023.) A sense of the scale of the cataclysm of 1937-38 is conveyed by the fact that 1,118 people were recorded as having been shot on these grounds in 1936. However, the number shot *without* a formal sentence of death cannot be established precisely. (Walter Laqueur, *The Dream That Failed: Reflections on the Soviet Union* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994], 139.) In general, Laqueur is highly skeptical of the conclusions Getty, Rittersporn, and Zemskov have drawn from their study of NKVD/Ministry of Internal Affairs records. Robert Conquest, "Letter to the Editor," *American Historical Review* 99 (June 1994): 1038-40, argues that the Getty-Rittersporn-Zemskov figures "are certainly incomplete in important ways."

<sup>40</sup>"Postanovlenie SNK SSSR i TsK VKP(b) ob arestakh, prokurorskom nadzore i vedenii sledstviia," 17 November 1938, in *Nakanune*, 1:3-4.

<sup>41</sup>I. V. Stalin, "O proekte Konstitutsii Soiuza SSR," 25 November 1936, in *Sochineniia*, vol. 1 (14), 149-50. Stalin announced that "we already have attained, in the main, the first phase of communism, socialism." Communism's "higher phase" lay "in the future."

so ruthlessly due to his clear-sighted expectation that the USSR soon would confront fascist aggression:

1937 was necessary. Bear in mind that after the Revolution we slashed right and left; we scored victories, but remnants of enemies of various stripes survived, and in the face of the growing danger of fascist aggression, they might have united. Thanks to '37 there was no fifth column among us during the war. You know, even among Bolsheviks there were and still are some who are good and devoted when all is well, when no danger threatens the country and the Party. But if anything comes up, they waver and change sides.<sup>42</sup>

Molotov applied this justification for pre-emptive killing specifically to Tukhachevsky and the other ranking commanders who scorned Voroshilov:

I don't think that the rehabilitation of many of the military who were repressed in '37 was correct....the main thing is that at the decisive moment one could not depend on them....if the Tukhachevskys and the Iakirs, with the Rykovs and the Zinovievs, had started an opposition in wartime, there would have been such a sharp struggle, there would have been a colossal number of victims. Colossal.<sup>43</sup>

These comments by one of Stalin's oldest and closest collaborators are noteworthy. They suggest that Stalin saw the Tukhachevsky group and the defeated opposition leaders as essentially alike: they were not merely potential impediments to the further progress of "socialist construction" but traitors-in-waiting whose opportunity to run

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<sup>42</sup>Chuev, *Sto sorok besed*, 390.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 390, 413. Kaganovich, too, advanced the fifth-column argument decades later. According to Chuev, *Tak govoril Kaganovich*, 36, Kaganovich affirmed: "There was a fifth column. If we had not destroyed this fifth column, we would not have won the war." (See also G. A. Kumanev, "Dve besedy s L. M. Kaganovichem," *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 1999, no. 2: 114.) And Vyshinskii protested to Churchill's interpreter at the Yalta Conference: "I know what you people abroad have been saying—that I was responsible for the death and exile of many innocent people. But do you realize that I saved the lives of thousands who might have been engulfed in the plot to undermine the safety of our State?" (A. H. Birse, *Memoirs of an Interpreter* [New York: Coward-Mecca, 1967], 185.) This argument was, of course, a convenient one, but it seems that Stalin's men genuinely believed that past opposition to or antipathy for Stalin on the part of Bukharin, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Tukhachevsky, and other leading victims of the Great Purges was "objectively" treasonous even if they did not actually engage in espionage.

amok inevitably would arrive with the outbreak of a war stemming from the condition of “capitalist encirclement.” From this peculiar yet ideologically-informed perspective, their removal and replacement by a new cohort of junior Stalinist officials actually would strengthen the regime, especially given the appearance of a direct, potent military threat in the form of Nazi Germany.<sup>44</sup> In a June 1937 general order on the NKVD’s “exposure” of a “traitorous counter-revolutionary military fascist organization” in the Red Army, Voroshilov declared: “Purging the army of putrid trash, we thereby make it still stronger and more invulnerable.”<sup>45</sup> This was the basic Stalinist justification for the mass purge of the military in a nutshell, expressed at its outset.

In summary, then, the aims of the *Ezhovshchina* appear to have been to effect a wholesale replacement of the higher *nomenklatura* in Moscow and the provinces and, in addition, to isolate or physically eliminate those in society deemed to be actual or potential threats to the regime’s aspiration to shepherd society into communism based on their personal political history or social origin.<sup>46</sup> (To some extent, of course, these objectives overlapped.) Weighed against his and the regime’s political needs as he saw them at the beginning of 1937, Stalin probably looked on the *Ezhovshchina* as a masterful and essential triumph. He not only had secured his position as Lenin’s rightful successor and the creator of a socialist order against any challenge, but, in his own mind, had primed the Party *apparatus* and the state administration for a victorious revolutionary march to full communism, the justification for the tumult and privation the people had endured. For the country, however, Stalin’s success as a Marxist visionary and politically adept tyrant was a national calamity with incalculable and enduring effects.

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<sup>44</sup>Stalin, “Otchetnyi doklad na XVIII s’ezde partii,” 1 (14):368-69.

<sup>45</sup>“Prikaz s obrashcheniem k armii po povodu ‘raskrytiia Narkomatom vnutrennikh del predatel’skoi, kontrrevoliutsionnoi voennoi fashistskoi organizatsii v RKKK,’” 7 June 1937, in *Priказы*, 16-18.

<sup>46</sup>Oleg Khlevnyuk [sic], “The Objectives of the Great Terror, 1937-1938,” trans. E. A. Rees, in Julian Cooper, Maureen Perrie, and E. A. Rees, eds., *Soviet History, 1917-53: Essays in Honour of R. W. Davies* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 167-68.

## II

As befitted Stalin's conspiratorial nature, the only publicly-released statement under his name that concerned the Great Purges is his report to the Central Committee plenum of 23 February to 5 March 1937, which was published in *Pravda* a few weeks later after what must have been scrupulous editorial review.<sup>47</sup> The plenum dwelt on the "lessons of wrecking, sabotage, and espionage by Japanese-German-Trotskyite agents" (among other agenda items), so the gathering presaged the national campaign against "enemies of the people" ushered in by the official announcement of the case brought against the Tukhachevsky group.<sup>48</sup> The very fact that the Tukhachevsky affair and the orgy of denunciations it inspired were the next political events of national import after the plenum underscores the linkage between the *Ezhovshchina*'s overall aims, to which Stalin alluded in his plenum speech, and the gutting of the high command.

The most significant aspect of Stalin's report is that it furnished a seemingly rational theoretical basis for a crusade against the enemy within. If one accepts that Stalin was a serious theoretician, revolutionary innovator, and original interpreter of Lenin's legacy, then his plenum report does provide genuine insight into his conception of the *Ezhovshchina* as an uncompromising mass cleansing of the Party rather than merely an exercise of unbridled, naked violence.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, we now are able to set Stalin's

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<sup>47</sup>The speech's text was published in *Pravda* on 29 March 1937 and in *Bol'shevik* on 1 April. Only the edited, official version seems to exist; see, for example, "Materialy plenuma," 1995, no. 3: 3-15, which was taken from the stenographic record in the Presidential Archive. This text lacks the section headings that appear in the text published in *Pravda* on 29 March 1937, but otherwise is identical. Hence it is not a verbatim record of Stalin's speech at the plenum's evening session of 3 March 1937.

<sup>48</sup>"Materialy plenuma," 1992, nos. 2-3: 3, details the plenum's agenda.

<sup>49</sup>Hanson, *Time and Revolution*, 134-47, effectively makes the case for Stalin as theoretician of "socialist construction." Walicki states that Stalin "was not a talented Marxist theorist," but also notes that Stalin was "acutely aware that his legitimacy as a communist leader was conditional on his active commitment to the realization of the Marxist vision of universal human liberation." Viewing Stalin as, above all, "a revolutionary Marxist, a Bolshevik, and a faithful disciple of Lenin," Walicki analyzes Stalinism as a "totalitarian ideocracy" rather than merely a system of power. (Walicki, *Marxism*, 404, 426, 429, 453.) Kolakowski, too, sees "Stalinist socialism" as legitimized entirely by ideology; consequently, its ruling elite was "essentially ideological and internationalist in character and could not be replaced by the police, the army, or any other institution." (continued next page)

heavily ideological message in the framework provided by his chief henchmen's accompanying reports and commentaries, which were declassified only recently and are available—in contrast to Stalin's report—in their unedited, verbatim form.<sup>50</sup> The reports by Molotov and Ezhov, in particular, foreshadow state security's onslaught and complement Stalin's theoretical warrant for the liquidation of supposed foes in important ways. All three addresses focused on the necessity of vigilance and heightening the struggle against the internal enemy.<sup>51</sup> By comparison, Voroshilov's report on the state of the Red Army was relatively restrained, which provoked Molotov to criticize it acerbically. Hence the plenum affords us an opportunity to examine, in its own terms, the Stalin leadership's advance justification of the *Ezhovshchina* as well as its advocacy, by and large, of a radically purgative course.

The plenum convened in an atmosphere of foreboding and anticipation. The trial of the "Anti-Soviet Trotskyite Center" had just been staged in January and Ordzhonikidze, the people's commissar for heavy industry, had died under mysterious circumstances on 19 February, which delayed the plenum's opening until the twenty-third. It was attended by eight of the Central Committee's nine military members as well as a dozen top commanders and political officers for whom Voroshilov had secured

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(Kolakowski, *Breakdown*, 90.) From a different perspective, Lars T. Lih argues that a selection of Stalin's correspondence with Molotov shows that he was a "principled intriguer," as opposed to the "unprincipled intriguer" of Bukharin's bitter complaints. (Lars T. Lih, introduction to *Stalin's Letters*, 61-62.)

<sup>50</sup> According to Artizov and Naumov, "Nekotorye problemy," 68-71, 75, there exist three versions of the stenographic records of Central Committee plenums: the first, "uncorrected" (*nepravlennaiia stenogramma*) text; the text with corrections by speakers; and the approved, official text (*stenograficheskii otchet*), which contains editorial changes by functionaries in the Central Committee *apparatus* or, during the Stalin era, by the general secretary himself. It is the final, official text, often differing substantially from the uncorrected version, that eventually was distributed to leading Party officials throughout the country. Stalin-era stenographic records of plenums, the authors state, "are not simply official, but, as a rule, are falsified versions of real events, created in the bowels of the Party *apparatus* to please the leader." Accordingly, the uncorrected versions of plenum proceedings provide by far the most accurate record of what actually was said at the time. Concerning the plenum of February-March 1937, whereas Voroshilov's report and Molotov's rejoinder are available in uncorrected versions ("Materialy plenuma," 1994, no. 8: 3-29), only the official version of Stalin's address evidently exists. Voroshilov's report also is available in its official, published version ("Plenum: Stenograficheskii otchet," 6-28), which can be compared to what he actually said. There are several noteworthy differences.

<sup>51</sup> Khlevnyuk, "Objectives," 160.

admission. Only Tukhachevsky was absent—because he was on leave.<sup>52</sup> He must have been unnerved by a strange episode during the recent trial and by the sudden death of Ordzhonikidze, with whom he had been friendly since they had commanded the Caucasus Front in 1920.<sup>53</sup> When Tukhachevsky returned to Moscow in 1931 to direct weapon acquisition for the Red Army, he found a partner in his old Civil War comrade, whose Commissariat of Heavy Industry produced tanks, aircraft, artillery, small arms, and munitions. Tukhachevsky, according to an acquaintance, “maintained close ties with Ordzhonikidze, consulted with him, listened to his views, and obtained ardent support from him.” Tukhachevsky is said to have been “staggered” by his death.<sup>54</sup> Uborevich, too, reportedly was shaken by Ordzhonikidze’s tragic end.<sup>55</sup>

In an ominous development for Tukhachevsky himself, on 24 January his name had been invoked a dozen times in testimony by Radek, one of the main defendants in the second of the three Moscow trials of 1936-38. Radek zestfully had connected Tukhachevsky with Putna, although Radek had averred that Tukhachevsky remained unaware that Putna was a terrorist and Trotsky agent. Radek stated that in 1935 he had held “material” that Tukhachevsky needed to perform some official task, and that Tukhachevsky had sent Putna to retrieve it. Radek claimed that he had taken advantage

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<sup>52</sup>Suvenirov, *Tragediia RKKA*, 57-58.

<sup>53</sup>F. G. Seiranian, “...Nadezhneishii voennyi rabotnik”: *Ocherk o voenno-organizatorskoi deiatel'nosti G. K. Ordzhonikidze* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1989), 49-52.

<sup>54</sup>G. Isserson, “Zapiski sovremennika o M. N. Tukhachevskom,” *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1963, no. 4: 66. Iurii L. Piatakov, the deputy commissar for heavy industry and a key administrator of the industrialization drive, was arrested on 12 September 1936. This precipitated a state security witch-hunt in the Commissariat of Heavy Industry’s central bureaucracy. Meanwhile, plant managers and engineers were coming under attack from local Party organizations for their alleged lack of vigilance and political unreliability. Apparently concerned about the disruptive effects of the assaults on his commissariat’s personnel, Ordzhonikidze sought to limit the damage by refuting the charges against some managers and engineers or contending, in effect, that most saboteurs already had been exposed. (Khlevniuk, *Stalin, NKVD i sovetskoe obshchestvo*, 116-37.) But the view in Stalin’s inner circle was that Ordzhonikidze, who had known the dictator well since the early years of the Georgian revolutionary movement, had come out “against Stalin....and the [Party] line.” And that, remarked Molotov many years later, “was such a bad step.” (Chuev, *Sto sorok besed*, 191-92.) Ordzhonikidze died of a gunshot wound, but the circumstances under which it was inflicted remain cloudy to this day. (Conquest, *Great Terror*, 169-70.)

<sup>55</sup>F. P. Samsonov, “Smysl ego zhizni,” in Aleksandrov et al., *Komandarm Uborevich*, 223.

of this fortuitous meeting to plot acts of terror with Putna. But Radek declared that he knew Tukhachevsky's "attitude to the Party and government to be that of an absolutely devoted man."<sup>56</sup> When a Soviet intelligence officer posted abroad came across Tukhachevsky's name in an account of the day's court proceedings, he gasped in shock to his wife that the marshal was doomed.<sup>57</sup>

It did not require great insight to conclude that Stalin was distancing himself from Tukhachevsky, if not actively undermining him. The story that Tukhachevsky, a first deputy defense commissar, had sent Putna to see Radek was a peculiar way to draw a connection between Radek and Putna, the ostensible purpose of the exchange. Moreover, what purpose was served by having Tukhachevsky's loyalty affirmed by a man on trial for his life? The odd dialogue between Radek and Andrei Ia. Vyshinskii, Stalin's bilious prosecutor, caused Moscow's foreign community to buzz for weeks with rumors that

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<sup>56</sup> *Report of Court Proceedings in the Case of the Anti-Soviet Trotskyite Centre* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1967), 105, 146; Conquest, *Great Terror*, 19.

<sup>57</sup> Krivitsky, *In Stalin's Secret Service*, 217. Curiously, the dialogue concerning Tukhachevsky did not appear in the accounts published in Soviet newspapers at the time of the trial or in the Russian-language trial transcript approved for publication on 12 February, of which some 75,000 copies were printed. Foreign correspondents in attendance, however, took note of the strange exchange between Radek and Vyshinskii, and Radek's references to Tukhachevsky were included in the English-language edition of the transcript. (Iu. A. Shchetinov and B. A. Starkov, *Krasnyi marshal* [Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1990], 282; the table of contents of *Protsess antisovetskogo trotskistskogo tsentra (23-30 ianvaria 1937 goda)* [Moscow: NKlu Soiuz SSSR Iuridicheskoe izdatel'stvo, 1937] does not even contain an entry for the resumption of Radek's cross-examination on the evening of 24 January! At that session Vyshinskii questioned Radek exclusively about his references to Tukhachevsky in testimony given earlier that day. [*Report of Court Proceedings*, 146.] The omission of any reference to Tukhachevsky in Soviet accounts of the trial raises the possibility that Radek's extraordinary remarks were intended for foreign consumption. They may have been meant to signal Hitler that Stalin still hoped to reach an understanding despite the Soviet military assistance to the embattled Spanish Republic. European diplomats believed Tukhachevsky wished to contain Germany, largely because he had bitterly attacked Hitler's military program and foreign policy aims in a March 1935 article featured in *Pravda*. The piece had caused "great indignation" in German diplomatic and military circles, and provoked protests from the German ambassador and the military attaché. (Gustav Hilger and Alfred G. Meyer, *The Incompatible Allies: A Memoir-History of German-Soviet Relations, 1918-1941* [New York: Macmillan, 1953], 271; "Zapis' iz dnevnika M. M. Litvinova o besede s poslom Germanii v SSSR F. V. fon Shulenburgom, Ne ranee 4 apreliia 1935 g." and "Dokladnaia zapiska nachal'nika otdela Vneshnikh Snoshenii NKO SSSR A. I. Gekkeria nachal'niku razvedyvatel'nogo upravleniia RKKA Ia. K. Berzinu o besede s germanskim voennym attashe, 4 apreliia 1935 g.," *Izvestiia TsK KPSS*, 1990, no. 1: 170-72.) Finally, it is striking that the January 1937 trial coincided with "the first formal Soviet political overture to Nazi Germany since the spring of 1935." (Geoffrey Roberts, "A Soviet Bid for Coexistence with Nazi Germany, 1935-1937: The Kandelaki Affair," *The International History Review* 16, no. 3 [1994]: 487.)

Tukhachevsky was under arrest.<sup>58</sup> Hence the first of several overt signs that Tukhachevsky's position was crumbling was orchestrated painstakingly four months before his final fall, apparently so that the marshal would feel "the agony of slow death" of one left to "wander" while being stalked unhurriedly but relentlessly.<sup>59</sup>

Had Tukhachevsky attended the plenum, he might well have been taken aback by Molotov's attack on the military leadership's supposed carelessness in command appointments and its complacency about the extent to which the Red Army harbored enemies of the USSR. Voroshilov's review of the Red Army was the foil for Molotov's threatening rejoinder. Voroshilov's address is interesting in its own right, as the editorial revisions that were made to the text prior to its distribution to Party leaders throughout the country subtly sharpen its tone. Moreover, Voroshilov knew that Ezhov's inquisitors were pursuing several of his most celebrated and accomplished subordinates. He spoke on 2 March, that is, after Kaganovich and Molotov had described industry and transport as rife with sabotage, treason, and peril, afflictions spawned by Trotskyism.<sup>60</sup>

Voroshilov began by likening the reports by Molotov and Kaganovich, together with Ezhov's speech the previous evening, to a spotlight that showed how deeply "our

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<sup>58</sup>Basseches, *Stalin*, 302; "Treason Trials, Red Army," 17 June 1937, U.S. National Archives, Correspondence of the Military Intelligence Division Relating to General, Political, Economic, and Military Conditions in Russia and the Soviet Union, 1918-1941, RG 165, roll 15, frame 133.

<sup>59</sup>Orlov, *Secret History*, 289. In late April 1937 Tukhachevsky was informed that his upcoming trip to London to attend the coronation of King George VI had been canceled. The NKVD, Tukhachevsky was told, had uncovered a plot to assassinate him while he was abroad. Voroshilov showed Tukhachevsky a memorandum that Ezhov had prepared for him, Stalin, and Molotov; the memo summarized information supposedly received from a foreign source about the plot. The British Embassy was notified that Tukhachevsky had fallen ill. ("Delo," 45-46; Fitzroy Maclean, *Eastern Approaches* [London: Jonathan Cape, 1949], 23.) Stalin and Ezhov obviously acted to keep Tukhachevsky on Soviet soil while the finishing touches were being applied to the operation to remove, vilify, and execute him, especially as the marshal must have realized that his position had grown tenuous. According to Krivitsky, who was in Moscow at the time, by the end of April it was common knowledge in state security circles (and, it seems, beyond them) that Tukhachevsky, Gamarnik, and several other top military officers were "marked men." Shunned in public, "they walked alone. Silence surrounded them." (Krivitsky, *In Stalin's Secret Service*, 226-27.)

<sup>60</sup>For Molotov's report on industry (delivered on 28 February), see "Materialy plenuma," 1993, no. 8: 3-26; for Kaganovich's on transport (given on the same date), see *ibid.*, no. 9: 3-32.

enemies” had “penetrated into the pores of our socialist economy and state administration.” However, he noted with relief that “not particularly many enemies of the people” had been unmasked to date in the military. It was “a numerically small...group from the command staff” that had carried on “subversive work.”<sup>61</sup> The published version of the text, however, refers to those arrested in 1936 as men mainly “holding high-level command positions” rather than merely as “command cadres,” as Voroshilov did in delivering his speech. This slight but significant editorial change reinforced the notion that the higher command staff had been corrupted. And after Voroshilov said that he was far from thinking that all was well in the army, the printed text contains the following insertion: “No, it certainly cannot be ruled out that despicable enemies have penetrated the army in far greater numbers than we know about at the present time.” This addition not only makes the passage more alarmist than the words Voroshilov actually spoke, but it represents a far more direct call for the vigilant unmasking of enemies than can be found in the unedited text. The underlying message, one can infer, is that although all of the enemies in uniform had not yet been identified, they would be tracked down, and in short order.<sup>62</sup>

As for the origin of the traitors, Voroshilov linked them to the Trotskyite opposition of the mid-1920s. Having been vanquished in the battle for Party leadership by Stalin, Trotsky, in league with Zinoviev and Kamenev, was forced to resort to clandestine means to continue his struggle for power. To that end, he had left behind “a sufficiently solid cell, not quantitatively, but qualitatively,” of supporters and agents in the Red Army to carry out his perfidious plans.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 1994, no. 8: 3, 5.

<sup>62</sup>“Plenum: Stenograficheskii otchet,” 8.

<sup>63</sup>“Materialy plenuma,” 1994, no. 8: 5-6.

Voroshilov went on to speak about the six “wreckers of general’s rank” (Corps Commanders Putna, Primakov and Turovskii; Divisional Commanders Shmidt and Sablin; Brigade Commander Ziuk) arrested from July to September 1936, as well as the lower-ranking Kuz’michev. He spitefully quoted the pitiable appeals of these tormented, bewildered men, who must have found their plight utterly incomprehensible.<sup>64</sup> He noted that both Primakov, on whom he heaped especial ridicule, and Turovskii had yet to acknowledge their guilt despite ample evidence of their criminality. For example, Voroshilov continued, five of the accused at the Zinoviev-Kamenev trial and the one just concluded had testified that Primakov was “an agent of Trotsky.” Nevertheless, Primakov still refused to acknowledge his “foul crimes” on the renegade’s behalf: “The most that [Primakov and Turovskii] have admitted is that they did not love Voroshilov and Budenny.” Voroshilov mocked Primakov with a statement that drew laughter from his audience: Primakov “saw us as rivals: he’s a horseman, and Budenny and I also are horsemen.” Primakov, continued Voroshilov, believed that Budenny and his cronies from the First Cavalry Army were monopolizing the leading positions in the cavalry arm, thereby depriving him of the opportunities for further advancement which he deserved.<sup>65</sup>

Voroshilov also dealt with Putna, who had escorted Tukhachevsky during the latter’s European tour in early 1936: he was said to have used his position as military attaché in Berlin in 1931 to contact Sedov in order to develop a scheme for subverting the

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 6-8, 11. Shmidt, for example, was said to have declared that “all of his blood, all [of his] thoughts belong to and have been devoted solely to the Party’s cause, to Stalin’s cause.” He pleaded for Voroshilov to save him for “future difficult battles under Your leadership.”

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 8. The bad blood between Primakov, on the one hand, and Budenny and Voroshilov, on the other, went back to the 1920 war against Poland: Budenny attributed the recapture of Brody by the Poles at the beginning of August 1920 to Primakov’s “criminal conduct” as commander of the 8th Cossack Cavalry Division. At the time, Budenny wrote in his memoir of the Civil War, he requested that Primakov be brought before a revolutionary military tribunal for judgment. (Budenny’s remarks are quoted in A. Todorskii, “Razmyshleniia nad prochitannymi memuarami,” *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1962, no. 12: 94.) At an assembly of the officers’ *aktiv* of the central military administration in mid-March 1937, Budenny asserted that Primakov, Shmidt, Turovskii, Ziuk, and Kuz’michev all had served in the 8th Cossack Cavalry Division, in his view, a significant finding which he intended to bring to the attention of Leplevskii, the new chief of the GUGB’s Special Department. (Suvenirov, *Tragediia RKKA*, 59.) This incident supports the view that the roots of the (continued next page)

army. Sedov had instructed Putna, Voroshilov said, that “the chief task of our military Trotskyite organization consists of the fight against the leadership of the [Party] and the Red Army, aiming...at a change in that leadership. I have in mind, above all, Stalin and Voroshilov.” Moreover, Voroshilov asserted that the machinations of the “parallel center” featured at the January trial and those of the military conspirators had been coordinated through Radek, Putna, and Shmidt. (According to the edited official version of Voroshilov’s address, Radek supposedly had so stated in his depositions of 4-6 December 1936.)<sup>66</sup> Hence Radek was linked once again to a Tukhachevsky acquaintance (Putna) and, for good measure, to a Iakir subordinate (Shmidt). Radek’s statement about his ties to Putna and Shmidt evidently was concocted immediately after Leplevskii, Tukhachevsky’s chief hunter inside the GUGB, took charge of its Special Department. If the falsified testimony about Putna and Shmidt attributed to Radek actually was composed in December 1936 (which seems likely, as Radek publicly connected Putna to Tukhachevsky at his January trial), it would appear that Stalin by then had resolved to have Tukhachevsky and Iakir murdered, and to use fabricated charges of treason as the pretext for the killings.

To that end, Voroshilov developed a theme introduced at the Zinoviev-Kamenev trial by placing the imprisoned commanders in a larger landscape of politically-motivated villainy and betrayal. What were the aims of Primakov, Putna, and their ilk? As military men, he declared, the conspirators conceived of their mission in both strategic and tactical terms. Strategically, their objective was to create a seditious underground of Trotskyites, other oppositionists, and disgruntled elements in the army and then await their opportunity. Realizing that the rank-and-file were loyal and disciplined, the traitorous commanders looked forward to the prospect of a future war so that they could “stab our

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Tukhachevsky affair lie in long-standing personal and institutional conflicts which converged inside the high command.

<sup>66</sup>“Materialy plenuma,” 1994, no. 8: 9-10; “Plenum: Stenograficheskiĭ otchet,” 18.

army in the back.” Voroshilov cited the deposition of the now-dead Piatakov, who supposedly had said that Trotsky not only considered a new war inevitable, but believed it would break out in the near future. A major wartime reverse would enable the conspirators to mount an uprising to topple the Soviet government and restore Trotsky to power. (Such an accusation was ironic, for a similar set of circumstances provided the backdrop for the Bolshevik insurrection that swept away the Provisional Government in 1917.) In the meantime, Voroshilov charged, they would plan and carry out acts of terror. The assassination of key Party and government leaders—said to be their tactical goal—would destabilize the regime and facilitate the success of a wartime revolt.<sup>67</sup> Voroshilov summarized the NKVD-concocted script for the military conspiracy as follows:

...all of their activity, all of their work focused mainly on creating small groups drawn from disgruntled individuals and waiting for the proper moment. On the one hand, to prepare terrorist acts and, if the opportunity presents itself, to carry out their chosen plans for terror; on the other hand, to wait for war, to await the most critical moment for our government so as to start their diabolical, base machine.

For the conspirators, the outbreak of war was held to be crucial because it would create opportunities for sowing defeat and demoralizing Soviet fighting men.<sup>68</sup> Hence the tale invented by Ezhov and the GUGB faithfully reflected not only the Bolshevik experience of 1917 but also Stalin’s precepts on the international situation, which trumpeted the constant danger of attack by predacious “imperialist” states.

In order to underscore the contention that the plotters had trained their sights on both him and Stalin (an assertion supposedly made by Putna), Voroshilov reviewed the testimony of Pikel’, who was tried with Zinoviev and Kamenev. In this regard, Pikel’

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<sup>67</sup>“Materialy plenuma,” 1994, no. 8: 8-9.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 10-11.

allegedly had implicated Putna and Shmidt on 4 July 1936, an event that very possibly was the pretext for Shmidt's arrest a few days later. Voroshilov quoted a statement attributed to Pikel' concerning the program of the subversive "military organization": "All measures of the Trotskyite-Zinovievite center were reduced to the organization of a major anti-government conspiracy." Accordingly, the center's military arm sought by means of "deep illegal work" to gain the allegiance of "part of the leadership of the army's command staff," whose "requirements" included "removing Voroshilov from the leadership of the Red Army."<sup>69</sup> So, according to the scenario contrived by Ezhov's fabricators, antipathy for Stalin's defense commissar became one of the wellsprings of treason within the army. This particular invention hints at the real reason for the vilification and killing of Tukhachevsky and his associates, the planning for which was far advanced at the time of the plenum.

What were the lessons to be drawn from this lurid exegesis of the evil sired by Trotsky? Voroshilov equivocated: he repeated his earlier statement that the army had yielded only "a small group of arrested enemies," but added "maybe that is fortunate, and maybe that is unfortunate." Perhaps there remained "a significant share of unexposed, undiscovered enemies" in the Red Army. In any event, he continued, additional work was needed to assure that the military ("a most delicate instrument") was "one hundred percent loyal." Still, much had been done over the years: a large number of "unfit" men, including "Trotskyite-Zinovievite rabble, among them all sorts of suspicious scum," had been removed from the army "without a fuss." According to Voroshilov, since 1924, the year Trotsky effectively was displaced as war commissar by Frunze, forty-seven thousand officers had been discharged; he hastened to add that this large group included "good people" dropped due to force reductions as well as "trash"—but there had been "very many enemies." Nearly half (twenty-two thousand) had been discharged during just the previous three years (1934-36), mainly on account of ineptitude and political

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 9.

unreliability, of whom five thousand were “oppositionists.” Nevertheless, Voroshilov went on, he, Gamarnik, Egorov, and the military district commanders “do not particularly consider such a method of purging correct.” As Voroshilov appears to be referring to mass or indiscriminate purging, his statement is indicative of a difference of view with at least Molotov. Voroshilov then emphasized the care, deliberation, and time required to reach a proper decision on a candidate for involuntary discharge, even if a man had flirted with the opposition in the past. He said that he “nearly always” engaged in “serious discussions” with state security about candidates for expulsion from the military. After all, Voroshilov quoted Stalin, “cadres decide everything,” and the Red Army had “special cadres.”<sup>70</sup>

Despite his detailed survey of the cases of the arrested senior commanders, his declaration that the Red Army had been “wounded... by this base, wrecking, counter-revolutionary abomination,” and his admission that like-minded enemies had yet to be uncovered, Voroshilov claimed that the situation did not call for “extraordinary measures.” The Red Army remained “a combat-ready armed force, loyal to the Party and the government.” Yes, not enough had been done to be “fully certain” that the conspirators had been barred from infiltrating the “99.9%” of the army in which saboteurs were absent. And, Voroshilov concluded, “we bear responsibility,” as did state security, for the authority given Primakov et al., who had duped them: not only were the traitors “very well known to us all,” they had discharged their duties “not badly.” Present circumstances did mandate a series of measures to prevent “the further spread of this gangrene into the healthy, undoubtedly healthy, excellent body of our army,” and “to deliver us from those still loathsome, pernicious elements that undoubtedly and indisputably remain in the ranks of the army, as in our entire state administration.” Voroshilov’s implication was that the Red Army was afflicted with enemies no more severely than any other state institution. He maintained that “even greater attention to

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 11-12.

Party-political work among the officer corps” to develop “genuine 100% Bolsheviks,” coupled with closer review and observation of the Red Army’s specialist units, academies, and schools, would serve as “the fundamental and chief pledge against the penetration of enemies into the ranks....” Yet this prescription was bland and formulaic: Voroshilov was advocating a measured response within his own domain to the general preoccupation with internal enemies. In his view, the Red Army was essentially sound and loyal, its condition certainly no worse than, say, that of industry or transportation. Voroshilov definitely was not calling for a radical purge of the military command over which he presided; instead, he apparently favored—at this time—selective, surgical excisions, the clandestine operation to remove Tukhachevsky presumably being a prime example.<sup>71</sup>

Molotov, the brusque organization man at Stalin’s side for a quarter century, returned to the podium immediately after Voroshilov. He proceeded to harangue the assembly about the complacency, if not outright indifference, of managers and administrators to the supposed epidemic of “wrecking” in the economic and industrial commissariats. He revealed that since 1 October 1936 state security had swept up more than eighteen hundred people from almost all branches of the economy, including 585 from the Commissariats of Heavy Industry and Defense Industry alone. Fulminating that “we still do not have sufficient vigilance regarding enemies,” Molotov kept his fire concentrated on the economic and industrial bureaucracies.<sup>72</sup> But his diatribe is especially notable for his brief remarks about the situation in the military establishment, that is, the very subject Voroshilov had just covered in detail. They show that Molotov thought that Voroshilov either did not grasp or had not conveyed fully the gravity of the Red Army’s condition.

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 13, 15-17.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 18, 22.

Molotov ostensibly fastened on the Defense Commissariat to illustrate the importance of attentively selecting and monitoring personnel. He remarked that although he had not focused on the military thus far, he would now. He bluntly declared that its turn to be examined would come “a bit later,” but that it would be checked “very strictly.” After all, “one enemy on the army’s staff can inflict greater damage than hundreds of enemies outside the army’s staff.” Molotov granted that Voroshilov had covered sufficiently that which was most important; nevertheless, he was going to consider “several questions so as to draw serious attention to these questions.” In other words, Voroshilov either had not touched on them at all or had not done them justice.<sup>73</sup>

In discussing the military establishment, Molotov resorted to sophistry that was almost laughably crude: given the prevalence of sabotage and treason inside the government, it was highly unlikely that those institutions in which just a handful of saboteurs had been uncovered to date truly harbored only a few—the search for them simply had not been pursued with the requisite vigor! Referring to the role of the military’s political organs in detecting subversion, Molotov noted that they remained in a state of “full well-being.” Yet, he continued, “enormous deficiencies” had been uncovered in civil Party organizations, which had shown a “slackening of vigilance toward the enemy.” Consequently, “is it possible that only our army political organs are in a state of full well-being and have no deficiencies? We, of course, have not yet spoken about this. But here we should concern ourselves seriously with this matter, as much depends on army political workers.” So, in Molotov’s view, the allegiance of those he designated a vital instrument for monitoring the loyalty of the commander and the soldier alike was itself very much an open question. Moreover, Molotov charged, there were “tendencies”

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 24.

toward reducing political training and political work in the army: “But such tendencies are unacceptable, incorrect, and un-Bolshevik tendencies.”<sup>74</sup> This was a slap at Gamarnik.

Molotov then made his most pregnant and venomous remarks about military matters. Although they concerned the hapless Shmidt, it was Voroshilov, Gamarnik, and Iakir who were the real targets of Molotov’s barbs. Molotov indignantly noted that the Defense Commissariat, “apparently on the basis of a proposal by the Kiev Military District,” had recommended Shmidt for the Order of Lenin a few days before his arrest. Mentioning Iakir, Gamarnik, and Voroshilov by name, Molotov sarcastically observed that “all of them knew that Shmidt, a former Trotskyite, does not deserve great trust, but works, so they say, not badly, why, not simply not badly—he’s being recommended for the awarding of the Order of Lenin.” Yet, Molotov barked, “it turns out that he not only worked badly, but now, comrades, we know that this is a malicious enemy.... It is clear that there were many mistakes, but still—from bad work to the Order of Lenin—that is a very great distance!” In effect, Molotov was censuring Iakir, Gamarnik, and Voroshilov for political gullibility and negligence in discharging their duties as, respectively, Shmidt’s immediate superior, military representative of the central Party *apparatus*, and overseer of the military as a whole. Molotov concluded his lecture on the state of the Defense Commissariat by remarking that, yes, “few symptoms” of “espionage-sabotage-Trotskyite work” had been detected there to date: “But, I think that here, if one were to approach [the matter] more carefully, one would find more [signs of treachery].”<sup>75</sup> Hence Molotov deftly but unmistakably placed the entire military establishment and, in particular, its stewards, under a pall of official, top-level mistrust.

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 24-25.

Molotov was making a case that the most exacting calculus of loyalty should apply to the army and that it must be subjected to an especially searching, severe examination considering the many hundreds of instances of subversion uncovered elsewhere. Voroshilov, in contrast, had tried to put the military establishment on the same footing as other commissariats while acknowledging that the Red Army had suffered from several recent cases of high-level treachery. Yet by mid-March, that is, days after the plenum ended, Voroshilov's tone had hardened markedly. He told officers assigned to the central military administration:

I repeat, in the meanwhile, we have arrested fifteen to twenty, but that does not mean, comrades, that we have purged you of enemies, not at all. It signifies only that we still have not really shaken up, have not looked over our cadres, our people. It is necessary to do this without fail, it is necessary to purge completely. We in the Worker-Peasant Red Army have no right to tolerate a single enemy, we cannot allow this.<sup>76</sup>

Hence Voroshilov quickly adopted a position indistinguishable from Molotov's and, by implication, Stalin's. On 7 June 1937, that is, shortly after the Tukhachevsky group's seizure, Voroshilov heralded the event in a sensational order to all Red Army personnel which alleged that many agents of the "traitorous counter-revolutionary military-fascist organization" remained at large.<sup>77</sup> This was followed, on 21 June, by an order co-signed by Ezhov that was intended to facilitate the army-wide search for traitors.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, throughout the *Ezhovshchina* Voroshilov actively facilitated the Special Department's arrest plans: for example, he personally summoned a number of eminent commanders (e.g., Iakir, Egorov, Bliukher) to Moscow for conferences or meetings so that they could be seized en route or immediately upon their arrival, that is, after they had been separated

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<sup>76</sup>Cited in Suvenirov, *Tragediia RKKA*, 58.

<sup>77</sup>"Prikaz s obrashcheniem k armii," *Prikazy*, 16-18.

<sup>78</sup>"Prikaz Narkomov oborony i vnutrennikh del SSSR 'Ob osvobozhdenii ot otvetstvennosti voennosluzhashchikh, uchastnikov kontrrevoliutsionnykh i vreditel'skikh fashistskikh organizatsii, raskaiavshikhsia v svoikh prestupleniakh, dobrovol'no iavivshikhsia i bez utaiki rasskazavshikh obo vsem imi sovershennom i o svoikh soobshchnikakh,'" 21 June 1937, in *Prikazy*, 18.

from the troops under their command.<sup>79</sup> And reams of arrest requests by the Special Department bear Voroshilov's favorable responses: "I do not object"; "No objection to arrest"; "Agree with arrest"; "Need to arrest"; "Arrest"; "Seize all of the scoundrels"; or simply "Agree."<sup>80</sup> The KGB's archive reportedly contained more than three hundred documents reflecting Voroshilov's approval of the arrest of a leading officer.<sup>81</sup>

Oleg F. Suvenirov, Russia's foremost authority on the military purge, surmises that Voroshilov's compliant attitude stemmed from his realization that the GUGB was acting, in effect, as a personal "ally" by removing potential rivals who were younger and much better prepared for the position of defense commissar.<sup>82</sup> It almost goes without saying that this postulate would apply, above all, to Tukhachevsky, Iakir, and Uborevich. Years later Marshal Timoshenko was asked if there was anyone in Stalin's entourage who could have saved some of the officers slain before the war. He replied disgustedly: "Of course there was. Voroshilov. But he did not lift a finger to help anyone; on the contrary, he ruined everyone." Marshal Vasilevskii agreed: "Voroshilov acted much like Molotov and the others."<sup>83</sup>

### III

The next day (3 March) Stalin delivered his report, but it did not appear in *Pravda* until the twenty-ninth, more than three weeks later. The delay in publication, coupled with the unusual length of the plenum (eleven rather than the usual three to five

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<sup>79</sup>N. G. Pavlenko, "Razmyshleniia o sud'be polkovodtsa," in *Marshal Zhukov: polkovodets i chelovek. Sbornik.*, vol. 2, comp. A. D. Mirkina and V. S. Iarovikov (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Agentstva pechati Novosti, 1988), 102.

<sup>80</sup>Cited in Suvenirov, "Narkomat oborony i NKVD," 28-29, as well as in idem, *Tragediia RKKA*, 74. For chilling examples of Voroshilov's own purge instructions, see Volkogonov Papers, reel 3, frames 525-41.

<sup>81</sup>Iakovlev, *Po moshcham i elei*, 179.

<sup>82</sup>Suvenirov, *Tragediia RKKA*, 76.

<sup>83</sup>G. A. Kumanev, "Voina glazami nachal'nika Genshtaba," *Pravda*, 28 September 1995. A 1977 interview.

days), the prosaic subject (the upcoming national election) of the only plenum resolution to be published in full, and, finally, the calamitous fate of this Central Committee, had led some historians to conclude that calls for greater vigilance by Stalin and his lieutenants must have met open resistance.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, Khrushchev claimed that this was indeed the case in his February 1956 attack on Stalin at the Party's Twentieth Congress. Yet the unedited stenographic record of the plenum shows that Khrushchev exaggerated the import of the speech by Pavel P. Postyshev (the second secretary of the Ukrainian Party), and overt signs of dissent are not apparent in the remarks of any speaker or the interjections from the audience.<sup>85</sup>

In any event, Stalin's speech, entitled "On Deficiencies in Party Work and Measures to Liquidate Trotskyite and Other Double-dealers," was on a different plane than those of his confederates: it elaborated a political and ideological framework for the faults he identified in the Party's activities and personnel and for the requisite corrective measures. Stalin's conception of these failings is important because it provided "a theoretical basis for the expectation that the enemy was everywhere" and the ensuing national campaign of exposure.<sup>86</sup> Significantly, Stalin linked his proposed remedies to the same theme of cadre advancement and renewal he was to raise in his June speech on the Tukhachevsky case to the Military Council, showing that this notion was a hallmark of his thinking on the eve of the *Ezhovshchina* and the military purge. This conclusion is underscored by Stalin's repetition of other threads of his March plenum report in his

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<sup>84</sup>Conquest, *Great Terror*, 175-76; McNeal, *Stalin*, 195-98; idem, ed., *The Stalin Years: 1929-1953*, vol. 3 of *Resolutions and Decisions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, ed. idem (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 181-82; idem, "The Decisions of the CPSU and the Great Purge," *Soviet Studies* 23, no. 2 (October 1971): 181-83.

<sup>85</sup>Khrushchev, "Doklad na zakrytom zasedanii XX s'ezda KPSS," 22-23. Postyshev was much more equivocal in expressing his misgivings concerning an associate's supposed treachery than Khrushchev had maintained. ("Materialy plenuma," 1995, nos. 5-6: 4.) To bolster the notions that Stalin was a historically insignificant, albeit horrible, aberration and that the Party itself remained infallible, Khrushchev wished to show that the tyrant's bloody designs had been resisted by some principled Party leaders.

<sup>86</sup>McNeal, *Stalin*, 197.

June speech. The upshot of Stalin's statements on these two occasions is that he commissioned the *Ezhovshchina*, in part, to bring about the advance en masse of a fresh cohort of Party and state officials.

Hence Stalin's prescription for raising the political knowledge and vigilance of Party officials foreshadowed the tremendous upwelling of subordinate Party, managerial, and technical personnel that flowed from the *Ezhovshchina*. As indicated by his plenum report and his June commentary on the Tukhachevsky case, Stalin welcomed the prospect of a virtually wholesale overthrow of the regime's leading officials, who, he apparently believed, increasingly were preoccupied with administrative routine as well as personal and bureaucratic aggrandizement. "A prisoner of communist ideology," Stalin resorted to the radical application of force to restore revolutionary élan to institutions which he feared had grown rotund, hidebound, and even corrupt as they had settled into the more stable and predictable environment of the Second Five-Year Plan.<sup>87</sup> In his mind, it seems, the *Ezhovshchina* would bring forth a rejuvenating freshet of ideologically attuned leaders that would revive institutions threatened by corruption and degeneration.

Stalin's 3 March report presented "a paradoxical combination of triumph and heightened vulnerability."<sup>88</sup> Bearing his personal imprint in its direct and repetitive style, the speech diagnosed burgeoning problems within the Party after the recent period of economic achievement.<sup>89</sup> As Stalin's address followed detailed reports on subversion in individual commissariats, he could summarize the Party's maladies bluntly. Roughly the first half of his report amplified three points made at the very outset: first, sabotage

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<sup>87</sup> Walicki, *Marxism*, 448. The author elaborates: "[Stalin] was acutely aware that the communist doctrine was the only justification of everything he had done in its name and his place in history depended on his role in the realization of the final goals of communism." (Ibid., 451.)

<sup>88</sup> Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 357.

<sup>89</sup> According to Andrei Gromyko, the durable postwar foreign minister, Stalin personally wrote all of his speeches, including reports to Party congresses ("for which he drew upon a vast range of materials"), and (continued next page)

and espionage were being conducted by foreign agents, among them Trotskyites, in “all or almost all of our organizations, economic as well as administrative and Party”; second, foreign agents had insinuated themselves into responsible positions; and lastly, the political carelessness and complacency of Party officials not only had made them oblivious to the danger, but actually had facilitated enemy penetrations. These were the “three basic facts” of “first-class significance for the fate of our country” about which Party members “simply had forgotten,” about which “Bolsheviks do not have the right to forget.”<sup>90</sup> This part of Stalin’s address clearly was meant to serve as an ideological orientation for the Central Committee and a warrant for radical remedies.

Returning to first principles, Stalin stressed the fundamental importance of the “state of capitalist encirclement” in which the USSR existed and of the Trotskyite menace, which lately had grown more adaptable and dangerous. “Bourgeois countries, which continue to follow a capitalist way of life and which surround the Soviet Union,” unrelentingly try “to sap its strength and weaken it,” sending waves of spies and saboteurs to infiltrate the Soviet rear. Trotskyism represented the new element of peril, as it had mutated from a “political tendency in the working class” into a “band of spies, wreckers, etc.” in the service of “agents of foreign governments.” Whereas the wreckers of the late 1920s were openly opposed to Soviet power, present-day saboteurs and Trotskyites, for the most part, carried “a Party card in the pocket,” which provided cover and brought them gratuitous trust. The confidence naively accorded enemies was one of the “dark sides” and “dangers” stemming from the Party’s tremendous achievements. (“Yes, yes, comrades,” Stalin avowed fatherly, “the dangers associated with successes, with achievements.”) The risks were manifest in the smugness and complacency of Party officials who had immersed themselves in economic tasks and been buoyed by their feats.

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articles. Gromyko admired Stalin’s literary ability. (Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence* [New York: Times Books, 1995], 22.)

<sup>90</sup>Stalin, “O nedostatkakh partiinoi raboty,” 1 (14):189-90, 194, 207.

The point is that they, being carried away by economic successes, began to see in this business the beginning and end of everything, and on such matters as the international position of the Soviet Union, capitalist encirclement, the strengthening of the Party's political work, the struggle with wrecking, and so forth—they simply began to pay no attention, supposing that all of these issues are a secondary or even third-rate affair.

In other words, by subsiding into a self-satisfied routine, the Party's officials had accorded wreckers and Trotskyites "political trust and access to Soviet organizations and institutions."<sup>91</sup> In a larger sense, they had lost sight of the need to actualize the Party's revolutionary mission in daily economic life and the imperative for across-the-board advances on the various fronts on which the class struggle was being waged domestically and internationally. In general, the Stalinist leadership's rising chorus of calls for vigilance after 1934 were a sign of its concern with the evident wish of a growing number of managers, workers, and Party members to "let the revolution take care of itself."<sup>92</sup>

Whereas the first half of Stalin's plenum report was diagnostic, the second half was prescriptive. Stalin began by calling for "our Party comrades who are tied up in 'routine matters' along the lines of this or that department" to focus anew on "the great political issues of an international and internal character." Next, the level of the Party's political work must be raised: paramount was "the task of the political education and the Bolshevik tempering of Party, soviet, and economic cadres." Further, Stalin continued, it was necessary to impress upon Party members that economic accomplishments "do not exhaust the entire business of our socialist construction." And Party members must bear in mind that as "capitalist encirclement remains the basic fact determining the international position of the Soviet Union," the country's rear would continue to be infested with enemy agents. Stalin then returned to his theme that economic

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 194-206.

<sup>92</sup> Hanson, *Time and Revolution*, 166.

accomplishments were necessary but not, by themselves, sufficient in view of the continuing threat to the Party's achievements in the USSR, which remained isolated: "...no matter how great, they cannot annul the fact of capitalist encirclement and the consequences stemming from that fact." In short, hard-eyed vigilance was imperative as long as the Soviet Union remained a lone outpost of socialism, as the "bourgeois" states were bound to infiltrate it with spies, saboteurs, and terrorists masquerading as loyal Party members.<sup>93</sup>

According to Stalin's next injunction, Party members must understand that Trotskyites now constituted a cynical, unprincipled band of "wreckers, saboteurs, spies, and assassins" answering to foreign intelligence services rather than serving "any sort of ideal coinciding with the interests of the working class." Consequently, the struggle with present-day Trotskyism required "new methods, methods of rooting out and crushing," in place of the old "methods of discussion." In other words, as the menace had become especially dangerous and insidious, the measures for combating it must be forceful and decisive: this admonition of Stalin's anticipated and served to justify the mass arrests and shootings of 1937-38. The vital issue now, Stalin continued, was "not the liquidation of the technical backwardness of our cadres... but the liquidation of political carelessness and political trust toward wreckers who accidentally have obtained a Party-membership card."<sup>94</sup> The premise that the enemy now was to be found hidden inside the Party itself had far-reaching implications, as the criteria used to judge loyalty during past periods of overt intra-Party opposition no longer held.

Stalin cast his position in explicitly theoretical terms by outlining six "rotten" ideas that the Party must "smash and throw away." In rejecting the first of the six

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<sup>93</sup>Stalin, "O nedostatkakh partiinoi raboty," 1 (14):208-10.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 210-213.

baneful theories, he set forth “the one theoretical innovation that is universally acknowledged to be Stalin’s own.”<sup>95</sup> Stalin decried the intuitive expectation that the class struggle internally would subside as socialism was built within the USSR, a project supposedly completed “in the main” by 1936.<sup>96</sup> Such an idea was both incorrect and dangerous; on the contrary, as the Party’s successes mounted, “remnants of the broken exploiting classes” would lash out more and more frantically, clutching “at the most desperate means of combat as the last resort of the doomed.” Hence the class struggle must sharpen with the approach of socialism’s final victory: as the defeated classes could rely on the support of the USSR’s external enemies, the intensifying internal class struggle was merely one pole of a conflict that encompassed the capitalist countries beleaguering the USSR. Seeing that their end was near but knowing that they could call on the resources of antagonistic foreigners, the ruined classes inside the Soviet Union would prolong their desperate attacks despite the inevitability of their demise and the nearness of socialism’s triumph.<sup>97</sup> This was, in fact, an imaginative formula for unrelenting mobilization and purification of the Party, a theoretical response (and application of a principle Stalin first enunciated in July 1928) to the potential for internal contamination and decay stemming from the consolidation and growth of the Soviet state’s power.<sup>98</sup> In the short term, though, Stalin’s proposition furnished the ideological underpinning for terror. From this standpoint, the mass arrests and executions of 1937-38 represented suppression of furious, last-gasp resistance to the advent of socialism and eradication of politically “irredeemable souls,” that is, of “enemies of the people”; the operation therefore had to precede the emergence of a fully socialist society and culture in the USSR and, to be sure, would ease the country’s progression to communism’s higher

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<sup>95</sup>Hanson, *Time and Revolution*, 167.

<sup>96</sup>Stalin, “O nedostatkakh partiinoi raboty,” 1 (14):213; idem, “O proekte Konstitutsii Soiuza SSR,” 1 (14):149.

<sup>97</sup>Stalin, “O nedostatkakh partiinoi raboty,” 1 (14):213-14.

<sup>98</sup>Hanson, *Time and Revolution*, 168, observes: “Communism must find its existence by continually destroying that which exists.” On the first instance in which Stalin set forth this idea, see n. 25 above.

phase.<sup>99</sup> We see, then, how a calculated campaign of mass murder was derived readily from “Marxism-Leninism in the epoch of the construction of socialism,” as Kaganovich defined Stalinism late in life.<sup>100</sup>

The other five nostrums of which Stalin disposed in his plenum report all tended to understate the extent, deviousness, staying power, and potency of Trotskyite troublemaking. Consequently, his commentary on these ideas of straw, tossed up so that they could be batted down, were intended to create the presumption that saboteurs and spies lurked everywhere and that any Party member could be suspect. The image elicited by Stalin was that of a country besieged from within by a perfidious, hydra-headed foe, one whose visage was elastic and imprecise. It could be made to fit anyone.<sup>101</sup> Stalin evoked the specter of war and used a military example for emphasis in this section of his report. He warned that saboteurs must be dislodged because they aimed to perform their most dangerous acts just prior to or during a war. And even a few traitors, Stalin advised, could inflict colossal damage: for instance, several spies on the staff of an army or a division could divulge operational plans to the enemy—virtually the same example Molotov had deployed in the tongue-lashing he had administered the previous day.<sup>102</sup> Stalin’s adoption of the spies-on-the-military staff case as his own is notable, as it suggested that he shared Molotov’s professed concern with the loyalty of the military command.

Stalin’s remedies for the ills he diagnosed in the Party are significant because they not only starkly prefigured the *Ezhovshchina*, but were raised again in his June

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<sup>99</sup>Halfin and Hellbeck, “Rethinking the Stalinist Subject,” 461. On the purge as purification of the Party, above all else: “Those [Communists]... found to be impure had to be annihilated. The public rituals of cleansing... probed the purity of Communists’ souls.”

<sup>100</sup>Hanson, *Time and Revolution*, 170; Chuev, *Tak govoril Kaganovich*, 82.

<sup>101</sup>Moshe Lewin, “Stalin in the Mirror of the Other,” in *Russia/USSR/Russia*, 211.

<sup>102</sup>Stalin, “O nedostatках partiinoi raboty,” 1 (14):215-16, 219.

presentation on the Tukhachevsky case to the Military Council. This repetition is indicative of the continuity in Stalin's thinking about the Tukhachevsky affair, the military purge, and the *Ezhovshchina* as a whole (at least as it affected the Party *apparat* and the state administration), and underscores the essential point that he commissioned and directed all of them, at least in broad outline, purposefully, over a period of several months.

In conclusion, Stalin mused that if the Party's cadres, "from top to bottom," could be developed ideologically and tempered politically to the extent that they would be able to arrive independently at the proper approach to the internal and international situation—that is, if they could be transformed into "fully mature Leninists"—then the Party would be able to resolve nine-tenths of its tasks. This is a revealing statement: it carries a note of frustration while expressing Stalin's conviction that a sort of mass ripening of an advanced Marxist-Leninist outlook throughout the Party would enable it to transcend its present difficulties.

To raise the ideological level and the political tempering of these command cadres, to infuse these cadres with renewed strength which awaits advancement, and thereby to expand the membership of the leading cadres—that is the task.<sup>103</sup>

In short, Stalin sought a Party membership that was pure, seasoned, and disciplined so that the Party could act as an effectual guide and monitor to the state and society now that he deemed the staples of the socialist order to be in place.

Stalin did not call openly for Party officials to be ousted en masse to clear the way for a new corps of leaders, but he did make some remarkably suggestive comments. He explained that the Party's leadership stratum consisted of three to four thousand

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<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 220-21.

higher officials, or “generals,” thirty to forty thousand mid-level leaders, or “officers,” and one hundred to one hundred fifty thousand lower functionaries, or “NCOs.” To hasten the ideological and political maturation of this large group, Stalin proposed novel measures: every Party leader, from secretaries of cells to secretaries of republic and *oblast*’ Party organizations, was to select two other Party members “capable of being their actual deputies,” that is, able to step in as replacements. Stalin pre-emptively parried an obvious objection in a way that revealed his intention to renew and reinvigorate the Party *apparatus*:

One can say: but where to get two deputies for each [secretary], we do not have such people, there are no suitable workers. This is incorrect, comrades. We have tens of thousands of capable people, talented people. One only must know and in due time promote them so that they do not stand too long in the old place and begin to rot.

The appeal of a wholesale draw on what Stalin regarded as a largely untapped reservoir of talent within and even outside the Party was, in fact, a motif in his thinking on the eve of the *Ezhovshchina*, as his June remarks to the Military Council also show. Stalin went on to propose the creation of a comprehensive system of political education courses for Party secretaries at every level throughout the country. At the system’s apex, a six-month course on internal and international policy would be organized under the Central Committee’s auspices for the first secretaries of regional Party organizations. The graduates of this course would constitute “several shifts” of replacements for the Central Committee itself.<sup>104</sup> Stalin’s unusual choice of words hinted at what he had in mind for the body chosen at the Seventeenth Party Congress in February 1934: seventy percent of its members were slain from 1937 to 1939, their places taken by the rising troop of junior officials reared within the Stalinist system who would run the country until the early

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<sup>104</sup>*Ibid.*, 220-22.

1980s.<sup>105</sup> This program for fortifying and regenerating the Party was necessary to “neutralize and liquidate... Trotskyite-fascist agents,” Stalin declared as he finished, but it presupposed the elimination of “our own blindness, our own equanimity, our own political myopia.”<sup>106</sup> In essence, Stalin enjoined Party members to scrutinize one another’s souls through a lens clouded by wariness and apprehension.

#### IV

When Stalin spoke to the Military Council about the Tukhachevsky case on 2 June, he returned to a key theme of his plenum report three months earlier: as the Party, the Red Army, and the country as a whole enjoyed large reserves of able personnel, the prospect of their rapid advancement was not something to be feared, but was to be welcomed. This four-day (1 to 4 June) session of the Military Council was attended by the Council’s permanent members, 116 other senior military officers, and the Politburo. In addition to explaining the Tukhachevsky affair in a way which would defuse any incipient discontent, Voroshilov and Stalin used the case to muster the military elite for a radical weeding-out and to promote the benefits of the accelerated promotions that the latter would trigger, even though the military establishment already was struggling to manage growth and the phase-out of the territorial manning system. It must have been a glum and jittery military command which shuffled into the Kremlin on 1 June: conference participants had received copies of the “confessions” of the “conspirators” before the proceedings began, although public announcement of the case was not made until the eleventh. This step undoubtedly was taken to assure them of the Tukhachevsky group’s guilt. Voroshilov’s tone-setting opening-day address was entitled “On the Exposure by NKVD Organs of a Counter-revolutionary Conspiracy in the RKKA.” In contrast to the

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<sup>105</sup>“O sud’be chlenov i kandidatov v chleny TsK VKP(b),” 86.

<sup>106</sup>Stalin, “O nedostatках partiinoi raboty,” 1 (14):223.

cautious line he had taken in his own plenum report, Voroshilov now proposed “to check up on and purge the army literally to the last man,” and warned that “severe damage” in a quantitative sense might ensue.<sup>107</sup> Its outline programmed in advance from Moscow, the military purge clearly was expected to lop large chunks, spoiled and spent, off the officer corps—and the Stalin leadership was willing to bear the immediate impairment to military readiness, which Voroshilov’s remarks anticipated.

The timing and nature of Stalin’s 2 June speech make it a singularly important item of evidence. Tukhachevsky, Iakir, and Uborevich had been arrested at the end of May, but they had not yet been shot: Stalin and Voroshilov appeared before the Red Army’s top commanders and commissars at an extremely tense and potentially volatile moment. Moreover, the text of Stalin’s speech is unedited, so it is an exact record of his remarks, one that was not released from the Presidential Archive and published until 1994. Lastly, in echoing major motifs of his plenum report, Stalin’s remarks reveal the deliberate, centrally planned nature of the *Ezhovshchina*’s initiation and the unity of purpose the operation had in his own thinking.

Although Stalin’s manner was conversational and discursive, his aims in briefing the military elite on the Tukhachevsky case emerge plainly from his words. They were intended, first and foremost, to expunge any residual respect or sympathy for the doomed men: hence Stalin took pains to depict them as moral weaklings whose character flaws had made them not only vulnerable to blackmail but unable to resist it. Tukhachevsky, for example, allegedly had cavorted with Josephine Genzi [sic], whom Stalin described as a beautiful temptress and long-time German agent. Consequently, Tukhachevsky, Iakir, and Uborevich, among others, supposedly had been compelled to spy for the German General Staff. Citing Tukhachevsky’s confession and the fact that his audience had read it themselves, Stalin feigned indignation: “Our operational plan, the

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<sup>107</sup>Cited in introduction to “‘Nevol’niki,’” 72.

operational plan—he gave our holy of holies to the German Reichswehr. He had a rendezvous with representatives of the German Reichswehr. A spy? A spy.”<sup>108</sup> Such allegations had at least a superficial credulity to them, as the commanders Stalin named had dealt extensively with their German counterparts in Germany before Hitler’s accession to power ended the two countries’ military cooperation. And, speaking to men charged with the country’s defense, Stalin probably figured that they would react to the “proof” of espionage that the victims’ confessions purportedly represented with particular revulsion.

Stalin also placed Tukhachevsky, Iakir, Uborevich, and Gamarnik in the thirteen-man “nucleus” of a broad “military-political conspiracy” headed by Trotsky, Rykov, and Bukharin. Consisting of ten “patent spies” and three “patent spy-masters,” this conspiratorial core, Stalin contended, had maintained “regular relations with the German fascists” and “had adapted all of its work to fit the German fascists’ tastes and orders.” Trotsky, naturally, was the “arch-spy,” the organizer of agents recruited from the Party or people close to its members.<sup>109</sup> Thus Stalin portrayed the Tukhachevsky group as the embodiment of the “Trotskyite-fascist agents of foreign intelligence services” about whom he had warned in his plenum report. Raising another theme voiced in March, Stalin attributed the failure to detect the evidence of military treason—and “there were signals,” he remarked—to the relaxation of political vigilance occasioned by the great strides the country had made in recent years. “Smugness,” he intoned once again, was the “dark side” of Soviet successes. Significant, too, is Stalin’s twice-made claim in his talk that the basis for the generals’ adherence to the conspiracy was external—German blackmail which exploited their personal weaknesses—rather than internally-generated opposition in principle to the General Line.<sup>110</sup> This assertion also underscored the

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<sup>108</sup>“Nevol’niki,” 75-77.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., 73-76.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., 78-79.

continuing threat posed by the state of “capitalist encirclement” in which the USSR remained, yet another theme of Stalin’s plenum address.

In the course of his analysis of the Tukhachevsky group’s characteristics and their alleged entanglement in espionage, Stalin digressed briefly on one of the marshal’s proposals. His seemingly off-the-cuff remarks indicate that the conflicts over military organization and weaponry that had put Tukhachevsky at loggerheads with Voroshilov and, to some extent, with Stalin still lingered in the latter’s mind. More important, they show that Stalin now saw some of Tukhachevsky’s initiatives as deliberate attempts to cripple the Red Army. In this respect, Stalin said that he had asked Tukhachevsky—“a not-bad soldier”—to justify what evidently was a recommendation of his that the peacetime strength of some rifle divisions be reduced to seven thousand men, a level which Stalin considered much too low. A seven-thousand-man rifle division, Stalin concluded, would consist mostly of infantry without enough heavy firepower or artillery and tanks lacking adequate infantry support. Stalin quoted Tukhachevsky as answering that his plan reflected “enthusiasm,” but Stalin’s own view, looking back at the incident, was: “That is not enthusiasm, that is wrecking....”<sup>111</sup> If Stalin’s account is true, the incident suggests how Tukhachevsky’s manifestly superior knowledge of military affairs and penchant for immoderate projects ultimately backfired on him, as it fueled his superiors’ enmity and suspicion. Moreover, the episode illustrates how, amid the blossoming of virtually universal mistrust, professional disputes in any field—or simply demonstration of superior knowledge—readily could become the basis for oft-deadly accusations of sabotage.

Turning to preventive and remedial measures, as he had in the latter part of his plenum report, Stalin identified poor “signaling” from below as a manifest weakness. He

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<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

appealed for Party members and non-Party people alike to heed the shortcomings around them and report these via letter to Moscow: after all, “the Center sees only a portion, the rest is seen locally.” Stalin was emphatic about the citizen’s duty to bypass his or her administrative chain-of-command and go directly to the top.

It is your obligation to check up on people at their business, at work, and if there are mix-ups, you report. Each Party member, loyal non-Party person, and citizen of the USSR not only has the right, but is obligated to report the deficiencies which they observe....One is obligated to send a letter to one’s people’s commissar, with a copy to the [Central Committee]....Who said, that one is obligated to write only to the people’s commissar? That is incorrect....Insofar as you refrain from writing to the TsK and don’t write even the people’s commissar about the things found to be bad, then you are perpetuating the old Trotskyite line.

Encouraging the submission of what were, in fact, attacks on officials ostensibly responsible for “deficiencies” and “breakdowns” directly to the central Party *apparatus*, Stalin obviously realized that this practice, in conjunction with the national campaign for vigilance and the upsurge of arrests by state security, would flummox the Party and state hierarchies.<sup>112</sup> Indeed, the sowing of fear and disorder among the regime’s elite evidently was Stalin’s aim: he considered a thorough shaking of the regime’s bureaucratic pyramid necessary to free places for the multitude of subordinate officials whose advance to leading positions he sought.

Stalin then turned his mandate for bottom-up denunciations against the military elite: “Well, if this rule had been followed, and this is a Leninist rule...we would have exposed this case much earlier.” Stalin was highly critical of the General Staff for its supposed failure to keep a tight leash on the military district commanders. Iakir in the Ukraine and Uborevich in Belorussia had been “left to themselves and what they were up to there, God only knows!” Stalin contended that the General Staff—and he obviously

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<sup>112</sup>*Ibid.*, 79-80.

meant, above all, its ill-fated ex-chief Egorov, who had just replaced Tukhachevsky as Voroshilov's deputy—had “not wished to hurt the feelings” of the district commanders. This expression of dissatisfaction suggested that Stalin believed there had been too much comradely solidarity among certain leading commanders. In general, Stalin complained, insufficient attention had been given to officer assignments, which required “particular care.” He definitely had the generals in mind, as earlier in his talk he had noted that the army was “very healthy” in its lower and mid-level ranks, but only partly so in its higher echelons.<sup>113</sup>

Nearing the end, Stalin returned to the “conspirators” (identifying their “fundamental weakness” as their isolation from the people and the army), but then abruptly shifted to the prospective effect of the building purge, which had begun to slash deeply into the command corps that spring:

Such a lot of the command staff is being removed from service, they say. I see some confusion as to how to replace them....In our army there is a wealth of talent. In our country, in our Party, in our army there is a wealth of talent. One must not be afraid to promote people, promote more boldly from below. There's the Spanish example for you....little-known men were sent, and they are working wonders there.<sup>114</sup>

As examples of up-and-comers making their mark in Spain, Stalin named Dmitrii G. Pavlov and Grigorii M. Shtern, both of whom were vaulted into high-level positions in 1937-38 before suffering precipitous falls in 1941. These men, in Stalin's view, exemplified the type of heretofore unrecognized, precocious commanders who should be given charge of the Defense Commissariat's numerous central directorates, military districts, and armies—not in due course but soon. Stalin positively extolled the new men

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<sup>113</sup>Ibid., 78-81.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., 83. Concerning the expansion of the military purge in spring 1937: whereas 577 men were discharged from the Red Army on political grounds from 1 January to 31 March 1937, 4,370 were discharged for such reasons from 1 April to 10 June, of whom 1,217 were arrested. (Suvenirov, *Tragediia RKKA*, 77.)

or, to be more precise, the fanciful notion that a fresh command contingent, almost by its very presence, would sweep away the staleness and artificial encumbrances hobbling the military establishment as it sought to manage its too-hasty growth:

Men without names—that's where our strength lies. "Send us, men with names, to Spain, they say." No, let's send men without names, our lowest- and mid-level officer corps. That is our strength, which is tied to the army, which will work wonders, I assure you. Those are the people to promote more boldly, everything will be remade, will be razed to the ground. More boldly promote people from below. More boldly—don't be afraid.<sup>115</sup>

These passages evoke ones near the end of Stalin's plenum report in which he praised "strength which awaits its advancement" and the country's "tens of thousands of capable people, talented people."<sup>116</sup> Moreover, in one more reprise of his earlier address, Stalin advised military organizations to select and begin to train command and political "deputies."<sup>117</sup> In celebrating the dynamism which would flow from a policy of accelerated promotion for the unheralded command mass, Stalin was signaling—just as he had in early March for the Party *apparatus*—his intent to reconfigure the higher command staff and the high command itself.<sup>118</sup> The transcript of Stalin's speech notes the "prolonged applause" that greeted his breezy talk of gifted "men without names," but

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<sup>115</sup>"Nevol'niki," 83. It is important to realize that prospective replacements for the purged generals were not necessarily younger, as the Red Army's high command and higher command staff were comparatively youthful. Tukhachevsky, for example, was born in 1893; Iakir and Uborevich in 1896; and Bliukher in 1890. By contrast, Stalin was born in 1879 and Voroshilov in 1881.

<sup>116</sup>Stalin, "O nedostatkakh partiinoi raboty," 1 (14):221.

<sup>117</sup>"Nevol'niki," 84.

<sup>118</sup>In fact, Voroshilov had anticipated Stalin's proposal in mid-May 1937 by requiring all military districts, armies, and fleets to compile lists of candidates for the positions of commander and chief of staff at the regiment-, brigade-, division-, and corps-levels. A 15 May directive from Voroshilov stated: "The selection of candidates is to be carried out from loyal men who have been checked in all respects, boldly advancing young, able, and [illegible] commanders and political workers." This charge probably reflected Stalin's personal guidance to Voroshilov. (Voroshilov to all district, army, and fleet military councils, 15 May 1937, Volkogonov Papers, reel 3, frame 528.) A 19 June order of Voroshilov's referred to the need "to accelerate the nomination of candidates for higher officer positions." (Voroshilov to the military councils of districts, fleets, and the OKDVA [Special Red Banner Far Eastern Army], 19 June 1937; see also Voroshilov to the military council of the OKDVA, 26 June 1937, Volkogonov Papers, reel 3, frames 530, 532.)

some members of the Military Council must have listened with trepidation, as twenty of their number already had vanished.<sup>119</sup>

## V

Statements to regime elites by Stalin and Voroshilov in 1937-38 are relevant to certain lingering questions regarding the larger import of the military purge, all of which center broadly on the puzzles of Stalin's perceptions and calculations. To what extent did he and Voroshilov understand how badly the military purge would deplete the higher command staff, which incurred the most severe proportional losses of any group among the command staff?<sup>120</sup> Did they realize that elimination of the Red Army's seasoned command core would exacerbate pre-existing human, structural, and technical weaknesses which nullified its advanced combat doctrine and stymied its ability to fight effectively? Surely, one would think, Stalin and Voroshilov must have known that a blood purge would aggravate the chronic shortage of officers stemming from the determined military build-up on which the regime had embarked in 1929. If so, why, then, did Stalin proceed with the military purge at the very time when Nazi Germany represented a rising and genuinely aggressive threat just over the horizon? As these questions concern veiled areas of Stalin's thinking, and due to the magnitude of the apparent disjunction between the systematic destruction of most of the command elite in 1937-38 and the dire military threat the regime and the country confronted in 1941, they resist attempts to provide persuasive answers. Below I cite some of the evidence that, in my view, bears importantly on these issues, although I do not claim (or attempt) to provide complete or conclusive explanations.

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<sup>119</sup>“Nevol'niki,” 72, 83.

<sup>120</sup>Suvenirov, *Tragediia RKKA*, 302-305, covers purge-related losses among the higher command and political staffs in careful numerical detail. In general, the corps- and army-levels of the command hierarchy as it existed in 1936 were annihilated almost completely, and more than half of the divisional commanders also were slain. Only five of the forty-one highest-ranking commanders and commissars in 1936 were alive in 1940.

The Stalin leadership's own words in the months preceding the launching of the full-blown military purge in May-June 1937 show that Stalin and his attendants understood—indeed, themselves ensured—that its scope would be extensive and thoroughgoing. Molotov, it will be recalled, had vowed at the Central Committee plenum of February-March 1937 that the military establishment would be scrutinized very closely.<sup>121</sup> Shortly afterward, in mid-March, Voroshilov had declared that the Red Army had yet to be investigated thoroughly, and implied that every single “enemy” would be unmasked.<sup>122</sup> At the June meeting of the Military Council, Voroshilov had warned that it might incur “severe” losses from an exhaustive purge.<sup>123</sup> And Stalin, in his own revealing speech to the Military Council, had said that he was aware of the concern aroused by the removal of numerous commanders, but made light of the difficulty of finding qualified replacements. By exhorting military organizations to choose and train “deputies” (obviously so that these men would be ready to succeed their superiors), Stalin had promoted the wholesale changeover in ranking officers that Tukhachevsky's fall would set in motion.<sup>124</sup> (To that end, Voroshilov had ordered all major commands to compile lists of candidates in mid-May.)<sup>125</sup> Shortly after Tukhachevsky's execution as a spy and subversive, a joint Voroshilov-Ezhov order of 21 June had encouraged denunciations with a promise of leniency for those who freely confessed their involvement in “counter-revolutionary and wrecking fascist organizations” and implicated their supposed accomplices.<sup>126</sup> In a 3 July directive to Bliukher in the Far East, Voroshilov had commanded the Far Eastern Army to “quickly, radically purge itself,” and asserted glibly that it possessed “enormous and excellent officer-command cadres, from which fully prepared commander-chiefs for vacant positions can be drawn on a large scale

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<sup>121</sup>“Materialy plenuma,” 1994, no. 8: 24.

<sup>122</sup>Suvenirov, *Tragediia RKKK*, 58.

<sup>123</sup>Cited in introduction to “‘Nevol'niki,’” 72.

<sup>124</sup>“‘Nevol'niki,’” 83-84.

<sup>125</sup>Voroshilov to all district, army, and fleet military councils, Volkogonov Papers. (See n. 118 above.)

<sup>126</sup>“Prikaz Narkomov oborony i vnutrennikh del SSSR,” *Prikazy*, 18.

without difficulty.”<sup>127</sup> Injunctions “to promote, resolutely and boldly, young, capable, upright, and staunch commanders, political workers, and chiefs regardless of their service positions and military knowledge” (as stated in an order of September 1938) were a feature of Voroshilov’s general orders to the Red Army in 1937-38, especially the theme-setting training order prior to the start of the new year.<sup>128</sup> Hence Stalin, Molotov, and Voroshilov (after the plenum) not only expected the military purge to sweep away a mass of traitors and obstructionists, actual or latent, but had acted expressly to foster a climate in the Red Army that would facilitate the rapid realization of such a result—just as Stalin, Molotov, and their other confederates had done for the Party *apparatus* and state administration as a whole.

It is impossible to say whether Stalin and Voroshilov understood at the outset of the *Ezhovshchina* that it ultimately would entail the removal of thousands of officers of all ranks; however, this question is largely irrelevant, as the *Ezhovshchina*’s ideological and political impulses unquestionably overrode rational considerations of efficiency and effectiveness. The military purge was central to the “Bolshevization of the Red Army,” a first-order task which, Voroshilov commanded in December 1938, must be completed “to the end.”<sup>129</sup> Indeed, in its underlying revolutionary fervor, the *Ezhovshchina* can be said to resemble the First Five-Year Plan, that is, the initial phase of Stalin’s single-minded drive to “build socialism.” One can infer from the two benchmark addresses reviewed previously in this chapter that, in Stalin’s mind, the “victory of socialism or, more exactly, the victory of socialist construction in one country” (his words at the *Ezhovshchina*’s midpoint) demanded a new cadre of “fully mature Leninists” to

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<sup>127</sup> Voroshilov to Bliukher, Khakhan’ian, 3 July 1937, Volkogonov Papers, reel 3, frame 535.

<sup>128</sup> “Prikaz ob attestovanii nachal’stvuiushchego sostava RKKA,” 16 September 1938, in *Prikazy*, 63. See also “Prikaz ob itogakh boevoi podgotovki RKKA za 1937 god i zadachakh na 1938 god,” 14 December 1937, in *Prikazy*, 34, 41; and “Prikaz o boevoi i politicheskoi podgotovke voisk na 1939 uchebnyi god,” 11 December 1938, in *Prikazy*, 68.

<sup>129</sup> “Prikaz o boevoi i politicheskoi podgotovke,” *Prikazy*, 66, 68.

consolidate and deepen this provisional triumph and to spearhead the advance to communism's higher phase.<sup>130</sup> Moreover, given his unfettered control of Ezhov, Stalin possessed the power quickly to curb the NKVD, but he chose not to act until November 1938, when he engineered Ezhov's ouster and the issue of a joint Sovnarkom-Central Committee resolution that forbade "any mass operations for arrest and eviction" and disbanded the notorious judicial troikas.<sup>131</sup> Concerning the higher command staff (as opposed to the entire officer corps), Stalin and Voroshilov surely recognized that elimination of the "military-fascist conspiracy" necessarily would involve liquidation of scores, if not hundreds, of ranking commanders, as the old command elite supposedly had provided Trotsky with his first and most active military recruits. Its destruction, therefore, was precisely the aim Stalin sought.

Thus, Stalin was unperturbed by the prospect of a wholesale turnover in the higher command staff. In part, his equanimity must have stemmed from the knowledge that the new General Staff Academy had begun to prepare the ablest colonels and majors for high-level assignments and that it would enroll 100-120 accomplished commanders annually.<sup>132</sup> But Stalin's blasé attitude toward the overthrow of the generals whose rise to prominence he had ratified with the conferral of personal ranks in 1935 also should be seen in light of a basic character trait of his, well developed by the time the Civil War ended. This was his conviction that he possessed "the ability to understand at least the essentials of any field whatever and make informed judgments" on a par with the professionals.<sup>133</sup> Stalin seems to have considered military leadership and planning mostly a matter of common sense. Years of professional training and experience apparently were much less important to Stalin than a man's qualities as an individual. In

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<sup>130</sup>I. V. Stalin, "Otvét tov. Ivanovu, Ivanu Filippovichu," 12 February 1938, in *Sochineniia*, vol. 1 (14), 270-71.

<sup>131</sup>"Postanovlenie SNK SSSR i TsK VKP(b)," *Nakanune*, 1:6.

<sup>132</sup>Kulikov, *Akademiia*, 55.

<sup>133</sup>Conquest, *Stalin*, 85, 193.

this connection, at the end of his personal copy of Lenin's *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, Stalin for some reason was moved to write: "If a man is 1) strong (inwardly), 2) energetic, 3) intelligent (or capable),—then he is good, regardless of any other 'vices.'"<sup>134</sup> A trite observation, perhaps, but it does provide genuine insight into Stalin's instrumental calculus of human value. Stalin believed that the Red Army had plenty of men with the qualities he prized, but he, a self-educated dabbler in fields as diverse as linguistics and economics, neglected to account for the many years of training and varied experience needed to produce, for instance, a qualified division commander or the chief of staff of a combined arms army.<sup>135</sup> More important, from Stalin's perspective, was the fully developed Marxist-Leninist outlook of which he spoke approvingly in his plenum report: it could be instilled in the legion of subordinate commanders to whom he looked to lead the seemingly powerful army of what now was a socialist state, though one which for the time being remained an "island" (in Stalin's metaphor) amid a threatening capitalist sea.<sup>136</sup>

As we have seen, Stalin's reply to those unnerved by the prospective loss of numerous senior officers to the purge was to hasten promotion of their underlings, whose education, military training, and experience often was indifferent at best.<sup>137</sup> In his June 1937 speech to the Military Council, Stalin appeared serenely confident that the "thousands of new, young, and upright commanders and political workers" (as Voroshilov later characterized the military *vydvizhentsy*), constituting "a renewed command and political staff," would excel when advanced to the fore.<sup>138</sup> Relying on

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<sup>134</sup>Cited in L. M. Spirin, "Stalin i voina," *Voprosy istorii KPSS*, 1990, no. 5: 94.

<sup>135</sup>Gor'kov, *Kremi'. Stavka. Genshtab.*, 52. The author, a colonel-general, states that the commanding general of an army or front should have spent from two to four years at each level of command (i.e., platoon, company, battalion, regiment, division) to be qualified properly.

<sup>136</sup>Stalin, "O nedostatках partiinoi raboty," 1 (14):220; idem, "Otvét tov. Ivanovu," 1 (14):271.

<sup>137</sup>Reese, *Stalin's Reluctant Soldiers*, 115.

<sup>138</sup>"Pobezhdát' vraga maloi krov'iu," 68.

subordinate commanders to fill the vacancies created by the purge as well as new positions arising from the Red Army's persistent growth, Stalin and Voroshilov evidently came to realize, though, that the promotees needed time and tutelage to become effective leaders, planners, and organizers. (A May 1938 resolution of the Main Military Council [of which both Stalin and Voroshilov were members] complained that "the majority of the young command and political cadres who have been promoted to leadership positions and are devoted to the Party and the working class, although possessing high personal qualities, still do not have practical experience in the leadership of units and formations, and cannot concentrate primary attention and time on the most important issues—the personal leadership of combat training."<sup>139</sup> In a July 1939 order, Voroshilov bemoaned the persistence of disorganized and slovenly staff work.)<sup>140</sup> But they almost certainly did not grasp the extent to which the turbulence, inexperience, and lack of cohesion produced by a policy of pell-mell, mass promotions—necessitated by the invidious combination of relentless purge and unbridled growth—would undermine the quality of leadership at the battalion-level and below. There thousands of new lieutenants and captains struggled to master the rudiments of combined arms battle while instructing masses of peasants and first-generation workers with low levels of education to perform elementary military tasks.

Tactical-level leadership was a chronic, major weakness for the Red Army, one steadily worsened by continuous "mass production" of new units from the flow of weapons and manpower directed to the military.<sup>141</sup> The regime made capital

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<sup>139</sup>“Prikaz s ob''iavlenniem postanovleniia Glavnogo voennogo soveta RKKA ob avariinosti v chastiakh VVS,” 21 May 1938, in *Prikazy*, 53.

<sup>140</sup>“Prikaz ob ulushenii raboty shtabov,” 18 July 1939, in *Prikazy*, 110.

<sup>141</sup> Reese, *Stalin's Reluctant Soldiers*, 115, 160. Reese emphasizes that the problem of officer procurement and command competence at the tactical level predated the *Ezhovshchina*, as the Red Army already had grown rapidly and had become, by and large, a standing army. (*Ibid.*, 119.)

accumulation a kind of fetish in military (as in economic) matters.<sup>142</sup> (Thus, Voroshilov's speeches at Party congresses and other ceremonial events are garnished with quantitative indices of growth in the Red Army's firepower and arms inventory.) As the Red Army accumulated, year by year, stockpiles of thousands or even tens of thousands of major weapons, the vital, albeit less tangible, underpinnings of *deployable* military power (such as command, control, and communications; logistics; education and military training; officer recruitment and retention) lagged behind the output of arms. Given the underdeveloped condition of Soviet industry and the Red Army at the start of the First Five-Year Plan, it was natural for the Stalin leadership to see military power as a derivative, at bottom, of machines—tanks, aircraft, artillery—and the ability to manufacture great quantities of them.

Stalin seems to have been uninformed or to have turned a blind eye to the persistently parlous state of the Red Army's tactical-level leadership: perhaps he believed that the regime's efforts to boost officers' status, authority, and well-being had been a boon for the entire command corps and that a sharp expansion of the military educational system eventually would redress the problem. As discussed in the next chapter, Stalin's complacency regarding the quality of the command staff and Voroshilov's stewardship of the Red Army finally was soured by the Pyrrhic victory over Finland in the winter of 1939-40, which impelled hasty, almost frantic stabs at reform even as the Red Army's growth accelerated and its commitments expanded with the territorial annexations of 1939-40. But prior to the Finnish campaign, the official line held that Corps Commander Shtern's victory over Japanese forces at Lake Khasan (on the Soviet-Korean border in Primorskii krai) in August 1938 belied foreign claims that the purge had wounded the Red Army; on the contrary, as Shtern himself declared (quoting

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<sup>142</sup>Sapir, "Economics of War," 224. See also idem, *The Soviet Military System*, trans. David Macey (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 226-34. Sapir notes the remarkable fact that "in the early 1930s, or in other words before Germany began to re-arm and before Japan attacked China, the Soviet Union was the world's biggest arms manufacturer." (Ibid., 230.)

Stalin), the Khasan operation had proven that “‘purging spies and saboteurs from Soviet organizations is the surest means of strengthening them’ (Stalin).”<sup>143</sup>

Still, German military power was rising at the very time that scores of Soviet generals methodically were being slain. Stalin was well aware of Hitler’s rearmament program and the options it would provide the Nazi dictator: for instance, he had studied (and revised) the draft of Tukhachevsky’s March 1935 article on the subject.<sup>144</sup> Why, then, did he set the NKVD upon the entire higher command staff rather than limiting its sallies to Tukhachevsky and his immediate associates? Here we must speculate. Stalin distilled a powerful theoretical impetus for terror from Marxism-Leninism. His memorable dictum of 1935 held that “cadres decide everything,” and he plainly had concluded by early 1937 that the Red Army (like other institutions in the new epoch of socialism) demanded fresh leaders—ones who were energetic, disciplined, and politically pure.<sup>145</sup> But Stalin probably overestimated the ability of colonels and majors to be effective quickly in the high-level command and staff positions into which they were thrust. The replacements were confronted with all-embracing administrative and organizational disarray brought on by the detrimental synergy of wanton purge, the spurt in the military build-up that began in 1938, the partial mobilizations of 1938-40, the unanticipated conflict with Finland, and the hasty occupation of the Baltic states and the lands seized from Poland and Romania in 1939-40. Stalin also must have been reassured by the steady presence, once again, of Shaposhnikov as chief military planner. The consummate professional staff officer, Shaposhnikov, phlegmatic and apolitical, had been promoted to head the General Staff in May 1937, one move in the flurry that heralded

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<sup>143</sup>“Rech’ t. Shterna,” *Pravda*, 16 March 1939. Shtern, who had commanded the main Soviet force in the operation (the 39th Rifle Corps) and subsequently been awarded the Order of Lenin, addressed the Party’s Eighteenth Congress. Voroshilov had made the same point to the Military Council in November 1938. (“Pobezhdat’ vraga maloi krov’iu,” 69.)

<sup>144</sup>“Rukopis’ stat’i M. N. Tukhachevskogo.”

<sup>145</sup>Stalin, “Rech’ v Kremlevskom dvortse na vypuske akademikov Krasnoi Armii,” 1 (14):62-64. Appropriately enough, Stalin unveiled the slogan in a speech to military academy graduates on 4 May 1935.

Tukhachevsky's downfall. Lastly, the international situation in 1937-38, though troubled and insecure, may have entered Stalin's purge deliberations as an enabling factor: Germany had no common border with the Soviet Union and the Wehrmacht then would have had to enter Poland or the Baltic countries in force to threaten the north-western USSR directly. Until the Munich crisis of September 1938, Stalin may have viewed that scenario as one still remote.<sup>146</sup>

Voroshilov's support for Stalin's and Ezhov's purge plans has long been apparent: if he fretted about the possibility that the holes knocked in the command staff would put Soviet military capability or growth at risk, his disquiet is not readily apparent. He did know that the replacements for the slain generals were deeply unsettled by the numerous symptoms (e.g., aircraft crashes, drunkenness) of the Red Army's stricken state. In a speech to an almost wholly reconstituted Military Council in November 1938, that is, at the end of a deadly weeding-out he lauded as "radical and comprehensive," Voroshilov alluded to the underlying disquiet.

Can we be certain that the promoted new men are coping with their work, are not ruining the combat and political training of the army for us, and would be able to lead the army in war? This question, comrades, is proper and it is necessary to give an answer to it immediately.

But the defense commissar presented a brave face to his subordinates. He maintained that "we have renewed and reinvigorated the army's blood," thereby producing "the most beneficial results and in the shortest time," and then cited various "proofs" of this implausible claim. The Red Army, Voroshilov insisted, was invincible, yet "colossal work" remained before it would be able to triumph with few losses.

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<sup>146</sup>Forces in several military districts were mobilized for possible intervention in Czechoslovakia. (Zakharov, *General'nyi shtab*, 112-15; Hugh Ragsdale, "Soviet Military Preparations and Policy in the Munich Crisis: New Evidence," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, n.s., 47, no. 2 [1999]: 210-26.)

**I am absolutely certain that our army is combat-capable and always will defeat any enemy and any enemies in whatever combination you like. But I cannot say, and none of you can claim, that our army is capable of defeating the enemy with little blood.**

**This deluded statement is indicative of Voroshilov's inability to comprehend the deeply rooted flaws in organization, technology, and leadership that would combine to hobble the Red Army in wars against capable adversaries in 1939 and 1941. To be sure, he did enumerate a host of basic tactical deficiencies apparent in training and the summer campaign on the Mongolian-Korean border, and there is an air of cheerleading in his upbeat depiction of the Red Army's condition to a military elite dazed by the hunt for "conspirators" among them. Voroshilov concluded by calling for a marked, immediate improvement in the quality of training and the expertise of the Red Army's "Bolsheviks of military affairs," thereby implying that shortfalls were due mainly to a lack of constancy and commitment. Indeed, he compared the acquisition of technical military expertise to the facility in Marxism-Leninism necessary to be "a real Bolshevik."<sup>147</sup>**

**Earlier, in a December 1937 general order, Voroshilov had stated that every commander should base the growth of his professional knowledge on the "systematic and persistent mastery of Bolshevism." In other words, revolutionary ardor (or, in Voroshilov's phrase, the "spirit of Bolshevik firmness, boldness, and energy") could redress shortfalls in a commander's know-how or aptitude. Hence, in the view of the Bolshevized high command of 1938, a situation which qualified as a full-fledged crisis of command could be redressed largely by acts of will spurred by intensive indoctrination and greater commitment politically. In turn, the purge-inspired mandate to maintain officers and soldiers in "a state of political mobilization and keen revolutionary vigilance" provided Mekhlis,<sup>148</sup> the stern ideologue at the head of the Political Administration, a**

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<sup>147</sup> "Pobezhdat' vruga maloi krov'iu," 67-72.

<sup>148</sup> "Prikaz ob itogakh boevoi podgotovki," *Prikazy*, 40-41.

privileged place within the high command as it floundered to organize, quarter, supply, and train an army being force-fed arms and men.<sup>149</sup> At the Party's Eighteenth Congress in March 1939, Mekhlis spoke of furthering the "Bolshevization of the entire RKKA," a perfectly appropriate précis of his mission.<sup>150</sup> Bolstered by "the new man of the Stalinist epoch" to whom the "decisive role in battle" belonged, the Red Army ultimately was to be the disciplined fighting arm of the Party.<sup>151</sup>

## VI

In this chapter I have sought to trace the ideological and political underpinnings of the Great Purges, of which the high command's violent reconfiguration is the key aspect for this study. Although the individual cases of Tukhachevsky, Iakir, and other prominent military purge victims certainly were affected and sometimes determined by their personal histories and relationships to Stalin and Voroshilov, the Great Purges as a whole clearly were impelled by much broader imperatives than personal score-settling. To see the Great Purges only as an extraordinary exercise of wanton state violence commissioned by a cynical, power-mad tyrant would be to overlook Stalin's own conception of them, which was framed by his resolve to turn a backward country into the world's first socialist state and his skilled adaptation of Marxism to Soviet conditions. Considered from this standpoint, the Great Purges emerge as an audacious Stalinist initiative to buttress the fledgling socialist order by infusing its basic institutions with men and women whose political experiences and outlooks reflected chiefly the drive for "socialism in one country" rather than the precursor periods of conspiratorial struggle,

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<sup>149</sup>For weapon production figures for the years 1937-1940, see N. S. Simonov, *Voенно-promышлennyi kompleks SSSR*, 112, 129. In general, a substantial jump in output occurred in 1938. As for men under arms, the Red Army's standing size grew from 1.5 million at the start of 1938 to 3.9 million at the beginning of 1941. (Skorobogatkin et al., *50 let*, 198, 234.)

<sup>150</sup>"Rech' t. Mekhlisa," *Pravda*, 17 March 1939.

<sup>151</sup>*Polevoi ustav RKKA (PU-39)* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Voенnoe Izdatel'stvo Narkomata Oborony SSSR, 1939), 11. This is a published draft of the Red Army's basic field regulation, which specified how it should fight.

revolution, civil war, and intra-Party conflict. Such leaders, in Stalin's view, would be better suited than their predecessors to guide or participate fully in the cultural transformation necessary for socialism to evolve into a fully communist society, the paradoxical *ultima ratio* of Stalinism. Characteristically, Stalin's report to the Party's Eighteenth Congress in March 1939 extolled as "a great achievement" the advance of "hundreds and thousands of new people" to positions of leadership which the recent division of commissariats and administrative-territorial units into smaller entities had permitted.<sup>152</sup>

As a result of his personal political travails during the First Five-Year Plan, Stalin evidently concluded that, as a group, the functionaries in leading positions in the Party *apparatus* and the state administration suffered from definite shortcomings. These were manifest in a preoccupation with bureaucratic or personal maneuvering and aggrandizement; an unacceptable desire for a respite from further political mobilization; a bent for fault-finding in regard to the conception or implementation of the General Line; and a slackening of political vigilance. In particular, Stalin viewed the doubts and discontent in the Party aroused by his program of socialist socio-economic development, which seem to have peaked in 1932, as malign signs of the hidden hand of Trotsky, ostensibly the source, inspiration, and ally of all ideological heresy and anti-Soviet activity. The origins of the Great Purges, therefore, appear to lie in the political meaning Stalin gave to the discontent produced particularly by the reckless brutality of collectivization, the linchpin of his strategy to implant socialism in the USSR. Stalin looked back on the year 1932 as a watershed in the growth and consolidation of the Trotsky-led opposition, inside the USSR and abroad, to his agenda and its implicit claim

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<sup>152</sup>Stalin, "Otchetnyi doklad na XVIII s'ezde partii," 1 (14):374-75. After the war Anatolii Dobrynin, then an assistant to a deputy foreign minister, suddenly encountered Stalin and his guards in a Kremlin corridor while delivering documents. Stalin asked the disconcerted junior diplomat who he was and where he worked. Then, moving a finger slowly in front of Dobrynin's face, Stalin said slowly: "Youth mustn't fear comrade Stalin. He is its friend." After relating the incident to his boss, Dobrynin was advised that Stalin's unpredictability made it best to avoid him. (Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 21.)

that he was Lenin's rightful heir. Accordingly, Stalin intended the Great Purges to strike at the vast, protean Trotskyite underground conjured up in his report to the Central Committee plenum of February-March 1937. To that end, the state security service targeted old adherents of the various movements to defeat or overthrow the Bolsheviks; onetime supporters of Trotsky, Zinoviev, and Bukharin; individuals and groups in the general population that were seen as opposed or insufficiently committed to the Party cause; and, inside the regime, leading officials whom Stalin judged were not, in the final analysis, absolutely reliable politically or personally. In these respects, anticipation of merely the possibility of future disaffection or backsliding proved to be as important as any past act.

In the military sphere, Stalin apparently concluded that Voroshilov's critics harbored the potential to put more extensive demands before the Politburo than solely the defense commissar's replacement: hence they effectively were traitors-in-waiting, who might very well bide their time until the eruption of war with the capitalist powers. Consequently, in the Stalinist view, the pre-emptive elimination of Tukhachevsky, Iakir, Uborevich, and their supposed supporters in the Red Army actually would gird the regime for the inevitable conflict to come. And, indeed, the elderly survivors of Stalin's inner circle insisted decades later that the Soviet war effort had benefited from Stalin's hard-nosed sagacity in liquidating the Tukhachevsky group.

There is, however, another critical aspect of Stalin's motives in undertaking the Great Purges. They responded to an incipient dilemma of "socialist construction," one raised by the Party's very success in suppressing overt, external opponents of the Soviet order and in extending the state's control or influence over practically every facet of social and economic life. For Stalin the Marxist visionary, socialism's realization in the USSR was a signal, if intermediate, triumph, but one spawning complacency and stagnation, and the danger of contamination and degeneration. Paradoxically, socialism's victory actually was sapping the Party's revolutionary ardor and appetite for pushing on to a fully

communist society. As a Marxist-Leninist, Stalin held that class struggle was the midwife of revolutionary progress: even as he heralded socialism's advent, he therefore elected to use the coercive power of the state to precipitate a violent internal convulsion through which residual resistance and obstacles would be exposed and overcome. A captive of his own schematic abstractions, Stalin evidently categorized as enemies those whom he viewed as tethers on the ability of the Party *apparatus* and the state administration to ascend from the socialist plateau they had struggled so mightily to reach. The overthrow of a regime elite that had grown distended, rooted in place, and distracted by bureaucratic routine was all to the good: Soviet officialdom would be transfused positively by the resulting upsurge of energetic, ideologically attuned activist-officials who looked to Stalin as their lodestar. Accordingly, the Great Purges were aimed squarely at the ruling elite, which was to be shaken and cleansed. That Stalin would commission and carry through such an extraordinary and perilous operation itself is evidence of the powerful ideological and political impulses which propelled the Great Purges. Viewed through the antiseptic theoretical prism of Stalin's writings and speeches at the time, the Great Purges primed the Party and the state for further revolutionary advances, thereby fending off stasis and atrophy after the exertions required to root socialism in a land of peasants. In Stalin's mind, the Great Purges represented a continuation and intensification of the revolutionary socio-economic offensive he had conceived and launched nearly a decade earlier.

The impetus from above for legions of unknown "men without names" to be promoted rapidly and en masse was especially strong in the military command hierarchy, as Stalin's June 1937 speech to the Military Council attests. Stalin was untroubled by the prospect of an upheaval in the command staff: the rationale for the latter's revolutionary renewal and, more broadly, the Red Army's Bolshevization trumped the conventions of military effectiveness and rationality. Given Stalin's vigorous encouragement of a policy of speedy advancement of the anonymous command mass, it is fitting that the event portending the overthrow of the military elite in 1937-38 was the

forcible disintegration, scattering, and destruction of the high command of which Tukhachevsky, Iakir, Uborevich, and Egorov had long been fixtures. By early 1938 the high command itself had been Bolshevized: its make-over was embodied in the March 1938 creation of a compact Main Military Council, whose members included Stalin himself. The second-generation Stalin-era high command of 1938-40 was well aligned with the full-fledged Stalinist system brought forth by the Great Purges. Animated by fealty to Stalin and ideological zealotry, the post-purge high command relied for its military expertise on Shaposhnikov, the bloodless technocrat now tremulous and more careful than ever.

## Chapter 5

### The High Command's Flawed Restoration

...we [are] Bolsheviks of military affairs....

Defense Commissar Voroshilov, addressing  
the Military Council, 29 November 1938

Dispatched to Moscow in February 1937, British diplomat Fitzroy Maclean found himself studying captains of the Red Army and Navy at a Soviet-hosted reception that summer. He recorded the morose impression made by this saturnine group after the Tukhachevsky affair's ghastly denouement:

Never have I seen men look more uneasy than those Generals and Admirals, many of whom must have been close friends and associates of the dead men. They were appalled at being in the same room as foreigners; that was the most dangerous thing of all. Whenever they saw foreign naval and military attachés coming in their direction, they sidled hurriedly away. Nor were they inclined for conversation with each other or with the important figures from the political world who were also attending the party. It was impossible to say nowadays who might or might not be a traitor, or who might not, on the strength of some chance remark, denounce you as one yourself. And so they stood about in doorways and in corners by themselves, their faces a greenish-yellowish grey above their stiff uniform collars and rows of medals.<sup>1</sup>

As 98 of the Military Council's 108 members in November 1938 were recent additions, some of the very men whose skittish behavior Maclean found so morbidly fascinating assuredly were shot within a year or two.<sup>2</sup> At the time of Maclean's observations, the

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<sup>1</sup>Maclean, *Eastern Approaches*, 26.

<sup>2</sup>"Pobezhdat' vraga maloi krov'iu," 69.

military leaders' watchful state security shadows were recording their every contact with foreigners as well as each other.

The high command was scattered at the outset of the full-blown military purge, and most of its members were isolated, seized, and killed at Stalin's and Ezhov's command between June 1937 and February 1939. Although two of the five original marshals were not finally slain until the *Ezhovshchina* was being wound down, a new, restructured high command was installed atop the Red Army in March 1938, when a nine-man Main Military Council of the Red Army (*Glavnyi voennyi sovet RKKA*, hereafter *GVS*) was formed.<sup>3</sup> Although the GVS's inclusion of Stalin was exceptional, its creation was a part of a general revival of collegiums in the commissariats. The resort to an institution characteristic of Bolshevik state-building in the regime's uncertain first years was motivated by the need for "systematic monitoring of the fulfillment of Party and government decisions," so as "to raise organizational leadership to the level of political leadership" and reduce opportunities for mischief-making by "enemies of the people" (as a 1940 article in a legal journal explained the change's rationale).<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, the GVS, a product of the *Ezhovshchina*, resembled the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic during the Civil War, a period of similarly uncompromising ideological zeal and concomitant suspicion of the professional military command, more closely than the RVS of the late 1920s and early 1930s.

Concentrating on the mechanisms of military decision-making in this chapter, I pass quickly over the details of the arrests of individual marshals and army commanders and the possible reasons for their fall: these topics have been covered extensively by

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<sup>3</sup>A Main Military Council of the Navy (*Glavnyi voennyi sovet VMF*) was established on 8 April 1938 as part of the new Commissariat of the Navy; its members included Andrei A. Zhdanov, the powerful head of the Leningrad Party organization, Central Committee secretary, and Politburo member who already was on the Leningrad Military District's military council. (Dvoinykh, Kariaeva, and Stegantsev, *Putevoditel'*, 1:27; *Sovetskaia Voennaia Entsiklopediia*, s.v. "Glavnyi voennyi sovet" and "Zhdanov.") References to the Main Military Council or to the GVS are to the Main Military Council of the Red Army.

<sup>4</sup>Gribanov, "K istorii razvitiia edinonachaliia i kollegial'nosti," 67-68.

Conquest in a 1990 update of his *Great Terror* and by Suvenirov in *Tragediia RKKA 1937-1938*, a major work published in 1998. Rather, this chapter details the fundamental changes in the high command's structure and composition that were effected, forcibly and convulsively, in 1937-38. It focuses, then, on internal aspects of the revamped high command, particularly ones that influenced the Red Army's development and war plans as it began a period of intensive preparation for war.

## I

Shortly before state security operatives in Kuibyshev carried off Tukhachevsky on 22 May 1937, Stalin and Voroshilov had acted to disintegrate and disperse the high command defined by the five marshals and fourteen army commanders (grades 1 and 2) appointed in 1935, of whom only the defense commissar, Budenny, and Shaposhnikov remained in good standing at the end of 1938. On 11 May a curt notice on the second page of *Pravda* had announced four major appointments: Marshal Egorov was named first deputy defense commissar (i.e., Tukhachevsky's position since April 1936); Army Commander Grade 1 Shaposhnikov, chief of the General Staff (Egorov's previous position); Army Commander Grade 1 Iakir, commander of the Leningrad Military District; and, lastly, Marshal Tukhachevsky, commander of the Volga Military District.<sup>5</sup> As the latter's territory and forces had been slashed when the adjacent Ural Military District was created in 1935, Tukhachevsky, in effect, had been expelled from Moscow and consigned to a provincial backwater—a long, hard fall.<sup>6</sup> Iakir's transfer to Leningrad also was a demotion, but not a conspicuous one: the border military district centered on

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<sup>5</sup>“V Narkomate Oborony,” *Pravda*, 11 May 1937. For the date (9 April 1936) of Tukhachevsky's promotion to first deputy defense commissar (and appointment as chief of the new Combat Training Directorate), see Koritskii, Mel'nik-Tukhachevskaiia, and Chistov, *Marshal Tukhachevskii*, 234. Soviet administrative practice accorded first deputy commissars (or first deputy ministers) certain powers not enjoyed by other deputies, such as the ability to represent the commissar (minister) at Sovnarkom sessions given the absentee's permission. (Ananov, *Ministerstva*, 175-76.)

<sup>6</sup>G. A. Gromov et al., *Krasnoznamennyi Privolzhskii: Istoriia voisk Krasnoznamenного Privolzhskogo voennogo okruga* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo, 1984), 140.

Kiev, over which he had presided since 1925, was the Red Army's premier command.<sup>7</sup> Voroshilov drew up the list of transfers and passed it for formal approval to the Politburo on 9 May; the moves were confirmed on the tenth and announced publicly on the eleventh.<sup>8</sup>

The statement in *Pravda* struck some senior officers in the Kiev Military District as "a presentiment of impending disaster."<sup>9</sup> The terse disclosure of Tukhachevsky's exile to a third-class military district triggered a wave of apprehension among his friends and associates. The news created a sensation in Kuibyshev, the seat of the Volga Military District, where a conference of district Party organizations had just begun. The general feeling among the officers gathered for the conference was that Tukhachevsky must have done something to deserve banishment from Moscow. Nevertheless, many happily contemplated the prospect of serving under the Red Army's leading innovator and thinker.<sup>10</sup>

Tukhachevsky realized that he had been cornered. A colleague encountered him in the Defense Commissariat's headquarters just after Voroshilov had told him of his demotion. Tukhachevsky reportedly said that the defense commissar had not offered him any explanation: "Cold and official," Voroshilov had informed Tukhachevsky of his removal as first deputy commissar and ordered him to depart at once. When his acquaintance suggested that perhaps Tukhachevsky's troubles should be attributed to his difficult relations with Voroshilov, the marshal responded gloomily, "The problem is not so much Voroshilov, but Stalin."<sup>11</sup> Tukhachevsky met with Stalin, Voroshilov, Molotov,

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<sup>7</sup>*Sovetskaia Voennaia Entsiklopediia*, s.v. "Kievskii voennyi okrug." Thus: "By 1937 the KVO [Kiev Military District] held the leading position in the Soviet Army in terms of the quantity and technical outfitting of [its] troops." <sup>8</sup>"Delo," 49.

<sup>9</sup>Gorbatov, "Shkola Iakira," in Iakir and Geller, *Komandarm Iakir*, 176.

<sup>10</sup>P. A. Ermolin, "Ispytaniia," in Koritskii, Mel'nik-Tukhachevskaia, and Chistov, *Marshal Tukhachevskii*, 128.

<sup>11</sup>G. P. Sofronov, "Skol'ko by on mog eshche sdelat," in Koritskii, Mel'nik-Tukhachevskaia, and Chistov, *Marshal Tukhachevskii*, 220-21.

Ezhov, and Kaganovich for forty-five minutes on 13 May—a day on which Stalin was closeted with Molotov, Voroshilov, and Ezhov for hours.<sup>12</sup> According to an old comrade of Tukhachevsky's, the marshal told him that he had been demoted because a friend as well as a former aide had proven to be spies.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, a press spokesman advised foreign correspondents that Tukhachevsky had shown a weakness for the champagne and pretty women to be found in the capital; a tour in the provinces would teach him to live “more simply.”<sup>14</sup>

Tukhachevsky's sister Elizaveta visited him at his dacha, where he spent a few days with his family before leaving for Kuibyshev. As soon as she saw her brother she realized instantly “that something extraordinary had happened.” Never had she seen him “so dispirited and depressed.” But the greatest shock for her was the “arrogant and openly contemptuous” behavior of the servants.<sup>15</sup> They undoubtedly were employed by or reported to the GUGB, within which rumors concerning Tukhachevsky's impending fall had been circulating for weeks.<sup>16</sup> After travelling in his private rail coach to Kuibyshev, Tukhachevsky made an appearance at the district Party conference, which was still underway. An officer who knew him was startled by his appearance: his hair had gone gray, his eyes seemed to bulge, and his fingers played involuntarily with a pencil.<sup>17</sup> The relentless stalking which had begun to be apparent in January 1937, when Tukhachevsky's name had surfaced seemingly innocuously at the second Moscow political trial, had left him isolated, dejected, and defenseless. In its finality after months

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<sup>12</sup>“Posetiteli,” 1995, no. 4: 52.

<sup>13</sup>“Delo,” 50 n. 1.

<sup>14</sup>Basseches, *Stalin*, 287.

<sup>15</sup>E. N. Tukhachevskaja, “V teni monumenta,” *Ogonek*, 1988, no. 17: 21.

<sup>16</sup>Krivitsky, *In Stalin's Secret Service*, 226-27.

<sup>17</sup>Ermolin, “Ispytania,” 128. Iakir, too, seemed “preoccupied and morose” just after the announcement of his transfer to the Leningrad Military District. His subordinates attributed his dour mood to the fact that the status of the Leningrad Military District was inferior to that of the Kiev Military District. (Gorbatov, *Gody i voiny*, 117.)

of mounting pressure, his arrest on 22 May, while waiting to call on the local Party boss, may even have come as a kind of relief.<sup>18</sup>

The 11 May revelation of Tukhachevsky's dismissal as first deputy defense commissar was merely one of two simultaneous bolts which dazed the command elite. The same bulletin's opening sentence was dumbfounding: "The necessity of establishing military councils in military districts and the institution of military commissars in military units, headquarters, and establishments of the RKKA is acknowledged by Government resolution."<sup>19</sup> Military councils and commissars had anchored the Party's control of the fledgling Red Army during the Civil War, when leather-jacketed, Mauser-toting Party men had ensured that a command corps whose loyalty was in doubt faithfully executed Moscow's orders. Hence the restoration of military councils and commissars in 1937 brought back close political supervision and intervention to a military command once again—and, it seemed, suddenly—considered suspect. Yet the command staff, especially in its upper ranks, now was heavily Communist: sixty-eight percent of the officer corps were Party or Komsomol members by 1935. Seventy-two percent of regiment commanders were Communists; among division and corps commanders, the figure rose to ninety and one hundred percent, respectively.<sup>20</sup>

Consequently, both the timing and the content of the 11 May bulletin were portentous. The high command was being fragmented by Voroshilov and Stalin for some as-yet mysterious purpose, a development synchronized to the overturn of the very principle of *edinonachalie*, which the Party's success in co-opting the command staff since the Civil War had permitted. The singular announcement showed that the regime had grown wary of the *Communist* professional commander, a type personified by

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<sup>18</sup>For the circumstances of Tukhachevsky's seizure, see Kotlova-Bychkova, "Riadam s marshalom."

<sup>19</sup>"V Narkomate oborony."

<sup>20</sup>"Krasnaia Armiia sil'na, kak nikogda. Rech' tov. Tukhachevskogo.," *Pravda*, 31 January 1935.

Tukhachevsky, who previously had advanced to a conspicuous position of official favor and privilege.

The government resolution on military councils and commissars to which the *Pravda* bulletin referred was issued on 10 May, and was distributed throughout the Red Army by a Voroshilov order of the same date. The act called for the creation of military councils consisting of the commander and two “members” (*chleny*) in military districts, and for the introduction of military commissars in all Red Army formations and units as well as staffs, headquarters, and establishments (e.g., schools).<sup>21</sup> The statute on military councils that was approved on the sixteenth (and published in *Pravda* the following day) placed the military council “at the head” of the military district (as well as the combined arms army and fleet), to which all troop units and military establishments located on the territory of a district were subordinate. In turn, the military council was responsible directly to the defense commissar. The council collectively bore “full responsibility” for the political condition, morale, and readiness of the units and establishments under its jurisdiction. Significantly, it was compulsory for all orders issued in the name of the military district commander to be signed as well by one of the council’s two members and the chief of staff.<sup>22</sup> This particular provision must have struck many in the higher command staff, Civil War veterans almost to a man, as a distasteful, even incomprehensible throwback to an era long past: one of the Party officials on the revolutionary military councils instituted in April 1918 had been required to countersign commanders’ orders as a guarantee of their revolutionary integrity.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>“Prikaz Narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR s ob’’iavlenniem postanovleniia TsIK i SNK SSSR ‘O sozdanii voennykh sovetov voennykh okrugov i ustanovlenii instituta voennykh komissarov v RKKA,’” 10 May 1937, in *Prikazy*, 11.

<sup>22</sup>“Ob utverzhenii Polozheniia o Voennom sovete okruga (flota, armii) RKKA.,” *Pravda*, 17 May 1937. See also “Prikaz s ob’’iavlenniem postanovleniia TsIK i SNK SSSR ‘Ob utverzhenii Polozheniia o Voennom sovete okruga (flota, armii) RKKA,’” 17 May 1937, in *Prikazy*, 13-14, which prints the actual military council statute. A Voroshilov order of 27 June 1937 introduced two positions for members of military councils into major headquarters of the Air Forces and Navy. (“Prikaz o vvedenii v shtaty Upravlenii VVS i VMS RKKA dolzhnostei chlenov voennykh sovetov,” 27 June 1937, in *Prikazy*, 19.)

<sup>23</sup>Colton, “Military Councils,” 37.

Who were these enigmatic members of the latter-day military councils and what were their duties? They were political officers: according to a Soviet source, one of the two was “an experienced political worker,” terminology connoting a ranking Party official; the other was the chief of the military district’s political directorate.<sup>24</sup> David Ortenberg, a wartime chief editor of *Krasnaia zvezda*, has furnished an unusually frank description of their duties on the military councils of the fronts and armies of the Second World War.

During my trips to the frontline, I observed the activities of the members of the military councils of fronts and armies, but was totally unable to identify the main thing with which they occupied themselves. . . . I would not be mistaken in saying that, to some extent, this position [i.e., that of political member] was instituted by Stalin for monitoring the commanding generals and senior officers of fronts and armies. These authorities were to report to the Supreme Commander everything negative which they observed in the forces which might be concealed in official reports.<sup>25</sup>

This duty was no different from that assigned to Party officials on revolutionary military councils of armies and fronts during the Civil War, when Stalin had shuttled from one threatened sector to another as a kind of roving “super-commissar” (in Erickson’s phrase) and grand *chlen* of the local military council.<sup>26</sup>

At lower levels of command (i.e., corps, division, separate brigade, regiment, and separate battalion), the newly inserted military commissar was placed on an equal footing with the commander, Party member or not. Several points of the statute defining the commissar’s duties begin with the words “the military commissar equally with the commander” or “the military commissar jointly with the commander,” an indication of

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<sup>24</sup>Iu. P. Petrov, *Partiinoe stroitel'stvo*, 305.

<sup>25</sup>Ortenberg, *Stalin, Shcherbakov, Mekhlis*, 180, 183. In contrast to Ortenberg’s pithy description, a major reference work published by the Soviet Defense Ministry in 1980 blandly states that the members of military councils “participate in planning the work of military councils, the discussion of issues submitted for their consideration, and the working-out and acceptance of decisions.” (*Sovetskaia Voennaia Entsiklopediia*, s.v. “chlen voennogo soveta.”)

<sup>26</sup>Erickson, *High Command*, 80.

the extent to which the commander's authority was being adulterated. Consistent with higher-level practice, the statute's final point mandated that all orders be signed by both parties. This particular measure effectively negated the previous preeminence of the commander-Party man, heretofore the beneficiary of the regime's effort to make service as an officer a prestigious, rewarding career.<sup>27</sup> Military academies and schools, too, had their own military commissars, as did the General Staff's directorates and major departments.<sup>28</sup> The latter body's commissars reported to the military commissar of the General Staff, a formal position created in June 1937.<sup>29</sup>

Mekhlis, the head of the Political Administration from 1938 to 1940, expected the military commissar to be assertive and intrusive. Nearly two years after the commissars were reinstated and shortly after the *Ezhovshchina* was curtailed, Mekhlis, a zealous purger, continued to exhort the commissar to be critical and all-seeing:

Commissars and political workers are the Party's eyes and ears in the Red Army. Nothing should escape the penetrating, Bolshevik eye of the commissars. They should know everything which is occurring in every corner of the Red Army, be the true bearers of the General Line of the Stalinist Central Committee and, together with Party organizations, radically foresee potential treason, safeguard our beloved army from spies, and keep watch so that not a single enemy penetrates our ranks.

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<sup>27</sup>“S ob’iavlениem postanovleniia TsIK i SNK SSSR ‘Ob utverzhenii Polozheniia o voennykh komissarakh RKKK,’” 20 August 1937, in *Priказы*, 24-25. In Red Army formations (corps, divisions, separate brigades), there were two “political” positions: the military commissar and the chief of the political department. (“Prikaz o vvedenii v shtaty vseh soedinenii RKKK dolzhnostei voennykh komissarov i nachal’nikov politotdelov,” 27 June 1937, in *Priказы*, 19.) Iu. P. Petrov, *Partiinoe stroitel’svo*, 303-05, strives mightily to give a positive gloss to this break with the Party’s previous policy of boosting the commander’s authority. He maintains, for example, that “in the conditions of the victory of socialism... one could not speak of the commissar’s function as the monitoring of the command staff, which was foremost in the initial period of the armed forces’ development.” (Ibid., 304.) Although correct ideologically, this distinction had no practical significance: military commissars watched commanders. Point 10 of the military commissar statute specifically charged the unit commissar, “together with the commander,” with evaluating the unit’s officers.

<sup>28</sup>*Priказы*, 311 n. 3; Zakharov, *General’nyi shtab*, 48.

<sup>29</sup>V. Danilov, “General’nyi shtab RKKK v predvoennye gody (1936-iiun’ 1941 g.),” *Voenna-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1980, no. 3: 71.

Moreover, the commissar even was to be a sort of co-commander: in the same address Mekhlis hailed a “new type of commissar” marked by his “splendid knowledge of military affairs.” The entire commissar corps, Mekhlis enjoined, must strive not only to master Marxist-Leninist theory, but to know military affairs “no worse than the commander.”<sup>30</sup> One might suppose that the authority of such commissars, armed dually with military expertise *and* political insight, naturally would come to outweigh that of their counterpart commanders, whose understanding of Marxism-Leninism presumably would be less refined. No defender of his subordinates or the military’s professional prerogatives, Voroshilov took a similar line in his training order for 1939, which was issued in December 1938: “Continually raising his ideological and theoretical level, the *voenkom* [military commissar] is obliged to have a perfect command of military affairs. He should be ready and able to replace the commander in his responsible position if a combat or other situation requires that.”<sup>31</sup> Voroshilov’s vague reference to a non-combat circumstance necessitating the commissar’s assumption of command evoked the innumerable recent cases in which a commander had been removed due to expulsion from the Party or arrest.

By reviving the military council and the military commissar, the government resolution of 10 May 1937 laced the military command once more with an overweening Party presence. This reversal of the long-standing policy of promoting the authority of the Communist commander-*edinonachal'nik* must be considered a keystone of the Red Army’s Bolshevization, the term Voroshilov and Mekhlis both used to refer to the transformation of the military leadership effected by the *Ezhovshchina* and a process they still considered unfinished at the end of 1938.<sup>32</sup> As was the case during the Civil War, the restoration of the commissar on the threshold of the *Ezhovshchina* was a telling sign

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<sup>30</sup>“Rech’ t. Mekhlisa,” *Pravda*, 17 March 1939. Mekhlis spoke at the Party’s Eighteenth Congress.

<sup>31</sup>“Prikaz o boevoi i politicheskoi podgotovke,” *Prikazy*, 71.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 66, 68; “Rech’ t. Mekhlisa.” Voroshilov and Mekhlis both spoke of Bolshevizing the “entire” Red Army, a process that Voroshilov said must be completed “to the end.”

that the Party's top leaders viewed much of the command staff as susceptible to subversion if not actually disloyal, as key members of its upper echelon ostensibly had shown themselves to be. The unsavory, unavoidable parallel with Civil War practice has been recognized by an official history of the Political Administration, but in a characteristically positive way: "As in the years of battle with interventionists and White guardsmen, the institution of military commissars was one of the forms of Party assistance to the command staff."<sup>33</sup> Yet it must have been very few senior commanders who contemplated the reimposition of obtrusive Party controls and the command shifts revealed on 11 May with anything but bewilderment and foreboding.

## II

Tukhachevsky's demotion and the reassignment of Egorov, Iakir, and Shaposhnikov in May 1937 initiated an upheaval in the peacetime high command that is unique in Soviet history. The suddenness of its onset sharpens the contrast with the years immediately preceding the tempest: an extended period of continuity in the high command's composition began in 1931, the year of Tukhachevsky's return to Moscow as a deputy defense commissar, Egorov's appointment as chief of the Red Army Staff, and Uborevich's assumption of command in the Belorussian Military District. Elsewhere, Iakir had been in place in Kiev since 1925, and Bliukher had presided over the Far Eastern Army since 1929. Gamarnik, who was appointed Voroshilov's other deputy in 1930, had headed the Political Administration since 1929. Budenny, professionally worthless but politically useful to Voroshilov and Stalin, had held a cavalry-related job in Moscow continually since 1923, and had been the Red Army's cavalry inspector since 1924. There were, to be sure, periodic changes in the commanders of the lesser military districts, but the group of men to whom the prime command and top staff assignments (e.g., chief of the Red Army Staff) went was both compact and static. As the vanguard of

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<sup>33</sup>Iu. P. Petrov, *Partiinoe stroitel'stvo*, 305.

the “professional (apolitical, one could say), new-era Soviet generals” of the mid-1930s, the favored few had gained prominence during the 1920s due to their Civil War exploits and the distance they had put between themselves and Trotsky.<sup>34</sup> Apart from those named above, this circle included Shaposhnikov; Ivan P. Belov; Avgust I. Kork (an Estonian slain with Tukhachevsky); Mikhail K. Levandovskii; Ivan N. Dubovoi; and Pavel E. Dybenko, among others—that is, most of the fifteen men on whom the exalted rank of army commander (*komandarm*) was bestowed in November 1935.<sup>35</sup> Hence the company from which the pre-purge high command was drawn was fixed and circumscribed after about 1925, that is, after Trotsky’s ouster from the Red Army and Voroshilov’s appointment as military and naval commissar.

If the deadliness and seeming suddenness of the Tukhachevsky case had the character of a lightning strike, the military purge as a whole, in its effect on the higher command staff, was like a drawn-out earthquake which swallowed great chunks of a familiar landscape. Commencing with the personnel moves announced on 11 May 1937, the high command, the central military administration, and the military district commands were shuffled and reshuffled in intricate, extended sequences. One high-level arrest would set in motion a train of reassignments, as the replacement (already a member of the command elite or newly elevated to it) himself required replacement. Considered individually, many purge-induced senior appointments, which evidently required Stalin’s personal approval and on which Voroshilov consulted Ezhov, probably had no deeper underlying logic than satisfaction of an urgent need to fill a key vacancy created by an arrest.<sup>36</sup> (The General Staff’s Operations Directorate [a department prior to October

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<sup>34</sup>S. T. Minakov, “Sovetskaia voennaia elita 1920-30-x gg. i Zapad,” in *Rossia i Zapad. Formirovanie vneshnepoliticheskikh stereotipov v soznanii rossiiskogo obshchestva pervoi poloviny XX veka.*, ed. Iu. S. Borisov et al. (Moscow: Institut rossiiskoi istorii RAN, 1998), 185.

<sup>35</sup>On the group of men who were the first to receive the rank of army commander, see O. F. Suvениров, “Tragediia pervykh komandarmov,” *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, 1996, no. 4: 170-81.

<sup>36</sup>Voroshilov to Stalin, 14 May 1937, Volkogonov Papers, reel 10, frame 660. This document is a request by Voroshilov for Stalin’s approval of five high-level personnel actions, of which three were removals and two were appointments. Khlevniuk, *Politbiuro*, 207, cites a similar request (dated 2 September 1937) in which Voroshilov (continued next page)

1939], responsible for the Red Army's war plan, had seven chiefs over a six-year period ending with the German attack.)<sup>37</sup> If the successor already held a top rank, he himself was likely to be taken sooner or later. By contrast, a man elevated rapidly from below, that is, a *vydvizhenets*, had a better chance of hanging on until the *Ezhovshchina* was suspended in November 1938.

One can imagine the spasms which convulsed the command elite as its exemplars were largely consumed, one after another. Ten army commanders, two fleet flag officers, thirty-nine corps commanders, and three flag officers were arrested in 1937, many in the first great wave of arrests in late spring and summer.<sup>38</sup> Initially, other marshals and army commanders could be moved to cover the gaps broached at the top. Below, for example, was transferred to the Belorussian Military District from the Moscow Military District after Uborevich was shot with Tukhachevsky and Iakir.<sup>39</sup> (Budenny succeeded Below as the custodian of the Moscow Military District, an ultra-sensitive assignment at the time; tellingly, he held the job until August 1940.)<sup>40</sup> Arrested himself in January 1938, Below was shot in July.<sup>41</sup> As army and corps commanders began to fall by the dozen, the lower tiers of the higher command staff were tapped for replacements. Below's place was taken by Mikhail P. Kovalev, who moved from command of a fortified area in 1936-37 to become the second-in-command of the Kiev Military District in December 1937 and then, just a few months later, Below's successor in Belorussia. Both a survivor and a prime, if unwitting, beneficiary of the *Ezhovshchina*, Kovalev commanded two more military districts before the German invasion, in addition to participating in the attack on

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specifically notes that he had discussed the candidate for a position as military district commander with Ezhov, who had cleared the nominee.

<sup>37</sup>Gor'kov, *Kremi'. Stavka. Genshtab.*, 51. In his dry memoir of the war years, Shtemenko, a wartime chief of the Operations Directorate, remarks tersely: "Such haste in the selection and transfer of officials so responsible was hardly useful." (Shtemenko, *General'nyi shtab*, 19.)

<sup>38</sup>Suvenirov, *Tragediia RKKA*, 373-80.

<sup>39</sup>*Sovetskaia Voennaia Entsiklopediia*, s.v. "Belov."

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, s.v. "Budennyi."

<sup>41</sup>Suvenirov, *Tragediia RKKA*, 373.

Poland and the war with Finland—quite a diverse set of assignments for a period of just a few years!<sup>42</sup> Mikhail G. Efremov's rise was similarly swift: he received his first military district command (the Volga) in May 1937, when he supplanted Tukhachevsky in Kuibyshev. He then whirled through the Transbaikal, Orlov, North Caucasus, and Transcaucasus Military Districts between November 1937 and January 1941.<sup>43</sup> (Not all of these moves were due to purge-related losses, however; the Orlov Military District was reestablished in July 1938 to facilitate force growth in the western USSR.)<sup>44</sup> Efremov was among the 1,056 "generals of 1940," as the new command elite has been dubbed, after generals' and admirals' ranks were instituted for the first time in May 1940.<sup>45</sup> Such rapid ascents and repeated transfers were not extraordinary for an able man on the cusp of high-level command in 1937, if he was fortunate enough to skirt the snares of state security.

The *Ezhovshchina* overturned practically the entire military elite, with several conspicuous exceptions: Voroshilov, Budenny, and Shaposhnikov, already at or near the Red Army's apex in 1937, went untouched, as did Kulik and Timoshenko, who were to advance to leading positions in the post-purge high command. Zooming from the rank of corps commander in 1936 to that of marshal of the Soviet Union in 1940, Kulik and Timoshenko profited from the unparalleled, if dangerous, opportunities the purge afforded, good fortune, and their Civil War association with the First Cavalry Army, the celebrated formation led by Budenny and patronized by Stalin. Only nine of the eighty-five members of the Military Council in February 1936 escaped the purge entirely (one because he had died in 1936), but seven of the nine were First Cavalry Army veterans.<sup>46</sup> In fact, Shaposhnikov has the distinction of being the *only* member of the Military

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<sup>42</sup>*Sovetskaia Voennaia Entsiklopediia*, s.v. "Kovalev."

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, s.v. "Efremov."

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, s.v. "Orlovskii voennyi okrug."

<sup>45</sup>I. I. Kuznetsov, "Generaly 1940 goda," *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1988, no. 10: 30.

<sup>46</sup>"Sostav Voennogo soveta," 74-80. By the end of 1941, sixty-eight of eighty-five had been shot, two had committed suicide, and one (Bliukher) had died under interrogation.

Council in 1936 who was left untouched yet had not ridden with Budenny. The nexus between exalted rank, survival, and First Cavalry Army service makes Shaposhnikov's case all the more remarkable. The stolid, wary *ex-voenspets* also was the only military district commander (of thirteen) at the beginning of 1937 who was not killed. (Budenny, Stalin's keeper of the Moscow Military District, was the only district commander at the end of 1937 who was still in place a year later.)

Assisted by Ezhov, Stalin and Voroshilov completed the main lines of the high command's deadly make-over in less than a year. At the outset of a broad and intensive renewal of the higher officer corps (as they conceived of the *Ezhovshchina*'s military dimension), they eliminated the chief thorns in Voroshilov's side (Tukhachevsky, Iakir, and Uborevich) with one shattering blow, disposed of Voroshilov's other deputy and chief of the Political Administration (Gamarnik), and installed a neutered chief of the General Staff, Shaposhnikov. His predecessor, Egorov, was shunted into Tukhachevsky's old position as Voroshilov's deputy—hardly an auspicious sign—even before Tukhachevsky was seized. Egorov was denounced directly to Stalin in November 1937 by a Party veteran at the General Staff Academy, who faulted his decisions on the Red Army's war plan and force structure, which allegedly were taken “mistakenly, and possibly subversively.”<sup>47</sup> Another denunciation, in January 1938, accused Egorov of having slandered Lenin in November 1917.<sup>48</sup> At this time, that is, shortly before a restored high command was unveiled in the guise of the GVS, Voroshilov ordered Egorov to proceed to distant Tbilisi to take charge of the Transcaucasus Military District. As had been the case with Tukhachevsky, banishment from Moscow, which served to isolate and demoralize a once-powerful victim, was the prelude to capture and execution.

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<sup>47</sup>For the text of the letter of denunciation from Ian M. Zhigur, a brigade commander on the faculty of the General Staff Academy, see Volkogonov, *Triumfi tragediia*, vol. 1, pt. 2, 271. Zhigur himself was arrested (ironically, before Egorov was taken) and shot. (Suvenirov, *Tragediia RKKK*, 405.)

<sup>48</sup>G. Zhukov to Voroshilov, 28 January 1938, Volkogonov Papers, reel 10, frame 731. On the identity of the letter-writer (not G. K. Zhukov, the future marshal), see Suvenirov, *Tragediia RKKK*, 114-16; and Spahr, *Stalin's Lieutenants*, 176.

After only a few weeks in Tbilisi, Egorov suddenly was called back to Moscow, where he languished before being arrested in April 1938.<sup>49</sup>

Egorov's downfall left Bliukher, the last to be slain of the three marshals who were shot in 1937-38. Stalin and Voroshilov dealt with him unhurriedly. Bliukher's subordinates had been thinned drastically by the mid-1938 forays of Frinovskii (Ezhov's first deputy and state security chief) and Mekhlis, who reported the arrival of his "ensemble" of purgers in Khabarovsk to Voroshilov in a telegram of 29 June.<sup>50</sup> But Bliukher himself was recalled to Moscow only in August, that is, after his Far Eastern Front had checked and then repulsed a large Japanese incursion at Lake Khasan. After hearing Bliukher's report on 31 August, the GVS castigated him for his direction of the summer operation, which it found to be "completely unsatisfactory and verging on deliberate defeatism." Bliukher was removed from his long-held position as Far Eastern Army commander and placed "at the disposal" of the GVS, a state of limbo preceding arrest.<sup>51</sup> Detained at Voroshilov's Sochi dacha on 22 October (together with his immediate family and brother), Bliukher was beaten savagely and died under interrogation on 9 November.<sup>52</sup> His case is unusual only in that he was left to dangle, six thousand kilometers from Moscow, for so long.

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<sup>49</sup>A. Smetanin, "Nachgenshtaba Egorov," *Krasnaia zvezda*, 7 October 1989; A. P. Nenarokov, *Vernost' dolgu: O Marshale Sovetskogo Soiuz A. I. Egorove*, 3d ed. (Moscow: Politizdat, 1989), 149-52. According to Smetanin, Egorov's sisters repeatedly wrote to Voroshilov after Stalin's death to learn his fate; Voroshilov never replied. In a letter of 23 March 1938 to Voroshilov, Egorov lamented that it had been two months since he had been "freed from any work" and that it was "unbearable... to sit without work." Voroshilov sent Egorov's letter to Stalin with a note stating that this was Egorov's fourth written appeal. (Egorov to Voroshilov, Volkogonov Papers, reel 10, frame 766.)

<sup>50</sup>Mekhlis to Voroshilov, 29 June 1938, Volkogonov Papers, reel 3, frame 514; Voronov, "Na sluzhbe voennoi," 68. Present in Khabarovsk throughout July and August 1938, Mekhlis sent Stalin and Voroshilov a stream of reports that were sharply critical of Bliukher. For example, he wrote the following of Bliukher in a lengthy report of 28 July: "At times it is difficult to tell when [sic] a commander or a man in a mask appears before you." Mekhlis's charge clearly was to gather "facts" with which to prepare the spurious grounds for Bliukher's removal. (Mekhlis to Voroshilov and Stalin, 28 July 1938, Volkogonov Papers, reel 3, frames 583-86.)

<sup>51</sup>"Prikaz o rezul'tatakh rassmotreniia Glavnym voennym sovetom voprosa o sobytiakh na ozere Khasan i meropriiatiakh po oboronnoi podgotovke Dal'nevostochnogo teatra voennykh deistvii," 4 September 1938, in *Priказы*, 58, 60. For a copy of the typed original of this order, see Volkogonov Papers, reel 10, frames 459-65.

<sup>52</sup>Conquest, *Great Terror*, 429-31. For a firsthand account of Bliukher's arrest, see Grafira Bliukher, "S Vasiliem Konstantinovichem Bliukherom—shest' let," *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1990, no. 1: 83. "M. N. Tukhachevskii i 'voенno-fashistskii zagovor,'" 47-51, relates the horrifying details of Bliukher's interrogation and death.

Just below the five marshals of the Soviet Union were the fifteen *komandarmy*. Of the five men awarded the rank of army commander grade 1 in 1935, four (Kamenev [who died naturally in August 1936, but was declared a traitor posthumously], Iakir, Uborevich, and Belov) were dead or under arrest by March 1938, that is, at the time of the GVS's creation. Only Shaposhnikov remained. And of the ten original army commanders grade 2, all but one (Ivan F. Fed'ko) had been shot or were awaiting execution by then.<sup>53</sup> When the *Ezhovshchina* was curbed at the end of 1938, Shaposhnikov (whose background and non-Party status until 1930 made him atypical among the command elite) was the lone survivor of the fifteen original army commanders—men who, together with Marshals Tukhachevsky and Egorov, had seemed to epitomize a distinctively Soviet yet genuine military professionalism.

During the months when much of the pre-purge high command was being scattered and destroyed, those who would stamp the reconstituted high command with their icy and dogmatic personalities were elevated to positions of broad authority. This was the other cardinal feature of Stalin's and Voroshilov's revamping of the high command between May 1937 and March 1938. The 1934 reform of the central military administration had provided Voroshilov with two deputies, Tukhachevsky and Gamarnik, of whom both were eliminated by the Tukhachevsky affair. Gamarnik's immediate successor as chief of the Political Administration was Army Commissar Grade 1 Petr A. Smirnov, a career commissar described by a contemporary as "peevisly interested in all persons 'having ties to enemies of the people.'" Notwithstanding a lack of naval training or operational experience, Smirnov (promoted to deputy defense commissar in October 1937) was appointed people's commissar for the Navy and head of the new naval commissariat in December 1937, a striking example of the supremacy of Stalinist *partiinosť* over professional knowledge and experience.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>Suvenirov, "Tragediia pervykh komandarmov," 178-79.

<sup>54</sup>N. G. Kuznetsov, *Nakanune*, 3d ed. (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo, 1989), 232; *Sovetskaia Voennaia Entsiklopediia*, s.v. "Smirnov."

Stalin filled the new vacancy atop the Political Administration in January 1938 with Mekhlis, an ex-personal assistant of his, cutthroat political operator, and veteran propagandist for whom revolutionary commitment invariably transcended professional judgment. Appointed a deputy defense commissar simultaneously (unlike Smirnov), Mekhlis would be central to the Bolshevized high command of 1938-40: he felt free to intervene in any aspect of military administration or operations which caught his eye.<sup>55</sup> Although Mekhlis's vanity inspired jokes (it was suspected that he lugged a Mauser in an old wooden holster at the Finnish front so as to evoke his Civil War exploits as a commissar), he was hated and feared.<sup>56</sup> Army General Sergei M. Shtemenko, a *vydvizhenets* and 1940 General Staff Academy graduate, had the opportunity to sift through the paper debris from Mekhlis's front-line forays while Shtemenko was detailed to the General Staff's Operations Directorate for the duration of the Finnish conflict. After the 44th Rifle Division was surrounded and destroyed in the Karelian forest by the enemy's nimble ski troops, Stalin sent Mekhlis to investigate. For a war memoir published while Brezhnev's stifling conservatism reigned, Shtemenko's assessment of Mekhlis is remarkably biting:

His reports often passed through my hands and always left a bitter after-taste inside: they were as black as night. Using the great powers granted to him, he would remove tens of men from command positions, immediately replacing them with others brought with him. He demanded that Division Commander Vinogradov be shot for losing control of the division.... Later on, I came into contact with Mekhlis more than once, and here I concluded definitively that this man always was disposed to the most extreme measures.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Iu. V. Rubtsov, "Lev Zakharovich Mekhlis," *Voprosy istorii*, 1998, no. 10: 73, 76, 82. Mekhlis had been the chief editor of *Pravda* since 1931; while retaining his editor's position, he had been appointed head of the Central Committee's press and publishing department in September 1937. Mekhlis joined the Orgburo in October 1937, just as Gamarnik had after he was named chief of the Red Army's Political Administration in 1929. (Crowley, Lebed, and Schulz, *Party and Government Officials*, 54.) Mekhlis's Orgburo appointment was indicative of his status as a top Party insider.

<sup>56</sup>Soloviev, *Nine Lives*, 167-69. Soloviev, who worked as one of Mekhlis's roving assistants during the Finnish conflict, confessed: "... everyone tried to avoid provoking him to wrath, for we all knew that a single word from him was sufficient to settle our fate."

<sup>57</sup>Shtemenko, *General'nyi shtab*, 18. For a discussion of the 44th Rifle Division episode, see Carl Van Dyke, *The Soviet Invasion of Finland, 1939-40* (London: Frank Cass, 1997), 86-89.

Voroshilov's other new deputy, Efim A. Shchadenko, was cut from similar cloth. Shchadenko was a career commissar whose purge-propelled ride to the top is atypical for one who entered the Party long before the Revolution. He was brought to Moscow in November 1937 from the Kiev Military District, where he, as a member of its restored military council, is said to have labored energetically on "*komprometatsiia*." Shchadenko was placed in charge of the Red Army's Command and Officer Personnel Directorate—an apt position for an ardent purger with a "penchant for *administrirovanie*."<sup>58</sup>

The last of the three Voroshilov deputies named in 1937-38 was Fed'ko, a professional commander who replaced Iakir and followed Shchadenko from Kiev to Moscow in January 1938. Seemingly ascendant after appointment as first deputy defense commissar, promotion to army commander grade 1, and the bestowal of an Order of Lenin, Fed'ko was carried off in July 1938 and shot three days after Egorov in February 1939.<sup>59</sup> Fed'ko's demise provided an opening for Kulik, already among the elect on the GVS. One of sixty-two corps commanders in 1936,<sup>60</sup> Kulik was called to Moscow in May 1937 to take over the Red Army's Artillery Directorate, whose span of control he was able to inflate.<sup>61</sup> Fidgety, vocal, and domineering, Kulik is damned as "almost a complete ignoramus" by Marshal of Artillery Nikolai D. Iakovlev, the wartime head of the Main Artillery Directorate and Kulik's replacement.<sup>62</sup> According to Nikolai N.

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<sup>58</sup>*Sovetskaia Voennaia Entsiklopediia*, s.v. "Shchadenko"; Gorbato, *Gody i voiny*, 117; Kazakov, *Nad kartoi*, 29. Gorbato was a commander in the Kiev Military District at the time of Iakir's arrest and Shchadenko's subsequent purge inquiries. After he was expelled from the Red Army, he met briefly with Shchadenko, who dismissed him with a promise that his case would be reviewed. That night (21 October 1938) Gorbato was arrested. (Gorbato, *Gody i voiny*, 120.) Kazakov, *Nad kartoi*, 29, ticks off Shchadenko's unattractive personal qualities. He goes on to state that Shchadenko's "Party experience" made him a good complement to Shaposhnikov while they presided together over the Frunze Military Academy in the early 1930s—an assessment both generous and implausible.

<sup>59</sup>"M. N. Tukhachevskii i 'voenno-fashistskii zagovor,'" 84, 88-89.

<sup>60</sup>Suvenirov, *Tragediia RKKA*, 304.

<sup>61</sup>*Sovetskaia Voennaia Entsiklopediia*, s.v. "Kulik"; N. D. Iakovlev, typescript of *Ob artillerii i nemnogo o sebe* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1981), 79-81. Page references are to the typescript of the marshal's memoirs. The typescript was provided to me by William J. Spahr, who obtained it from the marshal's son. Not surprisingly, the original version is more lively and frank than the published one.

<sup>62</sup>Iakovlev, typescript, 82.

Voronov, another wartime artillery marshal, he, Shtern, and Zhukov “breathed easily” when Kulik’s plane departed the Mongolian site of the summer battles of 1939 against the Japanese: “Kulik had brought much confusion,” Voronov laconically observed. Voronov later had to serve as Kulik’s deputy, a thankless job which required “great attentiveness and guardedness,” as Kulik was disorganized, considered his every action to be faultless, and terrorized his subordinates.<sup>63</sup> In an autocratic system of power in which the *Vozhd’* ostensibly was infallible, kept his attendants off balance, and prized vigorous, forceful action, officials who rose to leading positions were conditioned to operate as Kulik did.

A synopsis of the outcome of the high command’s murderous renovation was occasioned by the Party’s Eighteenth Congress in March 1939, the first such assembly since 1934. The membership of the Central Committee chosen for the event was announced on the front page of *Pravda*. The new Central Committee’s military contingent consisted of fourteen men, nine as full members.<sup>64</sup> The only holdovers from the Seventeenth Congress’s Central Committee were Voroshilov, Budenny, and Mekhlis, all full members in 1939.<sup>65</sup> Whereas the 1934 Central Committee was the first to include a professional commander (Iakir) as a full member, the 1939 body had four: Timoshenko, Shtern, Kulik, and Nikolai G. Kuznetsov of the Navy. Kuznetsov, just thirty-six years old in March 1939, was to head the Navy from 1939 to 1946; Shtern, at thirty-nine years of age, was a veteran of Spain and the battlefield victor at Lake Khasan, which afforded him the opportunity to address the Eighteenth Congress and the title “Hero of the Soviet Union.” None of these men had been a candidate member in 1934. Military candidate members in 1939 included Ivan S. Konev, to be graced with a marshal’s star in 1944; Kirill A. Meretskov, a distinguished Spanish veteran and another marshal-to-be; Dmitrii

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<sup>63</sup>Voronov, “Na sluzhbe voennoi,” 69, 75-76.

<sup>64</sup>*Pravda*, 22 March 1939; Crowley, Lebed, and Schulz, *Party and Government Officials*, 55-56.

<sup>65</sup>Of the three, only Voroshilov had been a full member of the Central Committee in 1934. Budenny and Mekhlis had been candidate members, but Mekhlis did not hold a military position at that time.

G. Pavlov, a hero of the Soviet Union whose Spanish deeds had garnered praise from Stalin; Aleksandr D. Loktionov, the chief of the Air Forces since 1937; thirty-six-year-old Ia. V. Smushkevich, yet another decorated Spanish veteran and the Air Forces' deputy chief; and Shaposhnikov, at fifty-six years of age the military delegation's oldest member but a Party man only since 1930. With the exception (once again) of Shaposhnikov, none of the candidate members had been especially well-known, even in the Red Army, in 1934. Hence the trend toward inclusion of leading professional commanders in the Central Committee was not reversed by the Great Purges: on the contrary, elimination of the old command elite actually brought about a relative increase in professional military representation on the Central Committee, a development itself suggestive of Stalin's goal of advancing a new command group to the fore.

This contingent, the replenished cadre from which the GVS was drawn, remained in flux, however. It was squeezed not only by the usual strains stemming from work in the regime's upper tier, but, to an increasing extent, by those exerted by the simultaneous conduct of a frenetic military build-up and a series of major mobilizations, deployments, and combat operations beginning in 1938. These pressures kept the high command in an unsettled, fluid state. It is noteworthy that Zhukov, whom Stalin plucked from the Kiev Military District to take over the General Staff in January 1941, cannot be found among the rising military stars on the Central Committee of 1939. And four (Shtern, Loktionov, Pavlov, and Smushkevich) of its fourteen military members were sacked and shot in 1941.<sup>66</sup> To the extent the revamped high command possessed any seasoned strategic insight, its source was Shaposhnikov, whose path to the Party pantheon was exceptionally odd and capricious. The Central Committee's sizeable military contingent signified that the Red Army remained a central institution of the regime, but it emerged from the Great Purges under a largely new leadership whose grasp was tenuous and unsteady.

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<sup>66</sup>Suvenirov, *Tragediia RKKK*, 376, 381. Shtern, Loktionov, and Smushkevich were arrested in June 1941 *before* the Nazi invasion on the 22d. Pavlov, commanding the Western Front in Belorussia, was arrested, together with four of his senior subordinates, on 4 July, that is, after the makeshift Soviet defense had collapsed. For a summary of Pavlov's case, see Smirnov, *Vplot' do vysshei mery*, 30-37.

In effect, then, Tukhachevsky and Gamarnik were supplanted at Voroshilov's side by Shchadenko and Mekhlis. The latter were deputy defense commissars (as Tukhachevsky and Gamarnik had been) when the GVS was established in March 1938. As such, they personified the diminution of the high command's military-technical expertise in favor of personal fealty to Stalin and a pitiless revolutionary rectitude. Kulik's inclusion on the GVS at the outset of its existence and his promotion to deputy defense commissar at the start of 1939 bolstered the amalgam of military incompetence, meddlesome arbitrariness, and intolerant revolutionary zeal which animated Stalin's new high command. Kulik's astounding advance to the pinnacle of the military establishment during the years 1937-39 gave Voroshilov a trio of inept, autocratic, and dangerous seconds. After the loss of Tukhachevsky and Egorov, only Shaposhnikov, the seemingly mismatched embodiment of a rigorous, universal, and apolitical military professionalism, was in a position to uphold standards of professional rigor and candor inside the high command. Yet he was too cowed or overshadowed for his presence to carry weight commensurate with his peerless experience and knowledge. Shaposhnikov is said to have been "severely traumatized" by the purge.<sup>67</sup> a colleague in Stalin's councils of war described him as an "extremely careful man [who] acted strictly within the bounds of the given task."<sup>68</sup> (Indeed, Shaposhnikov's self-discipline seems to have found expression in a studied reticence, and this side of his character probably figured in Stalin's decision to retain him.) In addition, Shaposhnikov and Shchadenko remained at odds, a circumstance arising from their joint tenure over the Frunze Military Academy earlier in the decade, and this would have heightened Shaposhnikov's caution.<sup>69</sup> Shredded and reconstituted by the Great Purges, the high command—in particular, its reduced professional cohort—was enervated by them too.

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<sup>67</sup>S. P. Ivanov, *Shtab*, 250.

<sup>68</sup>Kuznetsov, *Krutye povoroty*, 77.

<sup>69</sup>Zakharov, *General'nyi shtab*, 111.

## III

The GVS was the high command's vessel of Bolshevization. As merely the date of its founding (13 March 1938) would suggest, the GVS's creation stemmed from the same political and ideological imperatives behind the Great Purges. In essence, the GVS gave top Party officials a direct voice in military affairs on a routine basis; its composition also boosted the weight of the Party authorities and Stalinist marshals in the high command relative to that of the more professionally-minded soldiers. Accordingly, military policy and administration would be suffused with the values of the Stalinist Party leadership. Tellingly, for the first time since the Civil War, Stalin officially was accorded an overt place in the high command: he occupies the second position (after Voroshilov, the GVS's chairman) on the GVS's original roster, the only person outside the Defense Commissariat to so appear.<sup>70</sup> Given Stalin's position as the Party's general secretary, his place on the GVS symbolized the Party's mastery over military affairs and, by inference, the supremacy of Party values and interests over professional and departmental ones.

In combining Party leaders and career soldiers, the GVS resembled the fused high command of the Civil War, when the Trotsky-led Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic had ensured that the Red Army was administered and commanded wholly in the service of the Party.<sup>71</sup> The synthesis of transcendent Party authority and subordinate military expertise embodied in both the GVS and the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic responded to the political mobilization, violent internal strife, and rampant suspicion of experts characteristic of the *Ezhovshchina* and the Civil War alike. And, as the GVS was a state organ, Stalin's privileged position on it underscores the

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<sup>70</sup>“Prikaz s ob’iavleniem postanovleniia SNK i TsK VKP(b) ‘Ob obrazovanii pri NKO Glavnogo voennogo soveta RKKA,’” 15 March 1938, in *Priказы*, 50. Stalin was a member of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic for two periods during the Civil War (October 1918 to July 1919 and May 1920 to April 1922). (*Grazhdanskaia voina i voennaia interentsiia v SSSR: Entsiklopediia*, ed. S. S. Khromov [Moscow: “Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia,” 1983], s.v. “Revvoensovet Respubliki.”)

<sup>71</sup>P. A. Shevotsukov, “Revoliutsionnyi voennyi sovets Respubliki,” in *Revvoensovet Respubliki*, ed. A. P. Nenarokov (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1991), 12-13.

accumulation of formal powers in both the Party and state hierarchies (which otherwise maintained separate responsibilities and identities) by the dictator and his retinue during the 1930s.<sup>72</sup>

The GVS was unveiled in a Voroshilov order of 15 March 1938, to which was appended the Sovnarkom-Central Committee resolution that established the new body “under” (*pri*) the Defense Commissariat on the 13th. This terse resolution consists mostly of a list of the GVS’s handful of members (absent even their military ranks or titles), but its opening phrase refers to another act of 13 March in justification of the GVS’s creation.<sup>73</sup> This second resolution, entitled “On the Establishment of Collegiums Under USSR People’s Commissariats,” reveals the GVS’s Great Purge lineage. It begins with a declaration that the abolition of collegiums in 1934 had led to a “weakening of the unity of leadership” over the branches of individual commissariats; further, the “lessons of the struggle with wrecking” had shown the need for “a certain collegiality” in commissariat leadership, a “unification of management” within commissariats, and greater “verification of fulfillment” of Party and government directives.<sup>74</sup> Put bluntly, this meant that neither could the people’s commissar—the highest authority within a commissariat—be relied on to act properly on his own volition, nor could his subordinates be trusted to carry out their tasks as ordered. As the upper stratum of the state administration had become self-interested, lethargic, and even debased due to its economic successes (presumably the Marxian dialectic at work), the restoration of collegiums in commissariats would further the necessary processes of control and revitalization.

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<sup>72</sup>The intense concentration of authority over Party and state at the regime’s apex was a feature of political Stalinism that, in regard to Stalin personally, reached its apogee in 1941. After the Nazi attack, he took the titles of supreme commander-in-chief, chairman of the State Defense Committee, and defense commissar, while remaining general secretary of the Party. Stalin’s assumption of formal authority over every aspect of the war effort extended the trend to its furthest possible extreme.

<sup>73</sup>“Ob obrazovanii pri NKO Glavnogo voennogo soveta RKKA,” *Prikazy*, 50.

<sup>74</sup>“Postanovlenie Sovnarkoma SSSR i TsK VKP(b), 13 marta 1938 g. Ob obrazovanii kollegii pri narkomatakh SSSR,” in *Direktivы KPSS i Sovetskogo pravitel'stva*, 2:531-32.

A contemporary article in a leading legal journal explains the theoretical basis for this policy departure. The piece focuses in part on defects in the practice of full *edinonachalie* in the leadership of commissariats after the principle was instituted during the relatively relaxed mid-year interlude between the Party's Seventeenth Congress and Kirov's murder in 1934. According to the author, the void created by the elimination of commissariat collegiums, a mainstay of Soviet government administration since 1918 and an implicit check on the freedom of action of commissariat heads, had been "used for bureaucratic perversion of the principle of *edinonachalie*..." In turn, "Trotskyite-Bukharinist, bourgeois-nationalist, and other hirelings of foreign intelligence, having penetrated the people's commissariats, used the perversion of the principle of *edinonachalie* for their counter-revolutionary ends." Interestingly, this mouthpiece of Stalinist legality also evoked the transformative ends of the *Ezhovshchina*:

The world-historical tasks of the third Stalinist Five-Year Plan have complicated significantly the direction of the socialist economy. In addition, the tasks of catching up and surpassing the most developed capitalist countries of Europe and the USA, of completing the construction of the classless socialist society and gradually passing from socialism to communism, of overcoming the survivals of capitalism in the consciousness of people—all of these tasks have brought to the fore complicated new requirements for the state *apparatus*.<sup>75</sup>

From this standpoint—and entirely apart from Trotskyite mischief-making—the complexity of managing an increasingly industrial economy from the top, particularly given the proliferation of commissariats from 1936, mandated constant verification of compliance with central directives by the managers of thousands of far-flung enterprises.

Still, the author again tied the administrative demands of the Second and Third Five-Year Plans to the nefarious activities of "enemies of the people": "It is well known that disregard of the need for attentive, systematic verification of fulfillment in a number

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<sup>75</sup>Gribanov, "K istorii razvitiia edinonachalii i kollegial'nosti," 66. On the initial creation of collegiums, see Kozlov, *Kollegial'nost' i edinonachalie*, 19.

of departments created a situation which facilitated the hostile work of Trotskyite-Bukharinite bandits.” However, the advisory councils established in commissariats (as a feeble replacement for the disbanded collegiums) could not serve as the requisite “organ of systematic monitoring” of on-the-spot performance, as they assembled infrequently. Hence the need for collegiums, consisting of fewer than a dozen of a commissariat’s leading officials and convening regularly to deliberate and to ensure compliance with Party and state mandates—the latter a function for which *individual* leaders had been made specifically responsible in 1934. “Collegiate discussion of basic management issues,” the author counseled, “heightens political vigilance and strengthens self-criticism...,” a statement indicative of the fundamental mistrust of its own bureaucracy which underlay the regime’s retreat to an institutional refuge dating to its first years in power. For people’s commissars straining under the imperative to produce more products or raw materials more quickly, their work supposedly menaced by hidden saboteurs, the collegiums were said to possess “exceptionally great significance,” as they would help “to raise organizational leadership to the level of political leadership.”<sup>76</sup> In short, under an infant socialist system ostensibly still endangered from within and without, state functions such as administration and production required not only new leaders but the new form of leadership that the revived collegiums would provide.

The 13 March resolution called for a collegium to consist of not more than nine to eleven persons so as to promote efficient operation: the people’s commissar (the collegium’s chairman), his deputies, and “several leading workers... possessing sufficient experience,” that is, the heads of a commissariat’s main components (e.g., the *glavki* in economic and industrial commissariats). Collegium functions were enumerated indiscriminately, in a fashion indicative of the board’s appropriation of powers previously held by the people’s commissar:

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<sup>76</sup>Gribanov, “K istorii razvitiia edinonachaliia i kollegial’nosti,” 67. On the previous emphasis on leaders’ personal responsibility, see “Rezoliutsiia XVII s’ezda VKP(b)” and “Postanovlenie TsIK i SNK SSSR, 15 marta 1934 g.,” in *Direktivny KPSS i Sovetskogo pravitel’sva*, 2:410, 415.

... to hold regular meetings (approximately once every ten days) to examine, above all, issues of practical leadership, the verification of fulfillment, the selection of cadres, to examine any and all important orders for the people's commissariat, to summon representatives of local organs of the people's commissariat for reporting on their activity, to dispatch representatives of the people's commissariat to localities for verification of fulfillment, and so forth.

Collegium decisions were enacted by order of the people's commissar and, as was the case previously, a member could appeal his decision to the Sovnarkom and the Central Committee.<sup>77</sup> Even if this right was rarely, if ever, invoked, its very existence and the mandate that a commissariat's collegium take up all major administrative, operational, and personnel issues prior to a decision by the people's commissar diminished the latter's authority.<sup>78</sup> Hence, as a concomitant of the *Ezhovshchina*, the old collegiate form of administrative control was reimposed on the people's commissars, who had been free of such oversight since 1934 and, moreover, already reported to Molotov, the head of the Sovnarkom. As it was essentially the same regime leadership that had moved decisively in 1934 to elevate the people's commissars over the departments of government they headed, the sharpness of its reversal in March 1938—roughly the *Ezhovshchina*'s midpoint—is evident from the prerogatives accorded the restored collegiums and the fact that no amendment was made to the USSR Constitution of 1936, although one plainly was warranted.<sup>79</sup>

Not all of the organizational innovations of 1934 were discarded immediately, though. The large advisory councils under the people's commissars were retained for the time being, as they supposedly were useful in linking the central administrations of commissariats with their outlying subordinates and as forums for the "exchange of

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<sup>77</sup>"Ob obrazovanii kollegii pri narkomatakh SSSR," *Direktivy KPSS i Sovetskogo pravitel'stva*, 2:532. On collegium size, see also Ananov, *Ministerstva*, 159.

<sup>78</sup>Ananov, *Ministerstva*, 160 n. 1.

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*, 159 n. 2, states that the collegium resolution of 13 March 1938 "had, indisputably, constitutional significance." This was because collegiums did not exist in commissariats when the final text of the USSR Constitution was approved on 5 December 1936.

experience,” that is, for discussion of administrative and technical practice.<sup>80</sup> Their lack of any genuine power in relation to the people’s commissars who convened them as well as to the restored collegiums probably was the decisive factor in their retention, as it most certainly was in their establishment as part of the shift to full *edinonachalie*.

We see, then, that the *Ezhovshchina* not only effected a wholesale replacement of the leading officials of the state administration at every level, but precipitated a major change in the way the people’s commissariats—the “central branch organs of state control”—were organized and governed.<sup>81</sup> This little-known institutional dimension of the Great Purges contributed to the disarray which pervaded the Defense Commissariat during the final years of Voroshilov’s tenure as its overseer.

#### IV

The GVS was the Defense Commissariat’s purge-era collegium.<sup>82</sup> Initially, it had nine members: Voroshilov (its chairman), Stalin, Fed’ko, Mekhlis, Shchadenko, Shaposhnikov, Bliukher, Budenny, and Kulik. Hence the GVS, as constituted originally, amalgamated three distinct elements: top Party authorities (Stalin and Mekhlis); soldier-Stalinists (Voroshilov, Budenny, Shchadenko, and Kulik); and, lastly, professionally-minded commanders (Shaposhnikov, Bliukher, and Fed’ko), of whom two would be slain by the end of 1938.<sup>83</sup> Meretskov (then a corps commander) was appointed the GVS’s secretary; he served simultaneously as the deputy chief of the General Staff under

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<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>82</sup>The word *glavnyi* in the title of the GVS (*Glavnyi voennyi soviet*) distinguished it from the Military Council (*Voennyi soviet*), the “consultative” assembly of eighty to one hundred or more leading officers established under the defense commissar in November 1934. Convened and chaired by Voroshilov, the Military Council, decimated in 1937-38 and eclipsed completely by the GVS, finally was disbanded in November 1940. (“Prikaz Narodnogo Komissara Oborony Soiuza SSR ob uprazhnenii Voennogo soveta pri Narodnom Komissare Oborony SSSR,” 12 November 1940, Volkogonov Papers, reel 10, frame 497.)

<sup>83</sup>“Ob obrazovanii pri NKO Glavnogo voennogo soveta RKKA,” *Priказы*, 50.

Shaposhnikov. Added to the GVS later in 1938, it appears, were two of the youngest (and least fortunate) of the military *vydvizhentsy*: Pavlov, the new head of the Red Army's Automotive-Armored Directorate, and Loktionov, the Air Forces' chief.<sup>84</sup> Stalin had removed himself from the GVS's roster by July 1940—when Timoshenko, the new defense commissar, replaced Voroshilov as its chairman—although he obviously did not eschew military affairs at a time when the threat of war was surging. (Indeed, Stalin met with the chief of the General Staff on fifty-four occasions in 1939, more often than ever before.) Whereas he and Mekhlis had personified the Party's hands-on direction of the Red Army in the GVS originally, the GVS of 1940 included Mekhlis and two comparatively young men who were moving into Stalin's immediate entourage: Georgii M. Malenkov, the consummate *apparatchik* and chief of the Party's personnel bureau, and Zhdanov, then the director of Party *agitprop*.<sup>85</sup> Hence, even if Stalin did not remain a formal member, the GVS continued to have strong, top-level Party representation, which clearly was the sine qua non of its existence.<sup>86</sup>

In his report to the Party's Eighteenth Congress in March 1939, Voroshilov highlighted the GVS's creation a year earlier, and declared proudly that its members included "our Stalin." The GVS's purpose, he continued, was "examination and resolution of all the fundamental and most important issues concerning the Red Army's

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<sup>84</sup> "Prikaz o rezul'tatakh rassmotreniia Glavnym voennym sovetom voprosa o sobytiakh na ozere Khasan," *Priказы*, 56, indicates that Pavlov and Loktionov were GVS members by early September 1938. After returning from Spain, Pavlov was given command of a tank brigade; he effectively became the Red Army's chief tank expert when he was appointed to his senior position in the central military administration in November 1937—a huge step upward. (Notes on D. G. Pavlov, Volkogonov Papers, reel 8, frame 382.)

<sup>85</sup> "Prikaz o sostave Glavnogo voennogo soveta," 26 July 1940, in *Priказы*, 160-61; Gor'kov, *Kreml': Stavka. Genshtab.*, 31. For a summary of Malenkov's positions in the central Party *apparat*, in which he began working in 1925, see V. I. Ivkin, *Gosudarstvennaia vlast' SSSR. Vysshie organy vlasti i ikh rukovoditeli. 1923-1991 gg. Istoriko-biograficheskii spravochnik* (Moscow: "Rossiiskaia politicheskaiia entsiklopediia" (ROSSPEN), 1999), 403-04. On Zhdanov's pre-war career, see *Sovetskaia Voennaia Entsiklopediia*, s.v. "Zhdanov"; and Nevezhin, *Sindrom nastupatel'noi voiny*, 29-31.

<sup>86</sup> In fact, on 10 April 1941 Stalin decreed (in the form of a Politburo decision written in his own hand) that any significant orders for the Red Army had to be signed by the defense commissar, the chief of the General Staff, and either Zhdanov or Malenkov. Given the ongoing build-up of German forces at the time, Stalin's injunction would apply especially to operational orders (e.g., a directive to raise the readiness of forces near the border). (Khlevniuk, *Politbiuro*, 256.)

development”—a useful encapsulation.<sup>87</sup> In fact, the GVS appears to have dealt regularly with the full range of issues that previously would have been handled by the defense commissar personally or, operating under his guidance, his deputies and the chief of the General Staff: force readiness; the organization and armament of ground and air forces; the development and acquisition of arms and military equipment; force manning, training, and deployment; and military infrastructure—that is, any question under the ken of the Defense Commissariat. The GVS’s initial meeting on 19 March 1938 featured discussions of infantry weapons, military district needs for senior officers, and the conduct and frequency of GVS sessions. Its final one, on 20 June 1941, reportedly covered several routine matters, for example, the order of priority for arming the fortified areas then being built. The GVS was not intended or able to act as an organ of strategic command and control in wartime, however: it was a peacetime executive committee for military policy and administration. A GVS decision or resolution (*postanovlenie*) was enacted by an order of the defense commissar, a General Staff directive, or (by GVS request) a Defense Committee directive. Reflecting the emphasis on “verification of fulfillment” in official discourse, a special monitoring team under the General Staff was responsible for checking on the execution of GVS decisions.<sup>88</sup>

The GVS existed alongside the Defense Committee, a vest-pocket body with broad jurisdiction over national mobilization and the development and acquisition of weaponry. Nominally under the Sovnarkom, the Defense Committee succeeded the Defense Commission (created in 1930) and the moribund STO; it was established on 27 April 1937 to consider “all measures and issues relating to the defense of the USSR...”<sup>89</sup> (As this had been the task of the Defense Commission, which had largely

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<sup>87</sup>“Rech’ t. Voroshilova,” *Pravda*, 15 March 1939.

<sup>88</sup>V. D. Danilov, “Sovetskoe Glavnoe komandovanie v preddverii Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny,” *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 1988, no. 6: 10; *Priказы*, 319 n. 28; *Sovetskaia Voennaia Entsiklopedia*, s.v. “Glavnyi voennyi sovet.” For an example of a GVS decision promulgated by Voroshilov’s order, see “Prikaz s ob’iavleniem postanovleniia Glavnogo voennogo soveta RKKA ob avarii v chastiakh VVS,” 21 May 1938, in *Priказы*, 52-53.

<sup>89</sup>“Postanovlenie Politbiuro o sozdanii Komiteta oborony SSSR,” 27 April 1937, in *Stalinskoe Politbiuro*, 33. The Defense Committee originally had seven members; a joint Central Committee-Sovnarkom resolution of April 1941 cut (continued next page)

the same members and economic-industrial focus, the change seems to have had more to do with precedence and hierarchy than decision-making practice: a *komitet* ranked higher than a *komissii* in the state administration.)<sup>90</sup> The Defense Committee, which possessed a substantial supporting *apparat*, had far-reaching coordinating and monitoring functions, which had become crucial given the growing number of commissariats with roles in military production or mobilization. Accordingly, armaments and economic mobilization, especially in regard to the transport sector and the defense industry (disaggregated by weapon type into separate commissariats in January 1939), were focal points of the Defense Committee's activities.<sup>91</sup>

This concentration on the economic basis of military power distinguished the Defense Committee from the GVS, which confined itself to issues that were more strictly military, that is, ones involving the Red Army's ground, air, and air defense forces. The memberships of the GVS and Defense Committee nevertheless overlapped, as was the case with all of the compact, top-level committees, commissions, and councils founded at Stalin's direction in 1937-38 to streamline and strengthen his control of the details of economic, military, and foreign policy.<sup>92</sup> Initially, Stalin and Voroshilov were members

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its membership to just five (Voroshilov, Stalin, Zhdanov, Timoshenko [the defense commissar], and Kuznetsov [the naval commissar]). ("O Komitete Oborony. Postanovlenie TsK VKP[b] i SNK SSSR," 9 April 1941, *Izvestiia TsK KPSS*, 1990, no. 2: 203.)

<sup>90</sup>See, for example, the discussion under the heading "Olichie ministerstv ot drugikh vidov sovetskikh vedomstv" in Ananov, *Ministerstva*, 24-36. The author on the significance of state committees: "To some extent, state committees of the USSR Council of Ministers stand over ministries and special departments, as certain monitoring rights are accorded these committees, as well as coordinating functions in certain respects in regard to the activity of ministries and special departments." This general statement is fully applicable to the Defense Committee established in 1937. (Ibid., 35.)

<sup>91</sup>*Sovetskaia Voennaia Entsiklopediia*, s.v. "Komitet oborony pri SNK SSSR"; Zverev et al., *Surovye ispytaniia*, 52; *Stalinskoe Politbiuro*, 34 n. 2. On the differentiation of the defense industry, see N. S. Simonov, *Voенно-promyshlennyi kompleks SSSR*, 123.

<sup>92</sup>The chief examples are the two standing commissions of the Politburo established on 14 April 1937 to act in the Politburo's stead ("Postanovlenie Politbiuro o podgotovke voprosov dlia Politbiuro TsK VKP[b]," 14 April 1937, in *Stalinskoe Politbiuro*, 55) and the Economic Council, nominally under the Sovnarkom, which was created in November 1937. Most of the Politburo's members were on the Economic Council or the Defense Committee. So important, in Stalin's mind, were these two bodies that they were obliged to meet daily, according to a joint Central Committee-Sovnarkom resolution of 10 September 1939. (Khlevniuk, *Politbiuro*, 251-52.) In effect, the USSR was being governed by several interlocking boards centered on a durable nucleus of Stalin, Molotov, Kaganovich, Voroshilov, and (from 1939) Mikoian, around whom the supreme organs of Party and state power effectively coalesced. As these top-level bodies, however compact, were overlaid on the existing machinery of government, questions of jurisdiction and coordination must have arisen continually.

of both bodies, with Voroshilov, the GVS's chairman and, after Molotov, Stalin's most frequent visitor during the years 1937-39, representing the main link between the Kremlin and the Defense Commissariat.<sup>93</sup> Still, Stalin's initial inclusion in the GVS formally gave him a direct role in running the military establishment, a novel position for the Party's general secretary.

As the collegium of a commissariat, the GVS probably operated on the basis of an approved quarterly work plan drafted by a department of the Defense Commissariat's directorate for administration, which supported the defense commissar.<sup>94</sup> Any GVS member would have had the right to propose topics for its consideration. In addition to the senior military officers who briefed the GVS, authorities from other parts of the government, as required, could attend its sessions: for example, Molotov and Frinovskii were present at the 31 August 1938 meeting at which Bliukher was ambushed.<sup>95</sup> Based on general Soviet administrative practice for collegium proceedings, voting at GVS meetings would not have occurred, especially if Stalin was present and had expressed his own view on an agenda item. At the formal meetings convened in the Defense Commissariat's headquarters on *Frunzenskaia naberezhnaia*, Voroshilov would have tabled a proposal after discussion of an issue, asked who favored it, and then solicited any objections, which presumably would have surfaced and been dealt with during the review of the matter at hand.<sup>96</sup>

Meretskov, the GVS's original secretary, has provided a valuable, if brief, firsthand description of its functions and operations, one which emphasizes Stalin's

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<sup>93</sup>Khlevniuk, *Politbiuro*, 291. According to Khlevniuk's calculations, Voroshilov was present in Stalin's office on 422 occasions from 1937 to 1939. (Molotov's total was 657.) Ezhov's visit count for 1938-39 was somewhat greater than Voroshilov's, but he lost power at the end of 1938.

<sup>94</sup>Ananov, *Ministerstva*, 180-81; Dvoinykh, Kariaeva, and Stegantsev, *Putevoditel'*, 1:49.

<sup>95</sup>"Prikaz o rezul'tatakh rassmotreniia Glavnym voennym sovetom voprosa o sobytiakh na ozere Khasan," *Priказы*, 56-57.

<sup>96</sup>Ananov, *Ministerstva*, 181, 181 n. 1. The author describes the absence of concrete rules for the adoption of decisions by collegiums as a clear-cut shortcoming.

intimate involvement in military affairs and his contribution to Soviet defense capability in the years preceding the Nazi invasion.<sup>97</sup> According to Meretskov, the GVS convened two or three times a week, so collective leadership of the Defense Commissariat must have become a reality in 1938. A briefing by a military district commander or other ranking officer often served to orient the discussion preceding a decision. Meretskov's synopsis of the policy process is illuminating, even though it creates a misleading impression of Stalin's solicitude for the military:

A decision was taken for every issue that was considered. Next it was approved by the defense commissar and sent to I. V. Stalin. This meant that not a single military or military-economic issue facing the country was resolved without the direct participation of the General Secretary of the [Party Central Committee]. From him a draft of a Party-government decision went for the consideration of the USSR government, was accepted there, sometimes with several amendments, and went further to the General Staff, by now a resolution for which execution was compulsory. Stalin frequently was present at GVS sessions. On these occasions he invited its members as well as the district commanders and the district chiefs of staff to dine with him in the evening. There the conversation frequently went on and dragged out until late at night, and Stalin, in the most detailed fashion, queried the commanders on the situation in the provinces, about questions, requests, wishes, shortcomings, and therefore always was in the know about the whole of army life.<sup>98</sup>

This account suggests that Stalin was present at GVS meetings only when the group was summoned to his Kuntsevo dacha (known as the *Blizhniaia*) for a long night of supper and guarded table talk or when a special, expanded meeting was held in the Kremlin.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup>Meretskov's favorable depiction of Stalin is at odds with Khrushchev-era memoirs and historical works, and can be attributed, at least in part, to the publication of his memoirs in 1970. (See, for example, K. A. Meretskov, *Na sluzhbe narodu* [Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1970], 168-70.) Rejecting Khrushchev's legacy, the Brezhnev leadership partially rehabilitated Stalin, and the history of the "Great Patriotic War" was a prime vehicle for this undertaking. For a discussion of the depersonalization of culpability for the 1941 debacle in Soviet historiography, see Earl F. Ziemke, "Stalin as a Strategist, 1940-41," *Military Affairs* 47, no. 4 (1983): 173-80.

<sup>98</sup>Meretskov, *Na sluzhbe narodu*, 168-69. Another source (*Prikazy*, 319 n. 28) indicates the GVS met three to five times a month, apart from extraordinary sessions. If the latter were counted, the frequency with which the GVS met might well be consistent with Meretskov's account.

<sup>99</sup>The record of visitors to Stalin's Kremlin office shows that the GVS normally did not meet there, at least until Stalin began to consult more regularly with the high command in 1939. Meretskov, for example, does not appear in the log (continued next page)

The nocturnal sessions at Stalin's retreat probably were akin to the rambling, pseudo-jocular affairs experienced and described so memorably by Milovan Djilas and Khrushchev.<sup>100</sup> Meretskov wryly notes that his job as GVS secretary required considerable stamina, especially as he combined it with a demanding position as the General Staff's deputy chief.<sup>101</sup>

Regardless of where the GVS met, Stalin's involvement in its deliberations (either by participation or scrutiny of its decisions) provided Mekhlis and the other political figures in the high command with opportunities to sway him on personnel or policy questions, to gain his backing for their projects, and to discredit rivals and other personal targets. Aggressive and energetic, "Mekhlis often gave Stalin advice on military matters, and Stalin usually listened to him," according to Khrushchev.<sup>102</sup> In a case that is notable because his intended victim not only escaped but wrote about the incident, Mekhlis tried to do in Corps Commander Andrei V. Khrulev, a First Cavalry Army man and old revolutionary acquaintance of Voroshilov's, by convincing Stalin that Khrulev was mixed up in the "military-fascist conspiracy." (When Khrulev had an opportunity to speak with Stalin, his protest at Mekhlis's machinations caused the dictator to reply with a smile: "Well now, no wild animal is stronger than the cat.") Having failed in this instance, Mekhlis personally warned Khrulev that he intended to persist.<sup>103</sup> In Khrushchev's estimation, Mekhlis ranked with Voroshilov ("a total loss") as "one of the

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on even a single occasion in 1938, which is inconsistent with the holding of even occasional GVS meetings in Stalin's office. (Gor'kov, *Kreml'. Stavka. Genshtab.*, 237-39, lists the military visitors to Stalin's office in 1938.) Stalin did attend the 31 August GVS session that resulted in Bliukher's dismissal, which almost certainly convened in the Kremlin. ("Prikaz o rezul'tatakh rassmotreniia Glavnym voennym sovetom voprosa o sobytiakh na ozere Khasan," *Prikazy*, 56.)

<sup>100</sup>Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, 107-15, 147-61; Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, 296-303.

<sup>101</sup>Meretskov, *Na sluzhbe narodu*, 168.

<sup>102</sup>Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, 164.

<sup>103</sup>G. A. Kumanev, "Neopublikovannoe interv'iu nachal'nika tyła Krasnoi Armii v 1941-1945 gg. Generala armii A. V. Khruleva," *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 1995, no. 2: 68-69, 74; *Sovetskaia Voennaia Entsiklopediia*, s.v. "Khrulev." Mekhlis's relationship with Stalin is an interesting one. According to Ortenberg, *Stalin, Shcherbakov, Mekhlis*, 18, Mekhlis was not particularly afraid of Stalin; in fact, he is said to have responded in kind when Stalin cursed him during an angry exchange between the two men. A leading journalist, Ortenberg worked closely and amicably with Mekhlis.

worst.”<sup>104</sup> Mekhlis rode high until spring 1942, when his attempt to distance himself from the collapse of the Crimean Front, to which he had been assigned as Stalin’s representative, angered the supreme commander-in-chief.<sup>105</sup> However, from 1938 to 1940 Mekhlis had license to delve wherever he chose due to his record of reliable service in responsible Party positions, long personal acquaintance with Stalin, and duties as a would-be Bolshevizer of the Red Army.

As core, Moscow-based members of the GVS and Voroshilov’s deputies, Mekhlis, Shchadenko, and Kulik would have attended most GVS meetings. They were, in fact, Voroshilov’s right-hand men, though he can hardly have been comfortable with Mekhlis’s restless, scheming presence.<sup>106</sup> Their very substantial authority is plain in an order Voroshilov issued at the end of 1938 that details the responsibilities of Mekhlis, Shchadenko, and Shaposhnikov. In addition to his direct leadership of the Political Administration, Mekhlis controlled the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court, a death-dealing tool of the purge, the military procuracy, food supply, and military publishing, to name the most important elements of his expansive portfolio. Shchadenko, in charge of officer personnel, also oversaw force organization, manpower mobilization, military education, housing, and the veterinary service, among other operational and support functions. Directing the General Staff, Shaposhnikov monitored combat training, communications, engineering, and fuel supply as well. Kulik, not a political general per se but a hack nevertheless—“Nobody needs ships,” he once told Voroshilov in the presence of Kuznetsov, the Navy’s chief—presided over artillery and infantry weapons

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<sup>104</sup>Khrushchev, *Glasnost Tapes*, 52; idem, *Khrushchev Remembers*, 164.

<sup>105</sup>Shtemenko, *General’nyi shtab*, 48-51. For a uniquely sympathetic sketch of Mekhlis and his role as Stalin’s front-line watchdog and troubleshooter, see Ortenberg, *Stalin, Shcherbakov, Mekhlis*, 178-80. Ortenberg, alone among those who wrote about their experiences with Mekhlis during the war, casts him as well-meaning, upright, and brave: he got into trouble, says Ortenberg, because “he possessed neither tactical nor operational knowledge.” Ortenberg blames Stalin for giving Mekhlis assignments at the front in which he was bound to stumble.

<sup>106</sup>Ortenberg, *Stalin, Shcherbakov, Mekhlis*, 182. Ortenberg describes Mekhlis as a “tireless” man of “furious energy.”

after his appointment as Voroshilov's third deputy in January 1939.<sup>107</sup> In short, at the start of 1939, power in the Defense Commissariat was apportioned among Voroshilov; Mekhlis, Shchadenko, and Kulik, his three deputies; and Shaposhnikov, the chief of the General Staff. Stalin weighed in as he saw fit.

This group, the nucleus of the revamped high command, was neither cohesive, well qualified, nor functional. Khrushchev likened the Defense Commissariat to a "kennel of mad dogs...tearing at each other's throats" after the elevation of Mekhlis, Shchadenko, and Kulik.<sup>108</sup> Mekhlis's predaciousness was matched in degree by Shaposhnikov's circumspection: seeking safety by remaining a "technical staff officer" (as Marshal Konev described him in 1944), Shaposhnikov was keenly aware of the limits of his influence as the GVS's dispenser of professional wisdom in a newly Bolshevized high command.<sup>109</sup> Unlike Tukhachevsky, Shaposhnikov, a Party member of only several years' standing, recognized that the litmus test for a Soviet general ultimately was his "ability to maneuver among the innumerable reefs of the Soviet-party bureaucracy" rather than his talent or knowledge.<sup>110</sup> And, indeed, great caution on Shaposhnikov's part was warranted: the General Staff had to coordinate extensively with the Administration-Mobilization Directorate, which Shchadenko supervised, and there already existed "a certain tension" between the men.<sup>111</sup> Yet the trio of deputy defense commissars was lost on operational and technical matters, and fumbled such issues among themselves. Khrulev, an experienced administrator chosen to head the Red Army's Supply Directorate in October 1939, disgustedly recalled his attempt to create an integrated logistics system out of disparate supply channels:

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<sup>107</sup> "Prikaz o raspredelenii obiazannosti mezhdu Narodnym komissarom oborony, ego zamestiteliami i nachal'nikom General'nogo shtaba RKKA," 29 December 1938, in *Priказы*, 86-87; Zakharov, *General'nyi shtab*, 110-11. For Kulik's remark, see Kuznetsov, *Krutyie povoroty*, 95.

<sup>108</sup> Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, 164-65.

<sup>109</sup> Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, 55.

<sup>110</sup> Soloviev, *Nine Lives*, 36.

<sup>111</sup> Zakharov, *General'nyi shtab*, 111.

... before the war a decision on the problem of supplying rations, gear, medical support, [and] the supply of fuel passed from Mekhlis to Shchadenko, from Shchadenko once more to Mekhlis, then to Kulik, from him to Shchadenko, from Shchadenko again to Kulik. The people concerned with this business were superfluous, they could not grasp the essence of the matter.

The pernicious effects of the incompetence of Voroshilov's deputies were magnified by Mekhlis's notorious predisposition to brand, in Stalin's presence, a decision with which he disagreed an act of sabotage or, at the very least, to charge that it reflected a "wrecking point of view."<sup>112</sup> In an atmosphere so rife with threat and intimidation, utter poise and self-assurance would have been required to stand one's ground before such a head-hunter, and it was these very qualities which the *Ezhovshchina* had leached from the higher command staff, the survivors as well as the recently promoted. When Stalin abruptly averred during a meeting with top commanders that Shtern, a once-favored *vydvizhenets* whom Kuznetsov knew well, had proven to be a "scoundrel," Kuznetsov and his colleagues remained silent because "no one wanted to show even a shadow of doubt."<sup>113</sup> The Red Army's generals eventually would recover a wary, collective self-confidence, but this development would entail a new national disaster from which a decisive victory would be wrested only at stupendous cost.

## V

Acting to disperse the Tukhachevsky-centered high command in May 1937 in preparation for its destructive overhaul, Stalin and Voroshilov also changed drastically the practice and climate of military command by reviving control mechanisms—the military council and the military commissar—which had been superseded by the command staff's adherence to the Party. The reporting of these singular developments in

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<sup>112</sup>Kumanev, "Neopublikovannoe interv'iu," 71-72. On Khrulev and pre-war logistics, see I. M. Golushko, *Shtab tyla krasnoi armii v gody voiny 1941-1945* (Moscow: Ekonomika i informatika, 1998), 18-24.

<sup>113</sup>Kuznetsov, *Krutyie povoroty*, 74-75.

the same bulletin of 11 May was an unmistakable sign of the unfolding of a deep yet opaque scheme, one whose connection to the developing campaign against hidden “enemies of the people” became clear only a month later, when radio and newspapers trumpeted news of the espionage case against the Tukhachevsky group. The revamped high command, unveiled nine months afterward, departed from its predecessor in structure and composition. Like the military councils of military districts, its lower-level counterparts, the GVS was constituted to give Party authorities a direct, commanding voice in military administration and, at this top rung of the Defense Commissariat, the charting of military policy. Elevated, in effect, as replacements for Tukhachevsky and Gamarnik, Mekhlis and Shchadenko were fixtures on the post-purge high command, as were Voroshilov and Budenny, long-time Stalin stalwarts, and, originally, Stalin himself. In contrast, it was the new high command’s professionally-minded marshals and army commanders who proved eminently disposable, with the remarkable exception of Shaposhnikov. Thrown forth by the Great Purges, the GVS was emblematic of the high command’s Bolshevization, a cardinal goal of Stalin’s military policy in 1937-38.

The post-purge high command was distinguished by the high degree of shared Civil War experience among its principals. In particular, contact with Stalin as a collaborator or attendant on one or more fronts of the Civil War was a hallmark of the GVS’s core members, and must have been a key factor in an individual’s retention (Voroshilov, Budenny) or advancement (Mekhlis, Shchadenko, Kulik). In order to keep the military establishment under close observation and tight control during a potentially perilous period of centrally-directed upheaval, Stalin relied on men whose behavior under fire he had been able to observe personally, who had connived with him to resist Trotsky’s orders, or who had fallen in with Voroshilov and Budenny.

The high command’s restructuring in 1937-38 tipped its previous balance between professional expertise and *partiinost’* sharply in favor of the latter. Put under the sway of uniformed Party zealots and soldier-Stalinists, the high command experienced a drop in

its technical competence and intellectual quality. Lost, too, was the narrow autonomy the command elite had come to enjoy by virtue of its specialized knowledge and activities, as well as its identification of its own interests with those of the Party. Although the pre-purge Red Army cannot be considered an effective instrument due to structural, technical, and human weaknesses, its high command was seasoned and, by and large, qualified, even if it was under Voroshilov's inexpert control. The reconstituted high command's allotment of professional command and staff skill was limited, and most of it resided in Shaposhnikov. Although respected by Stalin, his apolitical, phlegmatic, and technocratic approach was no match for the stridently political and ideological one of Mekhlis and Shchadenko. The new high command was dominated by men who were preeminently Stalinists; Mekhlis, its foremost ideologue (after Stalin), saw lack of will or treachery in every failure.

The malign influence of the newcomers to the high command who served as Voroshilov's deputies was especially strong from 1938 to 1940. In bringing ideological and political factors to the fore in the high command's composition and decision-making, Stalin undermined its ability to manage, soberly and coherently, a vast military establishment as it entered a critical period of intensive preparation for a general European war, a theme elaborated in my final chapter.

## Chapter 6

### The End of the Stalin Line: A Case Study in Pre-War Military Policy

...not a single military or military-economic issue facing the country was resolved without the direct participation of the General Secretary of the [Party Central Committee].

Marshal Kirill A. Meretskov, describing the work of the GVS, for which he served as secretary in 1938

Professionally and intellectually depleted, the Red Army high command confronted a novel, three-part test in 1939: overseeing a vast program to expand, restructure, and rearm ground, air, and air defense forces; improvising the occupation of a large territory that lacked essential military infrastructure yet was important strategically; and directing a major campaign to subdue an unexpectedly resourceful foe. To be sure, all were daunting tasks—but all, without exception, were badly handled. The military purge must figure in any explanation of such a sweeping failure of command and management: over a period of less than two years, the purge deprived the Red Army of hundreds of senior officers qualified to guide the high command and to run the military districts, the General Staff, and other parts of the central military administration; simultaneously, it precipitated the unduly rapid advance of substitutes who often lacked experience and training appropriate to their new responsibilities. The purge effectively, if temporarily, both drained and diluted the command elite.

Although mediocre officers were slain along with the exceptional, the ranking leaders who were torn from the Red Army in 1937-38 would have given it a much better

chance of muddling through concurrent cycles of reorganization, rearmament, growth, strategic reappraisal, mobilization, and combat, thereby diminishing the scope and cost of the national calamity of 1941. Tukhachevsky, Egorov, and their associates surely would have struggled to juggle these challenges, and they would have fallen short in places. It is unlikely, for example, that they would have overturned the Red Army's self-defeating offensive dogma and its indifference to strategic defense, as they themselves were among the most ardent proponents of such views.<sup>1</sup> Still, the chief issues facing the high command once the Second World War began in September 1939 were strategic, structural, and technical. The reconstituted high command, its complexion mainly political rather than professional, was overwhelmed and adrift, and it bungled key decisions.

Examples abound. In a March 1940 report on officer personnel, Shchadenko acknowledged: "[As] the Red Army began its expansion from 1932, the rates of expansion have accelerated, and by 1939 it had grown almost four-fold. This expansion was not supported by normally trained army cadres, that is, the capacity of the schools remained as before."<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, despite Shchadenko's admission, the force structure was inflated more rapidly than ever without due account of its essential underpinnings, human, organizational, and technical. There were eight military districts from 1926 to 1934; thirteen in mid-1935; fourteen (as well as one front) in early 1939; and sixteen (and one front) in 1941.<sup>3</sup> The authorized strength of the officer corps spurted from 239,992 on 1 January 1939 to 357,000 by March 1940, a fifty-percent increase in little more than a year. The instability in command and specialist personnel that such forced growth entailed reached its highest level during the 1930s in 1939, when more than two-thirds of the officer corps was rotated. This was not a sudden development, as the number of

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<sup>1</sup>Roberts, "Planning for War," 1321.

<sup>2</sup>"O nakoplenii nachal'stvuiushchego sostava," 177.

<sup>3</sup>Babakov, "Sovetskie voennye okruga," 64-65; *Vsesoiuznaia perepis' naseleniia 1939 goda: Osnovnye itogi*, ed. Iu. A. Poliakov (Moscow: "Nauka," 1992), 244.

officer reassignments by promotion or upon completion of schooling jumped dramatically from 1937 to 1938, partly as a result of the *Ezhovshchina*.<sup>4</sup> But the upper levels of the officer corps were roiled by exceptional turbulence for an extended period. All military district commanders were shifted from 1938 to 1940, and the overwhelming majority of commanders, chiefs of staff, and other staff officers at all levels from regiment to military district were reassigned as well.<sup>5</sup> When the war with Germany began, 12 of 17 military district commanding generals had been in their assignments less than a year; the comparable figure for commanding generals of armies is 18 of 20; for commanders of corps, 73 of 95; for commanders of rifle divisions, 120 of 198.<sup>6</sup>

Underlying the unsettled hierarchy of military command was a force structure in a state of fantastic disruption. Of the 303 divisions in the force structure in June 1941 (there were 96 in 1938), only the 13 cavalry divisions were not restructuring or forming when the Wehrmacht struck.<sup>7</sup> Stalin and the high command fumbled the question of how mechanized forces should be organized for maximum operational effect: after a Kulik-chaired commission studied the issue in 1939, the GVS decided to break up the unwieldy tank corps and distribute their tanks and staff among fifteen new motorized divisions. When German armor overran France in May 1940, Stalin ordained that mechanized corps be resurrected on such a grandiose scale that these understrength formations in the western USSR were of little value when they were thrown willy-nilly into battle in June 1941. To overturn a decision taken so recently on such an essential matter at this particular time was folly. Only one of twenty-nine mechanized corps had its full complement of tanks in June 1941 even though the Red Army fielded twenty-three thousand machines (most in need of repair), nearly seventeen thousand more than the

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<sup>4</sup>“O rabote za 1939 god,” 186.

<sup>5</sup>A. P. Beloborodov, ed., *Voennye kadry Sovetskogo gosudarstva v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1963), 12.

<sup>6</sup>Zverev et al., *Surovye ispytaniia*, 430.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 69.

Wehrmacht possessed. Bristling with 1,031 tanks apiece, the new mechanized corps was to be larger than ever. A Sovnarkom resolution of 6 July 1940 ordered eight of them (and two separate tank divisions) to be formed in 1940; astoundingly, twenty more began to be formed in February-March 1941. Even considering the prodigious production capacity of the automotive industry (4,166 tanks were to be delivered in 1941), years would have been required to arm all of the mechanized corps with the new T-34 medium and KV heavy tanks, a fact which leaps from the pages of a Zhukov memo of February 1941.<sup>8</sup> In pursuing so many initiatives in the realm of force structure and military infrastructure at once and on such a wildly extravagant scale, Stalin and the high command were impelled not only by a growing sense that the USSR eventually would be drawn into or must enter the war, but by the conviction that peremptory, forceful action and large, centrally-directed resource flows could overcome any obstacle to their plans for enlarging the Red Army still further.

By 1941 the Stalinist fixation with quantitative indices of industrial and military might had yielded an elephantine force structure, but virtually every formation and unit in the Red Army was short of officers, weapons, and essential equipment. The Red Army's

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<sup>8</sup>Ryzhakov, "K voprosu o stroitel'stve bronetankovykh voisk," 109-11; I. E. Krupchenko et al., *Sovetskie tankovye voiska 1941-1945. Voенно-istoricheskii ocherk*. (Moscow: Voенnoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1973), 14; Zakharov, *General'nyi shtab*, 177-79, 186-88; Zverev et al., *Surovye ispytaniia*, 64, 437. Tank inventory figures are from the lattermost work; comparable figures (with minor differences) appear in G. F. Krivosheev, ed., *Grif sekretnosti sniat: Poteri Vooruzhennykh Sil SSSR v voynakh, boevykh deistviakh i voennykh konfliktakh: Statisticheskoe issledovanie* (Moscow: Voенnoe izdatel'stvo, 1993), 345. For the July 1940 Sovnarkom resolution approving the formation of mechanized corps, see "Vopros Narkomata oborony," 6 July 1940, in "Krasnaia Armiia za god do fashistskoi agressii," comp. V. A. Anfilov, pt. 2, *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1996, no. 4: 22-23. For Zhukov's two-page memo of [date illegible] February 1941 on the tank requirements of the new mechanized corps, see "Spravka po voprosu obespecheniia tankami mekh. korpusov Krasnoi Armii," Volkogonov Papers, reel 10, frames 650-51. Zhukov's own simple calculations revealed a shortfall of approximately eighteen thousand tanks, even considering planned production in 1941; reallocating older, obsolescent models to fill the gaps temporarily still left a deficit of about eleven thousand tanks! Due to the proliferation of new formations and units whose structures included tanks, the Red Army's paper requirement for tanks in 1941 reached the staggering total of nearly thirty-eight thousand. (Zverev et al., *Surovye ispytaniia*, 64.) Concerning T-34 production, Stalin approved a May 1941 resolution that called for 2,800 of these new-model tanks to be manufactured that year, and production would have grown in 1942. ("Iz postanovleniia SNK SSSR i TsK VKP[b] 'O proizvodstve tankov T-34 v 1941 g.,'" 5 May 1941, in *1941 god*, 2:163.) Still, fully supplying the mechanized corps with new tanks would have been a long-term, multiyear project. For evidence of the structural problems caused by the abrupt reversal of the organizational scheme for the tank fleet in 1940, see "Zapiska narkoma oborony SSSR i nachal'nika Genshtaba Krasnoi Armii v Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) – I. V. Stalinu i SNK SSSR – V. M. Molotovu ob uvelichenii chislennosti tankovykh chastei i soedinenii," undated, but not later than 11 October 1940, in *1941 god*, 1:296-98.

fighting power was much less than its enormous size alone would have suggested.<sup>9</sup> The debilitating, pervasive entropy of the final years before the German invasion was a product of overexpansion, operational overextension, and indifferent, immature leadership. At the highest level, the revamped high command's responses to rising threats from Germany and Japan were hobbled by hyper-centralization, *administrirovanie* (management by decree), and capriciousness, features of regime decision-making sharpened and brought to the fore by the Great Purges. These qualities mingled with an improvident monumentalism strongly evident previously in the five-year plans. The documentary record left by the attempt to diagnose the nature and sources of the Red Army's troubled campaign in Finland and the hasty remedial effort that ensued presents a startling picture of a disorganized and incoherent military establishment.<sup>10</sup> Ostensibly being prepared for a general war in Europe, the Red Army actually was mired in a state of all-embracing disorder from 1938 to 1941.

This chapter examines an important aspect of the high command's performance from 1939 to 1941: it analyzes the border fortification program, a subject considered only briefly (if at all) in older works on the pre-war Red Army.<sup>11</sup> The fortification program provides an expansive lens for examining the policy alternatives available to Stalin and the high command during this period (in addition to the choices they made), as it touches on military strategy, force structure, professional analysis of operational experience, and,

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<sup>9</sup>The Soviet Armed Forces, of which the Red Army was by far the largest component, had an authorized strength of about 1.1 million men in 1936; on 31 August 1939 their strength stood at slightly more than 2 million, a very rapid rate of expansion. Nonetheless, the size of the armed forces doubled over the next sixteen months: on 1 January 1941 they had 4.2 million men. More than a million *more* men were added over the next six months, as the armed forces numbered 5.7 million at the time of the Nazi attack, of whom 5 million were allotted to the Red Army (i.e., ground, air, and air defense forces subordinate to the Defense Commissariat). (G. A. Deborin et al., eds., *Nakanune voiny*, vol. 2 of *Istoriia vtoroi mirovoi voiny, 1939-1945*, ed. A. A. Grechko et al. [Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1974], 199; Skorobogatkin et al., *50 let*, 234; Zverev et al., *Surovyie ispytaniia*, 69, 437.)

<sup>10</sup>See, for instance, E. N. Kul'kov and O. A. Rzheshhevskii, eds., *Zimniaia voina 1939-1940*, vol. 2, *I. V. Stalin i finskaia kampaniia. (Stenogramma soveshchaniia TsK VKP(b))*. (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," 1998); and "Akt o prieme Narkomata Oborony Soiuzs SSR tov. Timoshenko S. K. ot tov. Voroshilova K. E.," [no date] 1940, *Izvestiia TsK KPSS*, 1990, no. 1: 193-209.

<sup>11</sup>See, for example, Erickson, *High Command*, 406, 576, 607, 728 n. 6; and idem, *The Road to Stalingrad* (London: Weidenfeld, 1975; repr., Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1984), 71, 85, 167. Erickson does make key points.

of course, Stalin's own ambitions and policy preferences, among other contributors to the calamity of 1941. In fact, the same presumptions and conceits that drove the fortification program from 1939 to 1941 also determined the Red Army's disaster-prone force posture and war plan. More broadly, they prevented the Stalin regime and its high command from planning and preparing properly for the very aggression against the USSR that supposedly justified the exertions of the five-year plans and the bloodshed of the Great Purges. Finally, the fortification program is a fitting subject for examination in its own right, as it was the largest Soviet military infrastructure project of the interwar period, on a par with the great industrial *stroiki* of the five-year plans.

## I

From the first years of its existence, the Soviet state confronted a basic security dilemma: it possessed land borders of exceptional length and numerous actual or potential enemies in regions directly abutting Soviet territory. As a consequence, problems of conducting land warfare on a continental scale always were at the forefront of Soviet military strategy. Soviet military thought placed special emphasis on the need for proper "preparation of the theater of military operations," which, Defense Commissar Timoshenko affirmed in December 1940, held "exceptional significance for the conduct of modern operations."<sup>12</sup> In the lexicon of Soviet (and Russian) military planners, this term refers to the system of measures required to prepare a state's territory, especially its border regions, for the successful conduct of operations by the armed forces. Such preparation entails construction (or improvement) of fortifications, command posts, communications, depots, garrisons, airfields, railroads, and roads, that is, of military infrastructure.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>"Zakliuchitel'naia rech' Narodnogo komissara oborony Soiuzsa SSR Geroia i Marshala Sovetskogo Soiuzsa S. K. Timoshenko na voennom soveshchanii 31 dekabria 1940 g.," in *Nakanune voiny: Materialy soveshchaniia vysshevo rukovodiashchego sostava RKKA 23-31 dekabria 1940 g.*, comp. A. P. Aristov et al., vol. 12(1) of *Russkii arkhiv: Velikaia Otechestvennaia*, ed. V. A. Zolotarev (Moscow: "TERRA," 1993), 361.

<sup>13</sup>*Sovetskaia Voennaia Entsiklopediia*, s.v. "podgotovka teatra voennykh deistvii."

Measured by its scale, consumption of resources, and duration, the construction of fortifications along Soviet borders was the regime's largest military infrastructure program of the interwar period. Consistent with official assessments that the principal military threats to Soviet security originated in Europe, the program's principal effort was concentrated in the western USSR.<sup>14</sup> Originally, it entailed the construction of twenty-one "fortified areas" (*ukreplennye raiony*) near the border demarcated by the 1921 Treaty of Riga, a sustained undertaking that began in the late 1920s and was continued into 1939.<sup>15</sup> Each of these fortified zones consisted of hundreds of concrete weapon emplacements and support facilities, manned by permanent garrisons and distributed over an arc of territory to shield a potential invasion corridor or major city.<sup>16</sup> After the territorial accretions of 1939-40, work began in 1940-41 on about twenty new fortified areas opposite Finland, East Prussia, the Nazi-occupied remnant of Poland, and Hungary.<sup>17</sup> This hurried effort swallowed substantial resources, brought no operational benefit, and entailed the disarming and neglect of existing defenses inside the previous border, which, before 1939, had been central to plans to deploy the Red Army on the main strategic axes in the western USSR at the outset of a war.

The program to fortify key sectors of the Soviet border area reflected broader currents in European military thought. Despite the post-Civil War polemics that centered

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<sup>14</sup>Savushkin, *Razvitie Sovetskikh vooruzhennykh sil*, 14. "Zapiska nachal'nika Genshtaba Krasnoi Armii narkomu oborony SSSR Marshalu Sovetskogo Soiuzu K. E. Voroshilovu o naibolee veroiatnykh protivnikakh SSSR," 24 March 1938, in *1941 god*, 2:561, flatly states: "The main enemies and the main theater of military operations are in the West, therefore our main forces should be concentrated here."

<sup>15</sup>E. P. Egorov et al., *Inzhenernye voiska Sovetskoi Armii 1918-1945* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo, 1985), 164-67; A. G. Khor'kov, "Ukreplennye raiony na zapadnykh granitsakh SSSR," *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1987, no. 12: 48; V. Sidorov, "Ukreplennye raiony. Uroki i vyvody," *Voennyi vestnik*, 1991, no. 4: 46.

<sup>16</sup>N. N. Shkodunovich, ed., *Kratkii slovar' operativno-takticheskikh i obshchevoennykh slov (terminov)* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva oborony Soiuzu SSR, 1958), s.v. "ukreplennyi raion (UR)," provides a useful capsule description of the fortified area: "An area or strip of terrain prepared in advance by means of field and permanent fortifications for the conduct of protracted and stubborn defense by forces comprising the UR garrison, independently or in cooperation with field forces. The UR's basic purpose is coverage of the most important operational axes and strategic points. The UR consists of durable concrete firing emplacements with artillery and machine-gun weaponry possessing great accuracy in delivery of fire. As UR construction requires a prolonged period and a substantial material outlay, they are created, as a rule, in peacetime."

<sup>17</sup>Egorov et al., *Inzhenernye voiska*, 185; Khor'kov, "Ukreplennye raiony," 49; Sidorov, "Ukreplennye raiony," 46.

on the Red Army's ability to develop a distinctive, "proletarian" method of warfare, the Soviet high command's views on the value and functions of border fortifications evolved like those of its European counterparts. Soon after the First World War ended, European general staffs began to investigate the use of linear systems of permanent fortifications as a means of protecting vulnerable frontier regions. Their conclusions were heavily influenced by the positional warfare that characterized the recent conflict, especially Germany's successful use of concrete weapon emplacements within a resilient, layered system of trenches and strongpoints in 1917-18.<sup>18</sup> The emergence of tanks, aviation, chemical weapons, and powerful heavy artillery during the war led to a consensus that the only fortifications able to blunt thrusts by the mass, mechanized armies of the future would be integrated systems dispersed over large areas. Outside the USSR, belts of border fortifications were built in France, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Finland, Germany, and Greece.

These fortification systems consisted of gridlike arrangements of concrete and steel emplacements housing machine-guns, artillery, mortars, and even flame-throwers. Linked by tunnels, emplacements with overlapping fields of fire were sited to take advantage of hills and other natural defensive positions. The most involved systems included underground personnel shelters, command posts, and supply depots that were hermetically sealable against gas attack and equipped with diesel generators for autonomous operation. An integral part of a fortified zone, obstacles—ditches, minefields, barbed wire, and concrete dragon's teeth—were placed around the blockhouses and pillboxes to obstruct the movement of enemy infantry and tanks.

In theory, the general scheme called for a single system of fortifications to encompass an area ranging from hundreds to a few thousand square kilometers. A fortified zone was to possess its own troops to operate its weapons and to provide

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<sup>18</sup>Keith Mallory and Arvid Ottar, *Architecture of Aggression: A History of Military Architecture in North West Europe 1900-1945* (London: Architectural Press, 1973), 29-33, 43, 55.

communications, engineering, and logistic support. To the rear, a web of lateral and axial roads and rail lines would be sited to bring up reinforcements and supplies. Following mobilization, the fortification troops operating the fixed weaponry were to be augmented by dug-in infantry with their own antitank weapons and machine-guns. If an enemy force attempted to penetrate the fortified zone, its multiple defense lines would erode the momentum of the enemy advance. Meanwhile, the defender's main body, concentrated out of enemy reach behind the fortified zone, would ready a heavy counterblow.<sup>19</sup>

Although the Russian Civil War was predominantly a conflict of sweeping maneuver across great distances, the Red Army did acquire experience in the use of field fortifications to defend important political and economic centers. In addition to their role in defensive operations, these rudimentary fortified areas served as secure jump-off or departure positions for attacking units.<sup>20</sup> The Red Army built forty-five fortified areas during the conflict with the assistance of ex-Imperial Army specialists.<sup>21</sup> As the struggle with internal counter-revolution and foreign intervention drew to a close, Red Army engineers began to examine the feasibility of using permanent fortifications to protect the new state against foreign attack. As early as 1920, Fedor I. Golenkin, an ex-Imperial major-general, urged that fortified zones be created along key sectors of the western border. Golenkin's proposal contained the core idea that would be found in the Red Army's field regulation two decades later: fortified areas were to shield the Red Army's mobilization and concentration from enemy incursions, thereby putting it in a position to take the offensive.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>This description summarizes material in *ibid.*, 91-123; and V. I. Levykin, *Fortifikatsiia: prashloe i sovremennost'* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo, 1987), 16-28.

<sup>20</sup>Egorov et al., *Inzhenernye voiska*, 70.

<sup>21</sup>V. V. Kulikovskii, "Ukreplennye raiony v grazhdanskoi voine," *Voenna-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1988, no. 4: 37. The fortified areas of the Civil War consisted almost entirely of stone, earth, and wood emplacements, that is, of field (rather than permanent) fortifications.

<sup>22</sup>Egorov et al., *Inzhenernye voiska*, 125-26.

Once the revolutionary illusions of the early 1920s had given way to sober “calculations of long-term strategic and military-economic preparation,” Red Army engineers focused in earnest on the security problem posed by the bulwark of hostile, restabilized states on the western border.<sup>23</sup> By the mid-1920s they already had published conceptual studies of fortification.<sup>24</sup> Although Poland was a neighbor and sufficiently strong to pose an immediate threat, their overriding concern was the fundamental antagonism between the revolutionary Soviet state and Europe’s leading capitalist powers. Dmitrii M. Karbyshev, a rising fortification expert, wrote in 1924 that the territories of states bordering the USSR “can serve only as bases for active operations by our main and powerful enemies—France and England.”<sup>25</sup> Here, then, was the predicament facing military planners: the nearness of Leningrad, Minsk, Kiev, and Odessa to the border put them at risk, but the Red Army remained relatively small and technically backward. As Stalin proclaimed the “real and genuine threat” of a “new imperialist war” directed specifically against the USSR in 1927,<sup>26</sup> officials from the central Military Engineering Directorate and the chief engineers of the military districts met to grapple with the problem of the western USSR’s security. They urged that the fortified area, with its dispersed grid of many small fortifications and obstacles, be adopted as the standard type of fixed defense along the frontier. The imposing fortresses that had studded northeastern France and Belgium in 1914 were seen as anachronisms in the new era of mechanized warfare.<sup>27</sup>

Construction of the first permanent fortifications on the Soviet frontier was underway by 1928. By the mid-1930s, when the “main operational axes” are said to have

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<sup>23</sup>Erickson, *High Command*, 209.

<sup>24</sup>Egorov et al., *Inzhenernye voiska*, 125-26.

<sup>25</sup>D. M. Karbyshev, “Inzhenernaia podgotovka granits SSSR,” in *Izbrannye nauchnye trudy* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel’stvo Ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1962), 361.

<sup>26</sup>I. V. Stalin, “Zametki na sovremennye temy,” 28 July 1927, in *Sochineniia*, vol. 9 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1952), 322.

<sup>27</sup>Egorov et al., *Inzhenernye voiska*, 102, 127; Karbyshev, “Inzhenernaia podgotovka granits SSSR,” 363.

been “protected,” a total of twelve fortified areas were in place near the western border. In addition, a fortified zone was constructed around Kiev.<sup>28</sup> Of the thirteen fortified areas present in the western USSR—dubbed the Stalin Line by the Germans despite the absence of a continuous chain of fortifications—the Leningrad and Belorussian Military Districts each possessed three. The biggest knot of fortifications was located in the Ukrainian (Kiev from 1935) Military District, a region of first-order economic importance. Seven fortified areas were established in this district, which was being stuffed with rifle, mechanized, cavalry, and aviation formations at the same time.<sup>29</sup> The building of thirteen sets of elaborate defenses during the early 1930s, a time when construction assets were stretched thinly across the country due to the five-year plans, underscores the fortification program’s importance in the regime’s military development plans.

The original fortified areas were between 50 and 140 kilometers in length, straddled major lines of communication, and tended to have one or both flanks anchored on a natural obstacle.<sup>30</sup> The Kiev Fortified Area, for example, formed an arc west of the city whose ends rested on the Dnepr River. The general arrangement called for a support zone with a depth of ten to twelve kilometers to precede a fortified area’s main defense zone; the support zone’s scattered outposts and obstacles were supposed to report on, harass, and delay an enemy advance. Behind it, the blockhouses and pillboxes in the main defense zone were scattered across a swath with a depth of three to four kilometers. Within it, a grouping of several fortifications formed a support point; a cluster of three to five support points comprised a battalion defense area assigned to a machine-gun battalion. The battalion defense area was positioned so that its fixed weaponry dominated the routes through the sector being protected. The two-story blockhouses and

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<sup>28</sup>Egorov et al., *Inzhenernye voiska*, 164-66. For an insider’s view of the managerial muddles and proclivity for squandering resources associated with fortification construction, see Petro Grigorenko, *V’ podpol’e možno vstretit’ tol’ko krysy...* (Long Island, N.Y.: Detinetz Publishing, 1981), 140-54.

<sup>29</sup>Buisikh et al., *Kievskii Krasnoznamennyi*, 92-94.

<sup>30</sup>Egorov et al., *Inzhenernye voiska*, 164.

single-story pillboxes typically were armed with machine-guns mounted in casemates.<sup>31</sup> (But no more than ten percent contained the 45-millimeter antitank guns needed to destroy medium tanks.) Embrasures with armored coverings enabled these weapons to be fired to an emplacement's front and sides. Fortifications were equipped with air filtration systems for protection against chemical weapons, water storage tanks, generators, and landline communications. The outfitting process was neither smooth nor uniformly effective, though; for example, battalion defense areas often were linked by unprotected open wire or tactical field cable due to the failings of the buried cable industry. In addition to weapon emplacements, there were command posts, communications centers, observation posts, personnel shelters, and depots distributed throughout a fortified area. The Kiev Military District's Letichev Fortified Area, built from 1931 to 1934, probably is representative: 354 weapon emplacements, 22 command and observation posts, 14 personnel shelters, and 19 communications centers were scattered along its 125-kilometer length. The fortifications themselves obtained additional protection from antitank ditches, wire entanglements, and the minefields that would be laid upon mobilization.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>A casemate is a chamber inside a fortification for protecting personnel and weapons. Embrasures—openings widening from within—permit the weapons mounted in a casemate to be fired. A caponier is a fortification positioned so that flanking fire can be conducted in two opposing directions; a half-caponier allows flanking fire to be aimed in a single direction only. The Russian term for a fortification housing a weapon is *dolgovremennaia ognevaia tochka* (permanent fire-point), often abbreviated *DOT*.

<sup>32</sup>The foregoing description of fortified area layout and structure draws on Egorov et al., *Inzhenernye voiska*, 164-65; and *Denkschrift über die russische Landesbefestigung*, U.S. National Archives, Captured German Records Collection, microfilm publication T-78, roll 642, frames 1-306, which contains hundreds of diagrams, photographs, and maps, including translations of Red Army maps depicting the disposition of Soviet fortifications. This encyclopedic study of captured fortifications, published in February 1942, was compiled on the basis of meticulous firsthand inspection by engineers and fortification experts. For additional German photographs of battle-scarred fortifications, see U.S. National Archives, Still Photographs Branch, RG 242. Although the intelligence assessments of the Red Army prepared by Foreign Armies East of the German Army High Command were deficient in many respects (see David Thomas, "Foreign Armies East and German Military Intelligence in Russia, 1941-45," *Journal of Contemporary History* 22, no. 2 [1987]: 261-301), this department did have a clear picture of Soviet fortifications on both the pre-1939 and the 1941 borders as well as the status of at least those under construction. Foreign Armies East prepared a comprehensive report on fortifications that was published in March 1941 as an operational planning aid. (*Die Landesbefestigungen der Union der Sozialistischen Sowjetrepubliken*, U.S. National Archives, Captured German Records Collection, microfilm publication T-78, roll 501, frames 6489522-645.) On Soviet problems with buried cable, see N. Gapich, "Nekotorye mysli po voprosam upravleniia i sviazi," *Voenna-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1965, no. 7: 47.

At the start of 1938, the Red Army's fortified areas (including several in the Far East) were authorized nearly twenty-one thousand men and were armed with 1,986 machine-guns, 222 artillery pieces in caponiers, and 99 field guns.<sup>33</sup> Fortified areas, like other types of Red Army formations, had to be augmented substantially with reservists to attain a full wartime footing. Mobilization plans allocated additional machine-gun battalions and artillery crews to each fortified area.<sup>34</sup> Further reinforcement would come from a military district's field forces: in the Belorussian Military District, for example, rifle corps were supposed to take up positions in the Minsk and Polotsk Fortified Areas.<sup>35</sup>

The Spanish Civil War enabled the Red Army to test its tactical and operational doctrine against actual experience, however special the conditions under which it was obtained. To some influential observers, the conflict in Spain suggested that the defender retained a major advantage over the attacker despite the addition of a motorized and mechanized veneer to armies. Moreover, technological advances seemed to have increased the defender's edge.<sup>36</sup> The prospects for using mechanized formations to attain rapid operational success therefore appeared more limited than previously imagined. In this view, the offensive would remain a matter of battering through the defender's positions with masses of infantry supported by tanks and artillery. Indeed, it was artillery's "gigantic role" in Spain which Tukhachevsky stressed in his May 1937 commentary on the Red Army's 1936 *Field Regulation*.<sup>37</sup> Concerning lessons applicable to Soviet border defenses, a 1939 General Staff analysis asserted that the war had confirmed the "enormous significance" of military engineering, especially because

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<sup>33</sup>A. G. Khor'kov, *Grozovoi iun'* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo, 1991), 46; "Doklad narkoma oborony SSSR i nachal'nika Genshtaba RKKA," *1941 god*, 2:532.

<sup>34</sup>Khor'kov, *Grozovoi iun'*, 46. For examples, see A. V. Vladimirkii, *Na kievskom napravlenii* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo, 1989), 135; and V. A. Semidetko, "Istoki porazheniia v Belorussii," *Voenna-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1989, no. 4: 28-29.

<sup>35</sup>Sandalov, *Na moskovskom napravlenii*, 31-32.

<sup>36</sup>Earl F. Ziemke, "The Soviet Armed Forces in the Interwar Period," in *The Interwar Period*, vol. 2 of *Military Effectiveness*, ed. Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millett (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 16.

<sup>37</sup>Tukhachevsky, "O novom polevom ustave RKKA," 2:250.

“operational-scale defense” required a “series of well-fortified rear lines with antitank zones and blocking positions.”<sup>38</sup> A 1939 Frunze Academy study claimed (wrongly) that “even fascist authors” had been forced to recognize that “their theories of lightning war had been refuted by the experience of war in Spain and China.”<sup>39</sup> The conclusions the high command and General Staff drew from operations in Spain probably were the catalyst for work to begin on eight additional fortified areas in the western USSR in 1938-39.

Following the pattern established during the early 1930s, five of the eight new fortified zones were located in the Kiev Military District; there, all five were clustered in the great salient centered on the city of Proskurov (now Khmel’nitskii), which jutted against southeastern Poland. Had construction been completed, Soviet Ukraine’s western projection would have been protected by two separate layers of defenses.<sup>40</sup> In the Belorussian Military District, work started on one fortified area, which was positioned near Slutsk in the gap between Minsk and the Pinsk Marshes<sup>41</sup>. The two remaining fortified areas whose construction began at this time were located in the Leningrad Military District opposite Latvia: the General Staff viewed Lithuania and Latvia as a potential corridor for a German irruption into the north-western USSR.<sup>42</sup>

These newer fortified areas contained emplacements of more advanced design than those built originally. In addition, the older defenses were upgraded: the new types

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<sup>38</sup>S. Liubarskii, *Nekotorye operativno-takticheskie vyvody iz opyta voiny v Ispanii* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe voennoe izdatel'stvo Narkomata Oborony Soiuzs SSR, 1939), 10-11.

<sup>39</sup>M. S. Kniazev, *Bor'ba v pozitsionnykh usloviakh* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe voennoe izdatel'stvo Narkomata Oborony Soiuzs SSR, 1939), 19.

<sup>40</sup>Egorov et al., *Inzhenernye voiska*, 167; Buisikh et al., *Kievskii Krasnoznamennyi*, endpaper map 1.

<sup>41</sup>Sandalov, *Na moskovskom napravlenii*, 33.

<sup>42</sup>V. F. Zotov, “Inzhenernoe obespecheniia boevykh deistvii fronta,” in *Na Severo-Zapadnom fronte*, ed. P. A. Zhilin (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo “Nauka,” 1969), 179. In a review of foreign military threats and the Red Army’s own war plan in March 1938, Shaposhnikov wrote that “Latvia also may be pulled into the conflict, and Lithuania will be occupied by the Germans and Poles in the first days of the war.” Shaposhnikov’s assessment placed Poland “in the orbit of the fascist bloc.” (“Zapiska nachal'nika Genshtaba Krasnoi Armii,” 1941 god, 2:557.)

of fortifications were added, 76-millimeter guns were mounted, and weapon sectors of fire were widened. In the Polotsk Fortified Area, for example, the 200 original emplacements were augmented with 45 new ones in 1938-39.<sup>43</sup> When work was halted in late 1939, many of the additions had not been completed or armed, however. In the Korosten Fortified Area, for instance, it appears that none of the new fortifications ever had guns installed. Even if they had been armed, artillery emplacements within the Korosten defenses nevertheless would have remained very few: originally, there were 427 machine-gun emplacements, but only 12 for artillery; a mere 14 new artillery emplacements were built in 1938-39.<sup>44</sup> The few antitank guns and shallow main defense zones of the original fortified areas led one Soviet military historian to assert that they were obsolescent by the late 1930s, that is, only several years after their completion.<sup>45</sup> Still, as additional modernization was an option in 1939-40, the Stalin Line did not lack strategic value, as this commentary implied.

## II

As specified by the Red Army's pre-war series of field regulations, fortified areas were to block avenues of advance into the USSR; to protect vital cities and regions; to shield the Red Army's concentration in the frontier zone; and, by providing commanders with freedom to maneuver, to facilitate the creation of "powerful groupings for inflicting a crushing blow on the enemy."<sup>46</sup> These "deep defensive zones" were considered essential to realization of Soviet objectives during the initial period of war.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Egorov et al., *Inzhenernye voiska*, 167; Semidetko, "Istoki porazheniia v Belorussii," 29.

<sup>44</sup>Vladimirskii, *Na kievskom napravlenii*, 135.

<sup>45</sup>Khor'kov, "Ukreplennye raiony," 48.

<sup>46</sup>*Vremennyi polevoi ustav RKKA 1936 (PU 36)* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe voennoe izdatel'stvo Narkomata Oborony SSSR, 1937), 15, 157. See also *Polevoi ustav RKKA (PU-39)*, 27-28, a later revision.

<sup>47</sup>Raymond L. Garthoff, *How Russia Makes War* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1954), 92.

The features and potential decisiveness of that initial period were subjects of intense Soviet interest by the early 1930s. Planners and theorists focused on the intricate process of strategic deployment (encompassing force mobilization and concentration for operations) in the regions where a future war would be fought. At first, they proceeded on the basis of the pattern of events in 1914, when war was declared well before the belligerents were able to complete the deployment of their armies. In the future, they believed, the attacker and defender would have about the same amount of time (fifteen to eighteen days) for mobilization and concentration before major operations would begin. By the mid-1930s, however, the alluring prospects for speedy operational success which tanks and aviation seemed to offer had raised a new concern. Strategic deployment of the Red Army might be upset by an enemy who had “crept up on war” by secretly mobilizing and concentrating forces in the frontier region over several months.<sup>48</sup>

Soviet theorists feared that this creeping-up (i.e., slow-motion force mobilization and concentration) would culminate, abruptly and explosively, in sudden strikes by enemy aviation, airborne units, and border-area covering armies which had been transformed covertly into powerful, mechanized “incursion armies.” Their targets would be Soviet covering forces and the roads, railroads, and depots in the western USSR that would move and supply the armies raised in the interior military districts. At risk was the Red Army’s ability to accomplish “an immediate offensive into the depths of the enemy country and the conversion of foreign territory into a theater of military operations,” that is, what Tukhachevsky and other like-minded theorists considered the best strategic defense.<sup>49</sup> Despite the Red Army’s energetic exploration of mechanization, it still relied mainly on its “ability to put greater masses of men in the field than could any other

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<sup>48</sup>Korotkov, *Istoriia Sovetskoi voennoi mysli*, 133-34. For discerning analyses of Soviet military thinking about the initial period of war, see Roberts, “Planning for War,” 1300-04, 1309-13; and Jacob W. Kipp, “Barbarossa, Soviet Covering Forces and the Initial Period of War: Military History and AirLand Battle,” *Journal of Soviet Military Studies* 1, no. 2 (1988): 192-95.

<sup>49</sup>Korotkov, *Istoriia Sovetskoi voennoi mysli*, 123.

European state.”<sup>50</sup> And that capability rested squarely on the ability of the mobilization and transportation systems to operate smoothly as they surged to their wartime capacities.

The initial wartime function of the fortified areas was simply to block the most direct routes across the long and exposed western border, thereby diminishing greatly the enemy’s ability to disturb the orderly progression of the Red Army’s mobilization and concentration in the theaters of military operations. Accordingly, amid the first phase of large-scale fortification work in 1933, Chief of Staff Egorov observed that the depth to which an invader could penetrate would depend on the force balance at the time of attack and the fortifications and major rivers in its path. Egorov confidently declared that “in our conditions, given the presence on the frontier of water obstacles such as the Dnestr and Sluch [Rivers] and a line of fortified areas, the danger of a disruption of rail transport and [the Red Army’s] deployment by ground force operations is negligible.”<sup>51</sup> Problems of strategic deployment engaged Tukhachevsky as well. His Soviet biographer claims that he regarded elaboration of the armed forces’ strategic deployment plan as military strategy’s most vital task relative to a future war’s opening phase.<sup>52</sup> A 1934 article entitled “The Character of Frontier Operations” offered Tukhachevsky’s prescription for preserving the Red Army’s offensive capabilities during a fluid and indeterminate initial period of combat. He wrote that the first engagements should be conducted by special “forward armies” rather than by formations that had to recall and outfit large numbers of reservists, move from the interior by rail, and then march to positions on the border.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Zienke, “Soviet Armed Forces,” 16. Erickson reached the same conclusion: “... retention of the mass, even with the leavening of the mobile force within it, suggested an adherence to the traditional Russian method of trundling [the army’s] vast assemblies of men on to the battlefield. The steam-roller was given a more powerful engine and a greater capacity to crush.” (Erickson, *High Command*, 406.)

<sup>51</sup>A. I. Egorov, “Taktika i operativnoe iskusstvo RKKA nachala tridsatykh godov,” in *Voprosy strategii i operativnogo iskusstva v sovetskikh voennykh trudakh (1917-1940 gg.)*, comp. A. B. Kadishev et al. (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel’stvo Ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1965), 378.

<sup>52</sup>V. M. Ivanov, *Marshal M. N. Tukhachevskii*, 284.

<sup>53</sup>Tukhachevsky, “Kharakter pogranichnykh operatsii,” 2:217.

Tukhachevsky's forward armies would be stationed close to the border, be maintained near war-authorized strength, and possess tank-heavy mechanized corps. These unusual attributes would enable them to "destroy the enemy's garrisons in his frontier zone... [and] disrupt [his] mobilization and strategic concentration" by "an immediate crossing of the border with the declaration of mobilization."<sup>54</sup> In stating that "a well-conducted frontier operation can destroy the enemy's ability to effect the disruption of our strategic concentration," Tukhachevsky underscored the military advantages to be gained by pre-emptively attacking a threatening assembly of Polish (or, for that matter, German) forces. The havoc he wished to wreak on the enemy army's mobilization and concentration is precisely what he feared the Red Army itself might suffer.<sup>55</sup> A strategist who solicited Tukhachevsky's views on planning issues in 1936 recalled that he had attached tremendous importance to the fortified areas in the western USSR. If the enemy managed to mount the first cross-border attack, Tukhachevsky envisaged the fortified areas as "a shield absorbing the enemy's offensive, and the secretly concentrated forward armies as a hammer delivering a flanking blow on him." On the other hand, if the Red Army won the race to deploy, the fortified areas would screen the massing of the forces that would plunge into enemy territory. Tukhachevsky is said to have seen the fortified areas as an "operational factor organically linked with the active operations of the field armies, the pivot for their maneuver in a general offensive operation."<sup>56</sup>

Tukhachevsky's views were influenced strongly by Karbyshev, whose prolific writings on fortification during the interwar years drew Tukhachevsky's attention.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 218.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 220.

<sup>56</sup>Isserson, "Razvitie teorii," pt. 2, 52.

<sup>57</sup>According to an acquaintance, Tukhachevsky edited Karbyshev's article on military engineering for the *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*. (N. N. Lapshin, "Listiaia starye bloknoty," in Koritskii, Mel'nik-Tukhachevskaia, and Chistov, *Marshal Tukhachevskii*, 118.) Karbyshev reportedly caught Tukhachevsky's eye with articles in 1921, when Karbyshev began to publish. (I. Kh. Bagramian, *Velikogo naroda synov'ia* [Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo, 1984], 310; "Osnovnye daty zhizni i deiatel'nosti D. M. Karbysheva," in Karbyshev, *Izbrannye nauchnye trudy*, 646.)

Karbyshv had maintained as early as 1924 that fortified areas would be the “springboard from which our army can make a leap”—an apt description of their role as a stable base for operational maneuver at the outset of a strategic offensive.<sup>58</sup> Fifteen years later, the Red Army’s draft *Field Regulation* explained that by “holding the enemy along an extended front, [fortified areas] permit large-scale concentration of forces and weapons on other axes for decisive offensive operations.” In its opening chapter on military doctrine and strategy, the 1939 *Field Regulation* proclaimed:

If the enemy forces war on us, the Worker-Peasant Red Army will be the most offensive of all the offensive armies which have ever existed.

We will conduct war offensively, carrying it onto the enemy’s territory....

The missions of the Worker-Peasant Red Army are international, they possess international, world-historical significance.

The Red Army enters the territory of the attacking enemy as the liberator of the oppressed and enslaved.<sup>59</sup>

Despite their seemingly defensive nature, then, the Red Army’s fortified areas supported a military strategy that prized the offensive. This offensive bias, which had hardened into dogma by the early 1930s, blended the ideas of military innovators such as Tukhachevsky concerning the strike capabilities of aviation and mechanized forces with ideological tenets about the Red Army’s revolutionary mission that were integral to its identity.<sup>60</sup> For Tukhachevsky, a strategic offensive in response to or anticipation of enemy attack was akin to revolutionary ju-jitsu. Moreover, by focusing consistently on sending the Red Army into Poland early in a war, the Soviet war plans of the late interwar years aimed, in effect, to shatter the western linchpin of the capitalist bulwark, an action which would effect an enlargement of the socialist system through the seizure and occupation of

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<sup>58</sup>Karbyshv, “Inzhenernaia podgotovka granits SSSR,” 369. On this point, see also E. Leoshenia, “Voenno-teoreticheskoe nasledstvo D. M. Karbysheva,” *Voenna-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1965, no. 2: 116.

<sup>59</sup>*Polevoi ustav RKKA (PU-39)*, 9-10.

<sup>60</sup>Roberts, “Planning for War,” 1294.

foreign territory.<sup>61</sup> In the broad context of military doctrine and strategy, the fortified areas were to be launch pads for the Red Army's western and south-western fronts once these defenses had served their initial purpose in shielding the Red Army's deployment, a prerequisite to assumption of the offensive.

### III

It might seem a paradox that although the Soviet regime invested heavily in fortifications and other military facilities during the 1930s, the poorly developed military infrastructure in the western USSR and the far-forward stationing of Soviet armies there helped to turn military defeat into national catastrophe in 1941. The explanation for the militarily deficient condition of the western provinces is that they had been part of the USSR only briefly: the region consisted of a great swath of territory between the Baltic and Black Seas that was occupied by the Red Army and annexed from September 1939 to August 1940. Allotted to the Soviet sphere of influence under the secret provisions of the Nazi-Soviet treaties of August-September 1939, it encompassed eastern Poland, northeastern Romania, and Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in their entirety. Inhabited mainly by Belorussians and Ukrainians, eastern Poland—a territory of approximately 77,500 square miles with more than thirteen million inhabitants—was the first of these increments to the USSR.<sup>62</sup> After the Red Army invaded Poland on 17 September, as foreseen by the agreement with Hitler, the lands east of the boundary set by a protocol to the Nazi-Soviet treaty of 28 September were incorporated formally into the Belorussian and Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs) on 1-2 November 1939. The USSR's new European border was two to four hundred kilometers west of the line demarcated by the 1921 Treaty of Riga.<sup>63</sup> (See Figure 1.)

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 1314-18, discusses underlying continuities in successive versions of the Red Army's war plan.

<sup>62</sup>Jan T. Gross, *Revolution From Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), 3.

<sup>63</sup>The annexation of eastern Poland brought changes to the Soviet military command structure. Attaching Western Ukraine to the Kiev Special Military District made it too large, so the Odessa Military District was re-established in (continued next page)

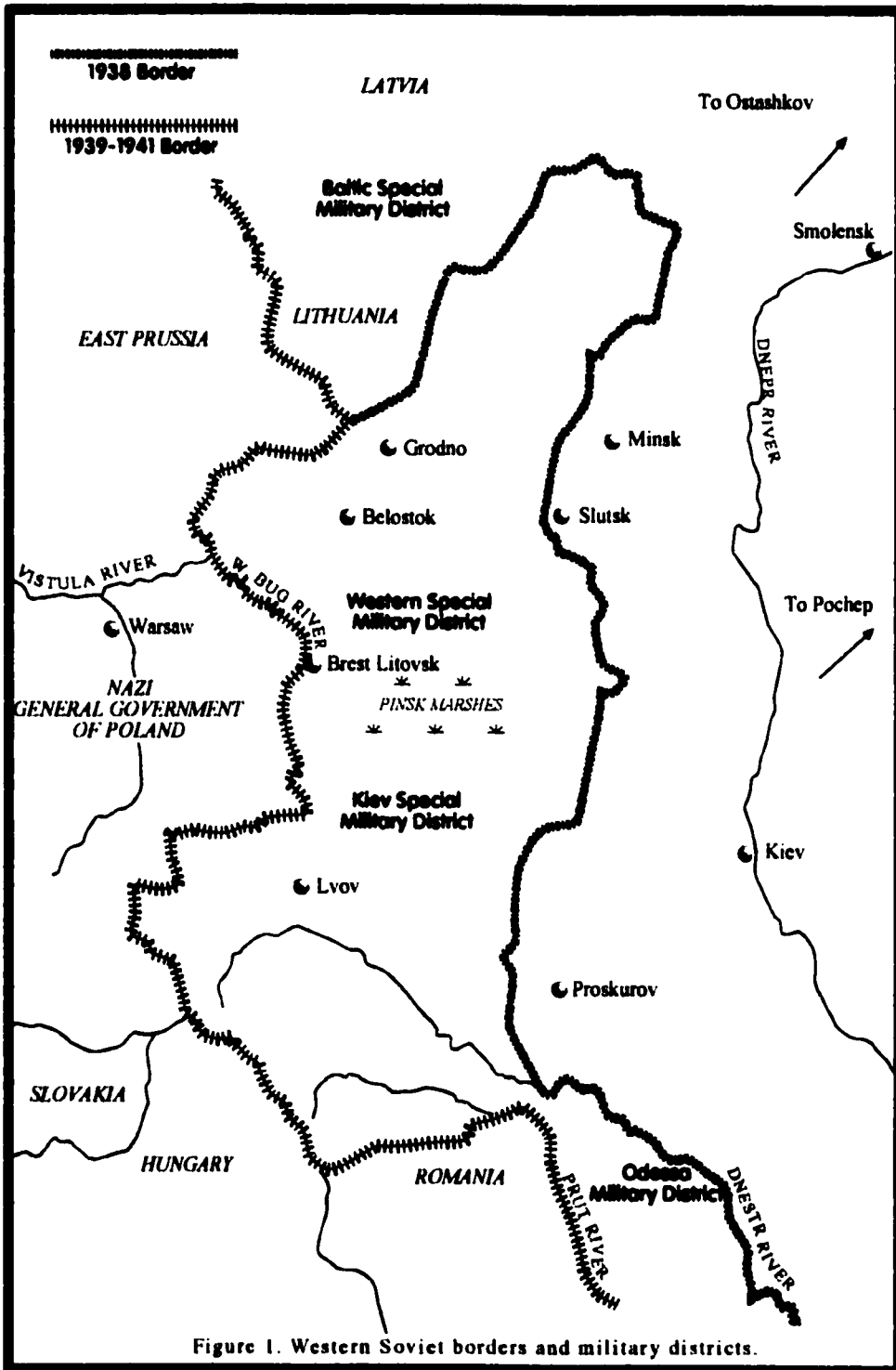
Although the Soviet security perimeter was pushed a good distance outward, the lands that had been grafted suddenly onto the western USSR lacked the military infrastructure needed for them to serve as an operationally suitable base for the two-million-man army in the western border military districts. Some existing facilities could be adapted for use as barracks, but shelters for vehicles and artillery, fortifications, training areas, firing ranges, depots, and military airfields had to be built to support the stationing of Soviet forces. Rail lines required conversion to the broader Russian gauge, and both roads and railroads needed to have their capacities for moving troops and supplies greatly expanded. Lastly, the General Staff's strategic deployment plan had to be rewritten to account for the westward shift in the Soviet force posture and the Wehrmacht's presence directly on the Soviet border. When Germany attacked, the pell-mell effort to provide the seized lands with the military infrastructure envisioned by the General Staff was woefully incomplete.<sup>64</sup> The Red Army's occupation-in-force of the territory that Stalin and Molotov gained in compensation for removing the worry of a two-front war from Hitler's Polish calculations actually undermined the integrity of Soviet defenses in 1941.

One of the most glaring deficiencies in the military infrastructure of the Western Special and Kiev Special Military Districts involved the fortifications whose construction

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October 1939 to control forces stationed in the southern Ukraine and Crimea. To the north, the headquarters of the Belorussian Special Military District was moved from Smolensk to Minsk, now apparently secure behind the Minsk Fortified Area and a territorial barrier. Due to the abolition of the Kalinin Military District, this expanded district also included forces in Smolensk oblast' (in addition to the entire Belorussian SSR); hence it was renamed the Western Special Military District in July 1940. (Timoshenko and Shaposhnikov to Stalin and Molotov, 4 July 1940, in "Krasnaia Armiia za god do fashistskoi agressii," pt. 2, 20, 22; *Sovetskaia Voennaia Entsiklopediia*, s.v. "Belorusskii voennyi okrug" and "Odesskii voennyi okrug.") One further note on the western border military districts: both the Kiev and the Belorussian Military Districts were designated "special" (*osobyi*) districts on 26 July 1938 in response to the crisis caused by Hitler's designs on Czechoslovakia. This appellation signified that these districts were being brought closer to a war footing through the creation of army-level commands in them, among other measures. (*Sovetskaia Voennaia Entsiklopediia*, s.v. "osobyi voennyi okrug.")

<sup>64</sup>Zverev et al., *Surovye ispytaniia*, 66-67. On railroads and roads, see I. V. Kovalev, *Transport v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine (1941-1945 gg.)* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," 1981), 23-27; G. A. Kumanev, *Voina i zheleznodorozhnyi transport SSSR 1941-1945* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," 1988), 40-41; S. K. Kurkotkin, ed., *Tyl Sovetskikh Vooruzhennykh Sil v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1977), 32-33, 35-36; and L. M. Sandalov, *Pervye dni voiny* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo, 1989), 13. According to Kovalev, *Transport*, 25, upgrading the transportation network in the territory seized from Poland to support Soviet military requirements would have required much longer than two years.



began in 1940. A string of new fortified areas, designed to be deeper and better armed than their predecessors, was supposed to be the “backbone” of the Red Army’s hold on what only recently had been foreign territory.<sup>65</sup> By June 1941, however, not one of the front-line military districts had managed to complete the plan for fortifying the new border, nor was even a single new fortified area finished.<sup>66</sup> As of spring 1941, twenty-three to twenty-five hundred emplacements had been built, of which about a thousand had artillery mounted as intended; the rest accommodated only transportable machine-guns.<sup>67</sup> In the Western Special Military District, however, only 193 of 505 fortifications (of the 1,174 planned) had been outfitted and armed properly when combat began.<sup>68</sup> Battle-ready fortifications reportedly covered about seventeen percent of the expanse of territory that was supposed to have been protected by about twenty fortified areas.<sup>69</sup> In effect, only a series of isolated strongpoints existed. Yet this modest result had required a Herculean effort: nearly 136,000 laborers and other personnel were engaged in fortification work in spring 1941.<sup>70</sup> The resources expended could have been put to better use on, say, airfield construction (permitting more extensive dispersal of Soviet aircraft, thereby reducing their vulnerability on the ground) in 1940-41. As was the case with the formation and outfitting of the revived mechanized corps, the entire fortification project, in reality, would have required years to complete.

Rather than being positioned at some substantial distance inland, the chain of fortifications under construction in 1940-41 adhered closely to the reconfigured border.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>Sidorov, “Ukreplennye raiony,” 46-47; Sandalov, *Pervye dni voiny*, 7.

<sup>66</sup>A. Khar’kov, “Ukrepaiony nakanune voiny,” *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1976, no. 5: 91. This author actually may be A. G. Khor’kov, whose writings are cited in this chapter.

<sup>67</sup>Anfilov, *Doroga*, 171; P. M. Derevianko et al., eds., *Nachalo voiny. Podgotovka agressii protiv SSSR*, vol. 3 of *Istoriia vtoroi mirovoi voiny, 1939-1945*, ed. A. A. Grechko et al. (Moscow: Voенnoe izdatel’stvo Ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1974), 439.

<sup>68</sup>Semidetko, “Istoki porazheniia v Belorussii,” 27.

<sup>69</sup>Sidorov, “Ukreplennye raiony,” 48.

<sup>70</sup>Anfilov, *Doroga*, 171.

<sup>71</sup>See, for example, the map in Sidorov, “Ukreplennye raiony,” 48, or Buiskikh et al., *Kievskii Krasnoznamennyi*, endpaper map 1.

The Wehrmacht, now directly across the agreed line of demarcation through pre-war Poland, had little difficulty monitoring the progress of construction through its border observation posts and the reconnaissance aircraft that violated Soviet airspace.<sup>72</sup> Nor were Soviet forces distributed prudently, that is, in a way which would have facilitated a defense of the original border using the existing system of fortifications: the bulk of the Red Army's first strategic echelon, consisting of the covering armies and reserves of the western border military districts, were stationed well forward in the annexed territories. In fact, two-thirds of the divisions (107 of 170) in the front-line military districts were stationed within one hundred kilometers of the frontier.<sup>73</sup> However, as the new border meandered over a distance of 4,467 kilometers, it was inherently susceptible to penetration.<sup>74</sup> In the Western Special Military District, two large Soviet armies (the 3d and 10th) were garrisoned in the prominent salient centered on Belostok. Free to mass on narrow breakthrough sectors during Operation Barbarossa's final preparatory phase, the Wehrmacht's Army Group Center quickly stove in the dangerously exposed hub of the Red Army's disposition in Belorussia. The forward-deployed armies in the Belostok salient were encircled and disintegrating within a few days of the opening of the German attack, which led to the loss of all of Belorussia in July 1941.

The damaging effects of fundamental errors in the disposition of Soviet forces and fixed defenses were heightened by the abolition of the fortified areas inside the original border. The Stalin Line lay behind the covering armies (107 divisions) in the first strategic echelon but ahead of much of the military district reserves (63 divisions stationed one to four hundred kilometers from the border) as well as the high command's

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<sup>72</sup>Sandalov, *Pervye dni voiny*, 12. German aircraft violated the border more than five hundred times from October 1939 to 22 June 1941. (Derevianko et al., *Nachalo voiny*, 332.)

<sup>73</sup>S. P. Ivanov, ed., *Nachal'nyi period voiny* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1974), 205, 214.

<sup>74</sup>D. T. Iazov, "Vperedil byla voina," *Voenna-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1991, no. 5: 7.

reserve armies in the interior military districts.<sup>75</sup> The junking, in effect, of this rear defense line across the western USSR occurred before work began in earnest on new border defenses in summer 1940. Consequently, the Red Army had no well-fortified defense lines anywhere in the western USSR when the Wehrmacht struck.<sup>76</sup> By June 1941 the regime's enormous investment in fixed defenses, initiated more than a decade earlier, had been frittered away. As the destruction of the pre-war Red Army proceeded in July 1941, the deputy chief of the Main Military Engineering Directorate wondered how it had come to be that neither the fortified areas on the original border nor the new one had functioned as intended.<sup>77</sup>

After Stalin's death, some of his marshals condemned the ill-considered way in which the regime had sought to make the annexed territories militarily useful. In this regard, the abandonment of the Stalin Line became a lightning rod for criticism. It is especially notable that several high-level military critiques went beyond Stalin's irresolute pre-war performance to encompass that of the high command.

Marshal Vasilevskii, the chief of the General Staff for much of the war, made the basic argument in a 1965 interview. Vasilevskii's words were too candid for publication at the time, even though he depersonalized the issue by referring vaguely to "the Government":

One must not overlook that decision of the Government by which all of the forces of the western border districts were subject to immediate relocation from old areas that were fully outfitted in defensive respects to the new territories incorporated into the Soviet Union....contrary to the objection of Chief of the General Staff B. M. Shaposhnikov, the

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<sup>75</sup>Zverev et al., *Surovye ispytaniia*, 82; S. P. Ivanov, *Nachal'nyi period voiny*, 211, 214; Glantz, *Stumbling Colossus*, 11-13.

<sup>76</sup>N. A. Fokin et al., *Otrazhenie sovetskim narodom verolomnogo napadeniia fashistskoi germanii na SSSR. Sozdanie uslovii dlia koren'nogo pereloma v voine (iiun' 1941 g.-noiabr' 1942 g.)*, vol. 2 of *Istoriia Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny Sovetskogo Soiuza 1941-1945*, ed. P. N. Pospelov et al. (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva oborony Soiuza SSR, 1963), 49.

<sup>77</sup>I. P. Galitskii, *Dorogu otkryvali sapery* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo, 1983), 13.

completely baseless decision was taken to disarm and dismantle all of the fortifications constructed with such difficulty over the course of a number of years on our previous border. As a result of this, as is well known, it turned out that the the Armed Forces were without prepared lines for defense and force deployment on the new as well as the old borders at the decisive moment.<sup>78</sup>

A similar point in regard to the older fortifications was made by Marshal Ivan Kh. Bagramian, albeit less analytically. In his account of the South-Western Front's disastrous attempt to hold Kiev—which ended in the death or capture of more than six hundred thousand men—Bagramian charged that “there is no doubt whatsoever that if we had succeeded in maintaining the combat readiness of the old fortified areas... the defensive capabilities of the South-Western Front would have been immeasurably greater....”<sup>79</sup> Given the tremendous gap in effectiveness between the Wehrmacht and the Red Army in 1941, Bagramian's claim is doubtful. Nevertheless, the abolition of the fortified areas inside the original border and the far-forward disposition of Soviet forces were emblematic, as Vasileveskii suggested, of basic failures of strategic conception and judgment. In part, both decisions stemmed from the same outdated model of how the opening phase of a war with Germany would unfold.

In contrast to Vasilevskii, Marshal Rokossovskii based his own sharp judgments on personal observation of the frontier zone. Like the Vasileveskii interview cited above, Rokossovskii's angry words were not published until the late 1980s. They undermined the official line, reflected in the expurgated version of his 1968 memoirs, that the non-aggression pact with Germany gave the USSR nearly two years to bolster its defenses.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup>Iu. A. Gor'kov, ed., and Iu. G. Murin, comp. “Neopublikovannoe interv'iu Marshala Sovetskogo Soiuz A. M. Vasilevskogo,” *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 1992, no. 6: 7-8.

<sup>79</sup>I. Kh. Bagramian, *Garod-voin na Dnepre* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1965), 7. On Soviet losses in the defense of Kiev, see Krivosheev, *Grif sekretnosti*, 166.

<sup>80</sup>See, for example, K. K. Rokossovskii, *Soldatskii dolg*, 4th ed. (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo, 1985), 7.

After release from imprisonment in March 1940, Rokossovskii eventually was given command of a new mechanized corps. On a May 1941 exercise in the western part of the Kiev Special Military District, he found “the state of affairs [near the border]...alarming.” The General Staff’s deployment plan called for the high-strength rifle divisions in the first echelon of the covering armies to take up positions in the fortified areas then being built on the new border. The plan called for these divisions to limit any enemy incursions until the tank-heavy mechanized corps in the army second echelons could assemble for counter-attacks. It was obvious to Rokossovskii that the new fortifications would not be able to fulfill their role for a long time to come; meanwhile, the existing defenses had been “demolished and neglected.” He indignantly placed the blame for such “carelessness” on the General Staff and the command of the Kiev Special Military District.<sup>81</sup>

Rokossovskii termed the earlier plan to deploy forces under cover of the Stalin Line “realistic” and asked: “But could this line have retained its function even in 1941? Yes, it could have, because our neighbor became fascist Germany.... We were obliged to maintain and strengthen—not destroy—our fortified areas on the old frontier.” Not only was siting the new fortifications “under the eyes of the Germans” ill-advised; the construction program manifestly could not be completed within the time demanded by the threatening situation: “Only the blind could not see this. The sacred duty of the General Staff was to demonstrate such an obvious fact to the government and to stand up for its proposals.” Rokossovskii’s wrathful indictment of the General Staff shows that Zhukov, whom Stalin abruptly appointed chief of the General Staff in January 1941, was one target of his ire.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>K. K. Rokossovskii, “Soldatskii dolg,” pt. 1, *Voenna-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1989, no. 4: 53.

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*, pt. 2, 1989, no. 5: 61. This barb may have been directed as well at Shaposhnikov, who reportedly did object to the new fortification scheme (as discussed below).

Indeed, other contemporaries of Zhukov's had faulted him for his inability or unwillingness to obtain Stalin's sanction for sensible preparatory measures which, they contended, would have mitigated the country's devastating losses.<sup>83</sup> Some criticism of Zhukov was aired publicly under Khrushchev, who cast the marshal out of the Presidium and the Central Committee in 1957 because he feared the war hero's popularity. Apart from political considerations, however, there were high-ranking veterans (e.g., Vasilevskii and Rokossovskii) who genuinely regarded the Stalin Line's abandonment as a colossal, reckless blunder for which Stalin and the high command shared responsibility. A portion of the blame inevitably went to the last pre-war chief of the General Staff. It was politics, however, that dictated that Zhukov be singled out for public scolding during Khrushchev's tenure as Party leader.

Zhukov's most prominent public military critic was Marshal Sergei S. Biriuzov, whom Khrushchev appointed chief of the General Staff in 1963. In a section of his memoirs originally published in 1962, Biriuzov disparaged Zhukov's performance as his predecessor.<sup>84</sup> Biriuzov maintained that Zhukov had refrained from supporting the sound proposals of Shaposhnikov, who supposedly favored holding most of the forces in the western border military districts behind the existing fortified areas. Biriuzov suggested that Zhukov's refusal to back Shaposhnikov's recommendation stemmed from his awareness of Stalin's unfavorable reaction to the idea. According to Biriuzov, Zhukov's aversion to reopening the question of force disposition in the acquired territories had the

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<sup>83</sup> Marshal Voronov's sentiments were similar to Rokossovskii's: "I cannot imagine how the people's commissar of defense, two of his assistants, and the chief of the General Staff (S. K. Timoshenko, L. Z. Mekhlis, G. I. Kulik, and G. K. Zhukov) could not have reported to Stalin and shown him the necessity of immediately taking a number of extraordinary measures to ensure the high combat readiness of the Soviet Armed Forces." (Voronov, "Na sluzhbe voennoi," 77.) This passage was not included in N. N. Voronov, *Na sluzhbe voennoi* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1963).

<sup>84</sup> According to Biriuzov's ghostwriter, Andrei Zharikov, the marshal had insisted that such criticism be inserted in the text. Zharikov observed that although Zhukov did indeed err, "in a different situation it would have been possible to keep silent, but at that time Georgii Konstantinovich was in disgrace." (Andrei Zharikov, "Kogda pisalis' memuary marshalov," *Krasnaia zvezda*, 26 May 1992.)

effect of “reinforcing the head of government’s certitude in the correctness of assumptions and estimates that, as history has shown, proved to be obvious errors.”<sup>85</sup>

Although it is unlikely that Zhukov could have prevailed upon Stalin if Shaposhnikov had failed to do so, the essence of Biriuzov’s accusations were repeated by Marshal Andrei E. Eremenko in his controversial 1964 memoirs. Eremenko charged that the military preparation of the new border zone had been hampered by “mistakes and sluggishness” and that the older fortifications had been “abandoned prematurely.” His discussion of the effects of the territorial annexations concluded with a remark that impugned the high command, especially the General Staff’s representatives, among other culprits: “Given an accurate strategic forecast of impending events, the newly reunited territories could have played an exceptionally positive role [in the USSR’s defense].”<sup>86</sup>

For his part, Zhukov was sensitive to charges that he was culpable for the 1941 catastrophe. In passages of his own memoirs that were not printed until 1990, he attacked Eremenko’s account of one pre-war episode and stated acidly that, “speaking frankly,” Eremenko’s “arrogance” had made him unpopular.<sup>87</sup> During Zhukov’s talks with Konstantin Simonov in 1965-66, he did concede that he and the other military chiefs were not sufficiently resolute in dealing with Stalin as the evidence of the Wehrmacht’s invasion preparations mounted. On the other hand, Zhukov recalled that he had possessed enormous faith in Stalin’s political acumen and grasp of the fluid international situation. And, Zhukov added, anyone foolish enough to question Stalin’s judgment would have found himself in Beria’s clutches.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>S. S. Biriuzov, *Surovye gody* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo “Nauka,” 1966), 18.

<sup>86</sup>A. I. Eremenko, *V nachale voiny* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo “Nauka,” 1964), 31. Eremenko’s book received a blistering review in *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal*, a sign of the high-level hackles it raised. (V. Ivanov and K. Cheremukhin, “O knige ‘V nachale voiny,’” *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1965, no. 6: 72-80.)

<sup>87</sup>Zhukov, *Vospominaniia i razmyshleniia*, 1:247, 311. In a passage that did appear in the heavily censored version of his memoirs published in 1969, Zhukov singled out Eremenko’s *V nachale voiny* for ridicule. (Ibid., 347.)

<sup>88</sup>K. M. Simonov, *Glazami*, 315.

Concerning the existing fortifications, Zhukov insisted that “the fortified areas on the old state border were not liquidated and fully disarmed, as certain memoirs and historical works maintain.” On the contrary, he claimed, “they were, on the whole, maintained on all of the most important sectors and axes, and it was intended, in addition, to strengthen them.”<sup>89</sup> These assertions appear to be at odds with the facts as several other marshals have alleged them to be. The seemingly conflicting positions can be reconciled, however. On the one hand, pillboxes and blockhouses of the Stalin Line actually were stripped of their arms and equipment in 1940 (as will be discussed below); on the other, the disarmed fortifications did reemerge in the General Staff’s plans in spring 1941, that is, during Zhukov’s tenure as chief of the General Staff. Serious interest in the potential of the abandoned fortifications to anchor a rear defense line came very late, however—only after the Wehrmacht’s build-up had become highly alarming. It is the Stalin Line’s belated reappearance in near-term strategic planning to which Zhukov referred in his memoirs, and this return is the basis of his denial that the older fortified areas were dismantled. (After all, in retrospect, it obviously would have been foolhardy to do so!) But Zhukov’s defense, such as it is, was predicated on yet another instance of an abrupt reversal of policy by Stalin and the high command. How, then, did the fortifications inside the original border come to be disarmed and effectively discarded in 1940, an event emblematic of Soviet military policy’s illusions, overreaching, and disarray in the final pre-war years?

#### IV

As Donald Cameron Watt has written in his monumental *How War Came*, “to enter into the minds of the Soviet leadership in this period is extraordinarily difficult.”<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup>Zhukov, *Vospominaniia i razmyshleniia*, 1:352.

<sup>90</sup>Watt, *How War Came*, 216. As Stalin’s personal assessment of the international situation was the prime determinant of Soviet foreign policy at this time, historians have had ample room for advancing very different explanations for Soviet behavior in the years immediately preceding the outbreak of the Second World War as well as the nerve-racking run-up to the German invasion in June 1941. (A stark example of the interpretive split concerning the nature of the (continued next page)

Nevertheless, Stalin plainly regarded the lands he had acquired at negligible cost as a validation of his appraisal of the international situation and, in all likelihood, as a strategic asset of tremendous worth. In relation to the warring capitalist states of Europe, this advanced base could serve as a protective glacis as well as a camp for the further extension of Soviet power in Europe at some favorable time in the future. Prior to 1939, the USSR's administrative and economic centers were situated within seven hundred kilometers of the Polish border; at the end of that year the Soviet 10th Army's positions on the Western Bug and Narew Rivers were closer to Berlin than to Moscow. It stands to reason that Stalin's thinking during the late summer and autumn of 1939 was guided by the Leninist tenet that war could powerfully accelerate the revolutionary process. In addressing the Party's Seventeenth Congress in January 1934, he had forecast that the "new imperialist war" already on the horizon "surely would unleash revolution and jeopardize the very existence of capitalism in a number of countries, as it did during the course of the first imperialist war." Moreover, Stalin had warned, any war involving the Soviet Union would be waged "not only at the fronts, but also in the enemy's rear" by the

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Soviet response to Nazi expansionism is provided by two works published in the same year: Jonathan Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe, 1933-39* [London: Macmillan, 1984]; and Jiri Hochman, *The Soviet Union and the Failure of Collective Security, 1934-1938* [Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984]. Gabriel Gorodetsky, *Grand Delusion: Stalin and the German Invasion of Russia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999) is a major new work grounded in the author's unparalleled access to a vast array of Russian archival sources as well as his use of a broad range of more accessible, yet still unusual, material (e.g., Bulgarian and Yugoslav archives). Refuting Vladimir B. Rezun's sensational, specious claim that Stalin was preparing to launch a revolutionary war against Germany in summer 1941, a plan foiled by the Wehrmacht's pre-emptive attack (see Viktor Suvorov [Vladimir B. Rezun], *Icebreaker: Who Started the Second World War?*, trans. Thomas B. Beattie [London: Hamish Hamilton, 1990]), Gorodetsky sees Stalin as a sober-minded realist whose foreign policy was devoid of ideological content or motive—a highly debatable contention. (Thus: "Stalin's policy appears to have been rational and level-headed—an unscrupulous *Realpolitik* serving well-defined geopolitical interests." [Gorodetsky, *Grand Delusion*, 316.]) On the other hand, if Stalin was a Marxist visionary motivated, above all, by the aspiration to "build socialism" in the USSR, the universal (as opposed to national) nature of the Marxist-Leninist conception of human liberation itself would call into question whether sharp distinctions in the postulates of Stalin's domestic and foreign policies really existed. As Walicki, *Marxism*, 441, points out, Stalin was convinced that Lenin had devised "a universally applicable theory of the proletarian revolution" and that he, Lenin's rightful successor, had "become the indisputable leader of the international proletariat...." One might also make the elementary point that Stalin's writings and speeches employ the same distinctive Bolshevik idiom of political discourse regardless of whether he is elaborating on the machinations of foreign "imperialists" or the tasks of "socialist construction" in the USSR. In effect, Gorodetsky has set up a dichotomy between ideological imperatives, which he discounts, and the genuine sources of Stalin's diplomacy, which he finds in Russia's traditional national interests—in other words, great-power goals "rooted in Russia's tsarist legacy." (Gorodetsky, *Grand Delusion*, 316-17.) I find this juxtaposition too stark. For example, the annexation of eastern Poland in 1939 did represent the recovery of an important part of Russia's tsarist patrimony, but it also entailed the enlargement of the socialist system, as Stalin himself mentioned in a frank Kremlin talk on 8 September 1939 (described below).

“numerous friends of the USSR’s working class in Europe and Asia.”<sup>91</sup> (In fact, through at least the early 1930s, Soviet military strategists postulated that worker uprisings in the enemy camp would complement Red Army operations.)<sup>92</sup> At the Party’s Eighteenth Congress in March 1939, Stalin counseled that even “a small war” posed the danger of aggression against “peace-loving countries” (notably the USSR), but also spoke of the fear on the part of Britain, France, and the United States that a “second world imperialist war” would lead to “the victory of the revolution in one or more countries.”<sup>93</sup> Hence the linkage between world war and Communist revolution would seem to have been a fixture of Stalin’s thinking on international relations.

Direct insights into Stalin’s deliberations in 1939 are rare. One valuable glimpse is afforded by the diary of Georgii M. Dimitrov, the Comintern leader. According to an entry in this document, an expansive Stalin delivered a tour d’horizon in an intimate, late-night Kremlin meeting on 7 September 1939, a few days after the British and French declarations of war on Germany. Stalin’s commentary called attention to the capitalist nature of the combatants, who, he held, would batter and weaken each other. The war would permit the USSR to maneuver and to play off the opposing sides so as to increase the harm they would inflict on each other. Poland’s destruction, Stalin averred, would mean only that one fewer “bourgeois” and “fascist” government would exist. And he joked about the prospect that Poland’s demise would bring “new territories and populations” under “the socialist system,” strongly suggesting that such a development had been an inducement for reaching agreement with Hitler.<sup>94</sup> Ten days after Stalin’s

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<sup>91</sup>I. V. Stalin, “Otchetnyi doklad XVII s’ezdu partii o rabote TsK VKP(b),” 26 January 1934, in *Sochineniia*, vol. 13 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1951), 294, 297. In a January 1925 speech at a Central Committee plenum, Stalin had declared: “But if war begins, we will not be able to sit with folded hands—we will have to join in but we will join in last. And we will join in so as to throw decisive weight on the scales, weight which would tip the scales.” (I. V. Stalin, “Rech’ na plenum TsK VKP[b],” 19 January 1925, in *Sochineniia*, vol. 7 [Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1952], 14.)

<sup>92</sup>Savushkin, *Razvitie Sovetskikh vooruzhennykh sil*, 9.

<sup>93</sup>Stalin, “Otchetnyi doklad na XVIII s’ezde partii,” 1 (14):337-38, 342.

<sup>94</sup>“Iz dnevnika General’nogo sekretaria ispolkoma Kominterna G. M. Dimitrova,” 7 September 1939, in *1941 god*, 2:584. Dimitrov’s diary entry noted that Molotov and Zhdanov also were present. (“Posetiteli,” 1995, nos. 5-6: 50-51, (continued next page)

ruminations, the Red Army's Belorussian and Ukrainian Fronts swept across the Polish frontier.

From Stalin's standpoint, only one aspect of the territorial alignment stemming from the 1939 treaties with Germany could have given him pause: for the first time since 1918, German soldiers held positions on the Soviet border. In other words, Germany no longer would need to "borrow" a frontier to attack the USSR, as Stalin had noted in a 1936 interview.<sup>95</sup> But the danger that presence represented must have appeared latent and wholly manageable in late summer 1939. On 3 September Hitler, to his evident surprise (and undoubtedly to Stalin's relief), had found himself at war with both France and Britain despite their governments' realization that they alone would confront Germany. Stalin knew that it had taken them more than four years to bring Germany to the point of exhaustion in 1918, and that was with the benefit of American intervention and Russia's diversion of scores of German divisions for most of the war. In a passage that censors excised from Zhukov's memoirs, he summarized Stalin's perspective at a time when the USSR remained a contented, if wary, onlooker to the war:

I. V. Stalin convinced us that Hitler's Germany had tied itself up for a long time, having become involved in a war with France and England, and would emerge from it so weakened that many years would be required for it to risk unleashing a great war with the Soviet Union. In the meantime, our country becomes much stronger economically, assimilates the regions reunited with the Soviet Union (the Baltic, Western Belorussia, Western

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confirms their presence.) The discussion in question concerned the official Comintern position on the outbreak of war, which was reflected in a directive to Communist parties sent on 8 September, the following day. ("Direktiva Sekretariata IKKI kompartiiam ob otnoshenii k nachavsheisia voine ot 8 sentiabria 1939 g.," in *Komintern i Vtoraiia mirovaia voina*, vol. 1, *Do 22 iyunia 1941 g.*, comp. N. S. Lebedeva and M. M. Narinskii [Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Pamiatniki istoricheskoi mysli," 1994], 88-90.) This instruction stated that the war was a fight "between two groups of capitalist countries for world supremacy"; consequently, to differentiate between fascist and democratic governments in the capitalist countries (the Comintern's position before the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact) no longer made sense. Communist parties in the belligerents now were enjoined to oppose the war. Gorodetsky admits that Stalin "did justify the division of Poland in what might be seen as an ideological perspective..."; however, he writes off Stalin's statement as a "thin veneer" over "Soviet strategic interests or the need to bring the war to a hasty end before Russia too became involved in the conflict." (Gorodetsky, *Grand Delusion*, 8.) This seems overly dismissive of a consideration that occurred readily to Stalin.

<sup>95</sup> "Interview given by Stalin to Mr Roy Howard (extracts)," 5 March 1936, in *Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy*, vol. 3, 1933-1941, ed. Jane Degras (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 165.

Ukraine, and Moldavia), and finishes construction of the fortified lines on the new state borders.<sup>96</sup>

Thus, Stalin evidently resolved to use the respite he believed he had won to ready the country and its armed forces for the trials and opportunities ahead. Decades later, Molotov told a confidant that “we did everything possible to defer war” with Germany because Stalin recognized that the Red Army would not be able to contend with the Wehrmacht until 1943.<sup>97</sup> Molotov’s claim may credit Stalin’s prescience unduly, but the dictator probably calculated that the Red Army would be a much more powerful instrument after the program of expansion, restructuring, and rearmament underway in 1940-41 had been completed or, at least, had progressed much further. The automotive and aviation industries, for example, were scheduled to begin manufacturing T-34 and KV tanks and several new-model aircraft in quantity only in 1941.<sup>98</sup>

If these suppositions about the view from the Kremlin during the first weeks of the Second World War are on the mark, the reaction of some of the military officers sent to occupy eastern Poland was quite different: they were apprehensive about the situation created by the settlement with Germany. Corps Commander Maxim A. Purkaev, the Belorussian Special Military District’s chief of staff, reportedly remarked during an October 1939 briefing that Poland never would have dared to strike at the USSR by itself. If Poland ever had allowed German forces to traverse its territory to reach the Soviet border, ample time would have been available for the Red Army to mobilize and assemble under cover of the defenses near the old frontier. In Purkaev’s view, the immediate effect of the events of the previous two months was detrimental: the Wehrmacht now had a broad corridor it could use freely to mass for an attack. Purkaev morosely observed that although the Red Army’s occupation of Western Belorussia and

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<sup>96</sup>Zhukov, *Vospominaniia i razmyshleniia*, 1:373.

<sup>97</sup>Chuev, *Sto sorok besed*, 31.

<sup>98</sup>N. S. Simonov, *Voenna-promyshlennyi kompleks SSSR*, 126-27.

Western Ukraine (i.e., eastern Poland) unquestionably was positive from the “general political point of view,” the potential advantages of moving the border so far to the west would be realized only when the frontier zone was brought to the same level of military preparedness that had been attained inside the original border.<sup>99</sup> As such a view implicitly was critical of the Kremlin’s strategic judgment (and therefore unlikely to be verbalized to any substantial extent), it is impossible to know how widely it was shared.

A November tour of the western addition to the Belorussian Special Military District did leave virtually all participants troubled. Colonel Leonid M. Sandalov, the chief of the operations department in the district headquarters, recalled that the trip “filled us with distress. We saw how much our capabilities for strategic concentration and force deployment in the event of war had been reduced.” Defensive works did not exist; the few rail lines required gauge conversion; railroads and roads had low cargo capacities; and airfields lacked concrete runways, restricting their use by high-performance military aircraft to the dry months of summer. Only the head of the topographical section remained unperturbed: there had been so little change in the region’s infrastructure since the First World War that old maps remained useful.<sup>100</sup>

For months after the move into eastern Poland, commanders in the annexed region were preoccupied with concerns which were immediate, mundane, and gritty. The number of buildings suitable for use as barracks was fewer than the Red Army required, even given the spartan quarters in which its units were lodged. Those lacking accommodations were put to work building dugouts for use as temporary shelters. Vehicle parks, stables, messes, depots, firing ranges, and training areas also had to be built or adapted from existing facilities.<sup>101</sup> Initially, units were placed wherever they could be housed, rather than in accordance with operational considerations. Two of the

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<sup>99</sup>Sandalov, *Na moskovskom napravlenii*, 40.

<sup>100</sup>*Ibid.*, 39-40.

<sup>101</sup>*Ibid.*, 41; Buisikh et al., *Kievskii Krasnoznamennyi*, 135.

four divisions assigned to the 4th Army at the end of 1939, for instance, were packed into the tsarist fortress at Brest Litovsk, that is, virtually on the border itself. Even the army hospital was there, just a few hundred meters from German border posts.<sup>102</sup> Due to the urgent need to construct suitable quarters and training facilities throughout the annexed region, actual training was limited to two to four hours a day.<sup>103</sup> Earthworks were put up in some border locations, but the effort fizzled with the approach of winter.<sup>104</sup>

The General Staff itself faced a hugely complicated job: plans for the mobilization, concentration, and employment of Soviet forces in the western border military districts had to be reworked to account for the seizure of eastern Poland (and, in 1940, Bessarabia, northern Bukovina, and the Baltic countries).<sup>105</sup> Not only had hundreds of units moved into a region lacking the requisite support facilities: they now were separated from the sources of trained reservists, horses, trucks, and tractors needed to bring them to wartime levels of manpower and transport upon mobilization.<sup>106</sup> Moreover, the details of a revised strategic deployment plan had to be coordinated with the People's Commissariat for Lines of Communication, which operated the railroad system on which long-distance conveyance from the interior military districts depended.<sup>107</sup> So extensive were the changes in geography, the lineup of potential

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<sup>102</sup>Sandalov, *Pervye dni voiny*, 9.

<sup>103</sup>Zverev et al., *Surovye ispytaniia*, 67.

<sup>104</sup>Sandalov, *Na moskovskom napravlenii*, 41.

<sup>105</sup>Gor'kov and Murin, "Neopublikovannoe interv'iu," 7. Vasilevskii, *Delo vsei zhizni*, 96, mentions the "colossal" amount of work which had to be accomplished quickly.

<sup>106</sup>Zverev et al., *Surovye ispytaniia*, 66.

<sup>107</sup>In fact, according to Kurkotkin, *Tyl*, 33-34, a coordinated schedule for the movement of military trains upon mobilization was not in place until early 1941. (The preceding schedule dated to 1938.) The new plan envisaged the deployment of locomotives and additional railroad personnel to the new border zone, which remained deficient in both. For example, on the eighteen rail lines (of fifty-four) in the western border military districts on which mobilization-related military traffic was to be especially heavy, 364 locomotives were needed to implement the deployment plan, but only 136 were present in the region. On 17 January 1941 Beria and the head of the NKVD's Main Transportation Directorate sent a lengthy memorandum on the unsatisfactory state of mobilization planning for rail transport to Stalin, Molotov, and Kaganovich. The report advised them that the Commissariat for Lines of Communication and the Defense Commissariat had yet to agree on a joint military transport plan. ("NKVD o mobpodgotovke zheleznodorozhnogo transporta," ed. A. I. Miniuk, *Istoricheskii arkhiv*, 1995, nos. 5-6: 103-07.) This example shows (continued next page)

adversaries (reduced to only Germany in the west), and even the Red Army's force structure that the General Staff largely had to begin anew.

Under the deployment scheme approved by the GVS in November 1938, the fronts formed on the western and south-western strategic axes would have mobilized and concentrated while shielded by the Stalin Line. Two premises underpinned the 1938 plan: first, that the Red Army's covering armies and fortified areas would be able to parry enemy incursions while the district and high command reserves deployed in good order, a process thought to require eight to twenty days from the start of mobilization; second, that the fronts formed by the western border military districts, reinforced by armies from the interior, would be sufficiently powerful to batter and cleave the enemy's first strategic echelon, enabling the Red Army to advance across Poland.<sup>108</sup> Notwithstanding the radically altered strategic situation as well as the rigidity and ineptitude displayed by Soviet commanders while in action in Poland, Finland, and Bessarabia from September 1939 to June 1940, the 1938 plan's assumptions were carried over into the strategic deployment plan for 1940-41.<sup>109</sup>

## V

In the annexed territories the Red Army began to duplicate the force posture and supporting infrastructure that had been built up inside the original border over more than

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how the NKVD's network of monitors and security agents throughout the state administration gave its leaders entrée to policy matters that seemingly were outside the realm of state security and foreign intelligence.

<sup>108</sup>Zakharov, *General'nyi shtab*, 133. See also "Zapiska nachal'nika Genshtaba Krasnoi Armii," 1941 god, 2:557-71, which was the basis of the deployment plan approved by the GVS in November 1938. The eight-to-twenty day figure for strategic concentration appears in "Zapis' zasedaniia voennykh missii SSSR, Velikobritanii i Frantsii," 15 August 1939, in USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *God krizisa, 1938-1939: Dokumenty i materialy.*, vol. 2, 2 iunia 1939 g.-4 sentiabria 1939 g. (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1990), 221. Finally, "Kratkii otchet o rabote soveshchaniia voennykh missii SSSR, Anglii i Frantsii," [no date] August 1939, in Russian Federation Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki. 1939 god.*, vol. 22, bk. 1, *Ianvar'-avgust.* (Moscow: "Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia," 1992), 666, summarizes the same briefing by Shaposhnikov that mentions the concentration time cited.

<sup>109</sup>Glantz, *Stumbling Colossus*, 88-89; "Soobrazheniia ob osnovakh strategicheskogo razvertyvaniia Vooruzhennykh Sil Sovetskogo Soiuzna na Zapade i na Vostoke na 1940 i 1941 gody," 18 September 1940, in "Gotovil li SSSR preventivnyi udar?," comp. E. I. Ziuzin, *Voenna-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1992, no. 1: 27-28.

a decade. Although Stalin and the high command evidently did not approve detailed plans to do so until 1940 (specifically, until after the war with Finland), this development was foreshadowed by preliminary planning in autumn 1939.<sup>110</sup> Voroshilov's proposal of 23 October 1939 for ground forces' reorganization referred to "the necessity of maintaining [forces] on the territories of Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia...at reinforced strength" and to the anticipated creation of more fortified area units in 1941 to support "fortification of the new frontier in the west."<sup>111</sup> In January 1940 the western border military districts were instructed to prepare for fortification work that year.<sup>112</sup> After France's capitulation in June 1940, a 4 July memorandum to Stalin from Shaposhnikov and Timoshenko, the new defense commissar, stated that "the sharply changing situation in the West" called for "additional measures for strengthening the western military districts."<sup>113</sup> In short, the western USSR was to be invested with all of the troops, fortifications, and other military infrastructure which could be mustered for that purpose, including from other military districts, or created ex nihilo.

Preparatory work for fortification-building was underway soon after the Red Army's entry into Poland: army commanders in the Belorussian Special Military District already were engaged in terrain studies for positioning fortifications in autumn 1939. The district command prepared two options. Under the first, fortified areas were to abut the newly demarcated border, following it closely as it jutted to the north-west from Brest Litovsk. An alternative called for fortifications to be positioned twenty-five to fifty kilometers back from the frontier so that the most exposed portion of the Belostok salient was left unprotected. From the standpoint of defense against attack, the second plan, though by no means ideal, had certain advantages over the border-hugging scheme.

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<sup>110</sup>Zhukov, *Vospominaniia i razmyshleniia*, 1:349.

<sup>111</sup>Voroshilov to Stalin and Molotov, 23 October 1939, in "Krasnaia Armiia za god do fashistskoi agressii," pt. 1, *Voenna-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1996, no. 3: 23-24.

<sup>112</sup>"Prikaz o khode oboronitel'nogo stroitel'stva v ukreplennykh raionakh," 2 October 1940, in *Prikazy*, 178.

<sup>113</sup>Timoshenko and Shaposhnikov to Stalin and Molotov, "Krasnaia Armiia za god do fashistskoi agressii," pt. 2, 19.

Emplacements could be built away from German border posts; more important, the covering forces would have more time to occupy their initial positions, especially if the area between the new fortifications and the frontier was mined and strewn with obstacles.<sup>114</sup>

Shaposhnikov, the seasoned chief of the General Staff in 1939, often is portrayed in memoirs as the upholder of professional values, objectivity, and wisdom inside the post-purge high command.<sup>115</sup> This is a fair (if one-dimensional) view, as Shaposhnikov's tenacity in pressing his views was limited by the inherent weakness of his position in the high command. This circumstance affected decisions on the direction of the fortification program in 1939-40. According to Sandalov, Shaposhnikov supported the more prudent fortification plan with certain unspecified changes. An authoritative firsthand source, Colonel-General Arkadii F. Khrenov, who headed the Red Army's Main Military Engineering Directorate briefly in 1940-41, has reported that his staff, under Shaposhnikov's supervision, developed a concept for fortifying the new border in stages. This option called for field (rather than concrete or permanent) fortifications to be erected in a first phase in 1940-41. These field fortified areas were to integrate dense obstacle belts with the old fortresses at Brest Litovsk, Grodno, and elsewhere. The plan would have deferred the more time-consuming and costly process of building, outfitting, and arming thousands of concrete fortifications to a subsequent phase in 1941-42. Khrenov optimistically believed that merely the first stage would have created "a sufficiently stable defense" on invasion routes. But "our plan was not adopted," Khrenov laconically recorded; instead, the arduous work of building permanent emplacements of concrete proceeded, he complained, "as if we had at least two years available."<sup>116</sup> Biriuzov, Khrushchev's chief of the General Staff, stated that Shaposhnikov's "very worthwhile

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<sup>114</sup>Sandalov, *Pervye dni voyny*, 7-8; idem, *Na moskovskom napravlenii*, 41.

<sup>115</sup>See, for instance, Konev, "Vospominaniia," 24, in which Shaposhnikov is described affectionately as a veteran General Staff professional and "a walking encyclopedia" of military affairs.

<sup>116</sup>A. F. Khrenov, *Masty k pobede* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1982), 67.

proposals” entailed placement only of obstacle-laying units and screening forces in the annexed territories; the main force in the western border military districts was to be kept “within the bounds of the old state border behind a line of powerful fortified areas.”<sup>117</sup> Finally, Vasilevskii stated that “the completely baseless decision” to disarm the Stalin Line was made over Shaposhnikov’s objection.<sup>118</sup>

These accounts of Shaposhnikov’s views in 1939-40 have important common elements: retention of the bulk of the first strategic echelon well back from the new border; extensive use of readily-constructed obstacles and field fortifications to hinder an enemy advance; and, in the commentaries of Biriuzov and Vasilevskii, continued reliance on defenses inside the original border to shield the Red Army’s mobilization and concentration. In essence, the recommendations attributed to Shaposhnikov amounted to a defense in depth, a force posture based on successive, prepared lines of defense and the withholding of the main force from the initial engagements, thereby allowing the defender to maneuver to hit enemy columns weakened by the early battles. A defense in depth would have been a judicious strategic choice for defending the western USSR, one that combined the deployment advantages afforded by the railroads and fortifications inside the original border with the territorial buffer (and, for an invader, prospective obstacle course) that Stalin and Molotov had wrested. However, a defense in depth would have run counter to the offensive orthodoxy which dominated Soviet military thinking during the 1930s (and had petrified by the end of the decade); on an elemental level, concession of land and the initiative to the enemy would have clashed with the Red Army’s revolutionary ethos. The latter predisposed Stalin, the high command, and Communist military theorists (e.g., Tukhachevsky) alike to envisage the USSR’s defense as entailing the destruction of the enemy armies, occupation of the enemy countries, and the emancipation of their captive “working masses,” to whom the Red Army was said to

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<sup>117</sup>Biriuzov, *Surovye gody*, 17-18.

<sup>118</sup>Gor’kov and Murin, “Neopublikovannoe interv’iu,” 8.

be “friend and protector.”<sup>119</sup> As a military technocrat come late to the Party, Shaposhnikov would not have shared the blanket disdain for defensive force postures that informed the outlook of the rising *kraskomy* of the 1920s.<sup>120</sup>

Notwithstanding Shaposhnikov’s reported support for a cautious alternative to the far-forward positioning of forces and fortifications in the border region, “the mistaken decision” that was taken in 1940, according to Zhukov, was “to relocate immediately the forces of the western districts to new areas of the western territory reunited with the Soviet Union. The first echelons of the forces of the western districts were positioned in them despite the fact that these areas had not yet been prepared properly for defense.”<sup>121</sup> As all major proposals concerning the Red Army’s force posture routinely were submitted to Stalin for approval, he unquestionably weighed in on such a fundamental issue as the nature and extent of the Red Army’s presence in the seized lands. (Vasilevskii emphasized that he knew from personal experience that “all of the strategic decisions of the supreme military command used to draw up the operational plan... were approved by the Soviet government,” that is, by Stalin personally.)<sup>122</sup> Stalin evidently was determined to fully secure and swiftly absorb the territories that represented, in his mind, a cardinal feat of diplomatic maneuver and revolutionary strategy. Western Belorussia and the Baltic countries (nominally independent until August 1940) had been ruled by Russia from the eighteenth century until Bolshevik weakness in the Revolution’s

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<sup>119</sup>*Polevoi ustav RKKK (PU-39)*, 10.

<sup>120</sup>In a work written in 1969 but published in its entirety only in 1989 (*General’nyi shtab v predvoennye gody*), Marshal Matvei V. Zakharov, a two-time chief of the General Staff during the 1960s and early 1970s, rebukes “certain authors” who had suggested that the failure to adopt a defense in depth based on the Stalin Line was “a fatal mistake.” Zakharov derides such a force posture as “strategic nonsense,” declaring that the loss of the annexed territories and the forces stationed in them would have placed the Red Army “in a very serious and dangerous position.” (One wonders how the actual course of events in summer 1941 differed from the outcome Zakharov decries.) Zakharov, in conclusion, insists that such a proposal could not possibly have been originated by Shaposhnikov. Zakharov was an aide to Shaposhnikov from 1938 to 1940, but his book is an apologia for the pre-war General Staff. (“We made mistakes, but they were not of a fatal or catastrophic character.”) Zakharov’s disassociation of Shaposhnikov with a defense in depth strategy is contradicted by other, equally authoritative sources (e.g., Vasilevskii). (Zakharov, *General’nyi shtab*, 224-25, 237.)

<sup>121</sup>Zhukov, *Vospominaniia i razmyshleniia*, 1:349.

<sup>122</sup>Gor’kov and Murin, “Neopublikovannoe interv’iu,” 8.

aftermath enabled the empire's western borderlands to break free. By succeeding in regaining a large chunk of them in 1939, Stalin had restored part of Russia's patrimony while enlarging the socialist system beyond the USSR's original borders. It is easy to picture him grimly telling Shaposhnikov that the General Staff had better plan to hold the lands previously "under the yoke of Polish landlords and capitalists," come what may.<sup>123</sup> Accordingly, the defense of the western USSR would be conducted right at the border.

Molotov described an incident following the war that illustrates Stalin's predilection for territorial aggrandizement for revolutionary as well as great-power ends. Contentedly examining a map of Soviet postwar borders at his dacha, Stalin reportedly exclaimed: "The Baltics—Russian land from time immemorial!—are ours again, our Belorussians all live together now, Ukrainians—together, Moldavians, together. All is well in the West." In the same conversation, Molotov boasted that his main charge as foreign minister, as he conceived it, was "to expand the boundaries of our Fatherland to the maximum possible extent," a task at which he and Stalin had enjoyed much success.<sup>124</sup>

Such attitudes strongly suggest that a key factor in the regime's decision to position fortified areas on the edge of the annexed region—and to saturate the frontier zone generally with military, border, and internal security forces—was the value Stalin attached to them as visible, enduring symbols of Soviet dominion and of his determination to retain this territory under any circumstances. When Sandalov observed concrete emplacements near Brest Litovsk being built in 1940 on the eastern bank of the Western Bug, that is, directly on the border, he remarked in puzzlement that their locations must be known to German intelligence. In response, the general in charge of them sighed: "We must be guided not only by military considerations, but by political

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<sup>123</sup>A. V. Antosiak, "Osvobozhdenie Zapadnoi Ukrainy i Zapadnoi Belorussii," *Voenna-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1989, no. 9: 54.

<sup>124</sup>Chuev, *Sto sorok besed*, 14.

ones stemming from the well-known aphorism: ‘We will not give up even a single *vershok* of our land to anybody....’<sup>125</sup> In this connection, Vasilevskii noted that Kulik, Mekhlis, and Shchadenko “categorically opposed” proposals to position reserve stocks deep in the rear, as they contended that an enemy attack would be repelled readily, and that operations “in all circumstances” would be shifted onto enemy soil.<sup>126</sup> In Sandalov’s view, practical considerations, such as the obvious mismatch between available construction resources and the Red Army’s infrastructure needs, were overridden by the doctrinal tenet that every patch of Soviet territory would be defended steadfastly. Based on his experience as a senior commander, he concluded that this proposition had been understood literally by the military leadership.<sup>127</sup> In this way, then, the fierce bravado of the regime’s stylized pronouncements on military affairs went beyond mere bombast to materially influence its military strategy and force posture. In 1940–41 Soviet construction organizations struggled to install simultaneously *all* of the infrastructure in the border region required by the Red Army’s forward-weighted posture, whose rationale was to carry the war to the enemy early.

These conceptions of how the Red Army should fight, which were shared by Stalin and the high command (Shaposhnikov’s short-lived dissent on fortification positioning aside), molded the General Staff’s new strategic deployment plan. Its Operations Directorate labored through summer 1940 to draft a strategic blueprint to replace the one adopted in November 1938. The new plan was presented to Stalin only in September 1940, as work on it lagged due to the ill-timed and deflating conflict with

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<sup>125</sup>Sandalov, *Perezhitoe*, 64. In the author’s *Na Moskovskom napravlenii*, 53, published in 1970, that is, four years after *Perezhitoe*, this quotation has been truncated to read: “We must be guided not only by military considerations, but by political ones.” This alteration was a subtle sign of Stalin’s return to official favor, albeit with a few blemishes on a supposedly positive record of achievement in founding a sound socialist system.

<sup>126</sup>Vasilevskii, *Delo vsei zhizni*, 97–98. See also Army General Khrulev’s account of his clash with Mekhlis on this matter in Kumanev, “Neopublikovannoe interv’iu,” 71–72.

<sup>127</sup>Sandalov, *Pervye dni voiny*, 8. Asked to explain the great retreat of summer 1941, Khrulev cited this precept of pre-war Soviet military doctrine in a 1960 interview. (Kumanev, “Neopublikovannoe interv’iu,” 78.)

Finland.<sup>128</sup> As in 1938, the Operations Directorate still postulated that a discrete, *discernible* interval would separate the start of the final German preparations for an attack and the time at which the main part of the enemy invasion force could be committed to the offensive. Whereas the 1938 plan had used nominal deployment times of twenty or twenty-eight to thirty days for a combined German-Polish invasion force (depending on where it massed), the 1940 version decreased the estimated concentration time for a purely German army to ten to fifteen days.<sup>129</sup> But it was further assumed that if the enemy attacked before the Red Army's main body had deployed near the border, its offensive would involve limited forces only.<sup>130</sup> This postulate represented a grave misjudgment of Nazi war-making style, which was predicated on scrupulously masking an attack's date and locus, and then applying the Wehrmacht's full striking power from the outset.<sup>131</sup>

The Operations Directorate took for granted that the final assembly of a German invasion force would be detected—a reasonable assumption—and that warning of impending attack would trigger a prompt, resolute response: an order for the first strategic echelon to mobilize and assemble (which, in fact, never came in June 1941). The main features of the plan were now standard—and fanciful. Front commands would be fielded from the headquarters of the border military districts; district reserves would march closer to the frontier; and on the border itself, the high-strength divisions of the

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<sup>128</sup>Zakharov, *General'nyi shtab*, 217; Vasilevskii, *Delo vsei zhizni*, 91. "Zapiska narkoma oborony SSSR v Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) – I. V. Stalinu i SNK SSSR – V. M. Molotovu," 9 May 1940, in *1941 god*, 2:608, refers to the inability to effect organizational measures approved by the Defense Committee on 1 December 1939 due to the war with Finland.

<sup>129</sup>Zakharov, *General'nyi shtab*, 129, 215; Vasilevskii, *Delo vsei zhizni*, 91. The 1940 plan states: "The approximate time [required] for deployment of the German army on our western borders: the tenth to fifteenth day from the start of concentration." ("Soobrazheniia ob osnovakh strategicheskogo razvertyvaniia," in "Gotovil li SSSR preventivnyi udar?," 26.)

<sup>130</sup>S. P. Ivanov, *Nachal'nyi period voiny*, 206.

<sup>131</sup>Erickson, *Road to Stalingrad*, 68; idem, "Threat Identification and Strategic Appraisal by the Soviet Union, 1930-1941," in *Knowing One's Enemies: Intelligence Assessment Before the Two World Wars*, ed. Ernest R. May (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), 422 n. 77. For an analysis of German innovations in warfare from the time of Prussia's Danish and Austrian wars in the mid-1860s to the blitzkrieg's heyday from 1939 to 1941, see Larry H. Addington, *The Blitzkrieg Era and the German General Staff, 1865-1941* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1971).

covering armies would take up positions among the fortified areas. In the internal military districts, the armies of the second strategic echelon would mobilize and embark for transport west. As the flow of mobilized divisions from the interior increased, the covering forces on the border, stiffened by the fortifications there, would repulse German incursions. Soviet planners even believed that “under favorable circumstances,” the covering armies might be able to cross the border and seize favorable positions from which subsequent operations would be mounted after the arrival of the second strategic echelon.<sup>132</sup> The successive front offensives across Poland and into south-eastern Germany that were to follow formed the centerpiece of the war plan devised in 1940.<sup>133</sup>

All was predicated on an initial, albeit short and ancillary, phase of defense at the border, a transition from the outbreak of war to the Red Army’s seizure of the strategic initiative. Anchoring the fleeting opening defense, according to the plan, was a chain of fortifications that remained in rudimentary form in spring 1941.<sup>134</sup> No analysis of alternative scenarios for the initiation of war or their implications for the Red Army’s capabilities during its initial phase was performed.<sup>135</sup> The high command and General Staff never seriously considered the possibility that a shattering enemy blow would prevent most of the rifle divisions in the first echelons of the covering armies from even taking up their assigned positions.<sup>136</sup> To those who were so inclined, the speed and decisiveness of the Wehrmacht’s victories in Poland and France could be explained away

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<sup>132</sup>S. P. Ivanov, *Nachal’nyi period voyny*, 205-06. On an early advance into enemy territory “under favorable circumstances,” see Iu. A. Gor’kov and Iu. N. Semin, “O kharaktere voenno-operativnykh planov SSSR nakanune Velikoi Otechestvennoi voyny. Noveye arkhivnye dokumenty,” *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 1997, no. 5: 117.

<sup>133</sup>“Soobrazheniia ob osnovakh strategicheskogo razvertyvaniia,” in “Gotovil li SSSR preventivnyi udar?,” 27-28. According to the draft of the deployment plan submitted to Stalin on 18 September 1940, the immediate objectives of the three fronts that were to be mobilized in the Western theater of war were: to pin German forces in East Prussia; to destroy those concentrated to the southeast of Warsaw around Lublin; and to reach the Vistula River. Subsequent objectives included Kielce and Cracow in southern Poland, and then the upper Oder-Breslau region in Germany itself.

<sup>134</sup>An April 1941 order concerning force deployment in the Western Special Military District speaks glibly of “defense [of the border] with the full use of the fortified areas and field fortifications....” (“Direktiva narkoma oboronnykh SSSR i nachal’nika Genshtaba Krasnoi Armii komanduiushchemu voiskami ZAPOVO general-polkovniku D. G. Pavlovu,” [no date] April 1941, in *1941 god*, 2:137.)

<sup>135</sup>Erickson, *Road to Stalingrad*, 81.

<sup>136</sup>Vladimirskii, *Na kievskom napravlenii*, 54.

by the small size and “bourgeois” infirmity of those countries. Perhaps the foremost “error” that Zhukov later ascribed to the military leadership was the presumption that war between Germany and the USSR would commence “according to the previously existing scheme: the main forces would engage each other several days after the border engagements. In relation to concentration and deployment times, Fascist Germany was subject to the same conditions as us.”<sup>137</sup> Zhukov admitted that neither he, Defense Commissar Timoshenko, nor Shaposhnikov had foreseen that the Wehrmacht would “concentrate such a mass of armored and motorized forces and hurl them in compact groupings on all strategic axes on the very first day.”<sup>138</sup> To be sure, these failures of strategic assessment were rooted in the biases and misconceptions of Soviet military thinking, but they also grew from the ignorant conceit of the Stalin leadership: unshakably sure and proud of its world-historical purpose and the supposedly innate superiority of socialist institutions, the Politburo nevertheless feared, hated, and misunderstood the outside world.

Hence, entirely apart from Stalin’s well-known insistence that no overt or readily detectable measures to raise the Red Army’s immediate readiness for war be taken in spring 1941, he and the high command remained wedded to an outdated model of war initiation, one in which extensive border defenses would safeguard the Red Army’s deployment. The deployment plan that Stalin approved in October 1940 continued to rest on the premise that the Red Army’s mobilization and concentration at the outset of a war with Germany would unfold largely unimpeded. At the same time, Stalin and the political figures in the high command were disposed to reject any strategy and force posture that appeared to cede some land and the initiative to the enemy initially. Accordingly, the bulk of the great force stationed in the western border military districts was garrisoned in the territories annexed in 1939-40, most of it within one hundred

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<sup>137</sup>Zhukov, *Vospominaniia i razmyshleniia*, 1:354-55. On this point, see also Vasilevskii’s remarks in Gor’kov and Murin, “Neopublikovannoe interv’iu,” 8.

<sup>138</sup>Zhukov, *Vospominaniia i razmyshleniia*, 1:340.

kilometers of the new frontier. But the closeness to the border of so large a part of the standing army was fraught with danger given the limited mobility of the divisions strung out along the length of the winding frontier.

If the Red Army *had* been mobilized and concentrated in the strike groupings envisaged by the October 1940 plan, it obviously could have been used pre-emptively in a desperate bid to disrupt the impending German attack. Yet full deployment of the Red Army and mobilization of the national economy would have required Stalin to decide unequivocally that war either was preferable to peace or imminent and unavoidable: sixty thousand motor vehicles and twelve thousand tractors from state enterprises of all sorts were to be sent to the western border military districts upon general mobilization.<sup>139</sup> The so-called Icebreaker controversy is outside the scope of this study.<sup>140</sup> Nonetheless, my own view is that Stalin, unlike Timoshenko and Zhukov (who judged by mid-May 1941 that a German attack was highly likely, if not virtually certain), never reached either conclusion before 22 June 1941. In fact, Stalin's initial reaction to reports of German bombing and artillery fire was to temporize in the hope that the conflict could be defused somehow. Thus, Timoshenko's first order (sent at 0715 on the 22d) once combat was underway forbade ground forces from advancing across the border "until further notice."<sup>141</sup> Stalin evidently remained convinced to the end that Hitler would not open

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<sup>139</sup>Iu. Ia. Kirshin and N. M. Ramanichev, "Nakanune 22 iuniiia 1941 g. (po materialam voennykh arkhivov)," *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 1991, no. 3: 9. For details on the many thousands of motor vehicles and horses that, according to mobilization plans, state enterprises in the Ukraine were to provide the Red Army, see D. Pikha, "O deiatel'nosti partiinykh, sovetskikh i mestnykh organov voennogo upravleniia Ukrainy po podgotovke k provedeniiu mobilizatsii v sluchae voiny (1929-1941 gg.)," *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1984, no. 3: 66.

<sup>140</sup>See n. 90 in the present chapter. For an overview of the debate, see Teddy J. Uldricks, "The Icebreaker Controversy: Did Stalin Plan to Attack Hitler?," *Slavic Review* 58, no. 3 (1999): 626-43.

<sup>141</sup>Volkogonov, *Triumf i tragediia*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 157-58, which reprints the entire order and includes an archival citation. The same order, with exactly the same archival citation, appears as "Direktiva Voennym Sovetam LVO, PRIBOVO, ZAPOVO, KOVO, ODVO, kopiia narodnomu komissaru Voенно-morskogo flota (SSSR)," 22 June 1941, in *1941 god*, 2:431. However, this version lacks the following sentence (the second sentence of point 1 in the Volkogonov text): "Henceforward, until further notice, ground forces are not to cross the border." As this injunction casts the high command in a bad light, its omission from a large and seemingly authoritative 1998 collection of documents pertaining to the beginning of the war, culled from several state archives, is very curious. The Volkogonov version *does* appear in Zverev et al., *Surovye ispytaniia*, 414, which is an official Defense Ministry work published in 1995, as well as in Fokin et al., *Otrazhenie*, 17-18, published in 1963. A reproduction of the hand-written original (continued next page)

another major front in the war until Britain had been defeated. He feared, too, that blatantly raising the Red Army's readiness to meet an attack would provoke Hitler to act, while hoping that the appearance of passivity would prolong the status quo. This point was advanced by Herbert S. Dinerstein more than forty years ago, and I am persuaded that it remains valid.<sup>142</sup> Stalin's hesitations meant that the Red Army effectively conceded, in Erickson's phrase, "the race to concentrate en masse in June 1941."<sup>143</sup> Yet Stalin's stance was failure-prone: it held no margin of safety in the event of miscalculation, a possibility he refused to entertain.<sup>144</sup>

## VI

As a corollary to the fortification program's reorientation and the Red Army's retention of a forward-weighted force posture, work on all but one of the eight fortified areas begun in 1938 was suspended in autumn 1939. Slightly more than one thousand emplacements were built before work was halted, although they were not armed or outfitted with communications, power, or air filtration systems.<sup>145</sup> Abandonment of these projects enabled construction assets to be funneled to fortification sites on the new border. Thus, laborers and trucks assigned to the Slutsk Fortified Area, where "many" emplacements that remained unarmed were erected in 1938-39, were sent to Brest Litovsk in 1940. The commandant of the Slutsk fortifications had no idea if his own project would be revived.<sup>146</sup> As for the oldest fortified areas, their authorized strength

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order (with the sentence in question) appears in Iu. A. Gor'kov and Iu. N. Semin, eds., "Strategicheskie proshchety Verkhovnogo?..." *Voenna-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1992, no. 8: 22-23.

<sup>142</sup>H. S. Dinerstein, *War and the Soviet Union* (New York: Praeger, 1959), 201. Further: "This seems to be the explanation of his otherwise inexplicable failure to heed the most unequivocal of warnings."

<sup>143</sup>Erickson, "Threat Identification," 422 n. 77.

<sup>144</sup>Gorodetsky, *Grand Delusion*, 321.

<sup>145</sup>Khor'kov, "Ukreplennye raiony," 48; Khar'kov, "Ukrepraiony nakanune voiny," 89; Egorov et al., *Inzhenernye voiska*, 185. Work proceeded on the Kamenets-Podolskii Fortified Area in the Kiev Special Military District due to its position on the Dnestr River, then the border with Romania.

<sup>146</sup>Sandalov, *Na moskovskom napravlenii*, 47.

was slashed by the GVS on 15 November 1939, a sign of their diminished role.<sup>147</sup> It probably was the same decision that slated these existing defenses for elimination as active Red Army formations, their weapons and equipment to be placed in long-term storage.<sup>148</sup>

By July 1940 eleven of thirteen fortified areas completed before 1938 had been abolished: upon taking over the Main Military Engineering Directorate at that time, Khrenov reacted with “the deepest alarm and anxiety” to his discovery that “the old [fortified areas] had been put in long-term storage and partially dismantled.” (“But construction of fortified areas on the new border,” he added, “had only just gotten underway.”) Mothballing the older fortified areas entailed removing not only arms and ammunition, but optics, communications gear, air filtration devices, and other accoutrements, a process which left behind empty concrete shells.<sup>149</sup> Strategic dogmatism, resource shortfalls, and false self-assurance dictated that prepared defenses in the rear be vacated for the sake of a rushed, haphazard attempt to replicate them on the new border.

If the high command or General Staff intended in late 1939 or early 1940 for the older fortified areas to bolster a deep, stand-by defensive line,<sup>150</sup> the careless way in which their emplacements, weapons, and equipment were put in a state of *konservatsiia* undermined the prospect of speedy restoration to a combat-ready condition. Weapons and internal equipment removed from emplacements in the disbanded fortified areas were supposed to be maintained and stored in depots, ready for reinstalment if the need arose; the empty emplacements, barracks, and other support structures then were to be put under

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<sup>147</sup>Zhukov, *Vospominaniia i razmyshleniia*, 1:350.

<sup>148</sup>Derevianko et al., *Nachalo voiny*, 439.

<sup>149</sup>Khor'kov, “Ukreplennye raiony,” 48-49; Khar'kov, “Ukrepraiony nakanune voiny,” 89; Khrenov, *Masty k pobede*, 65-66.

<sup>150</sup>Khor'kov, “Ukreplennye raiony,” 48-49, asserts that this was Moscow's aim at the time, but the claim seems implausible.

guard. Attentive planning and supervision might have preserved the capital investment that the older fortified areas represented. On-site guardianship was lacking, however. The western border military districts were grappling with much more pressing matters in 1940: unrelenting force expansion and reorganization, the rigorous training program ordained after the inglorious experience of war with Finland, and the massive construction effort unfolding throughout the annexed territories, among other imperatives. A General Staff survey of the Minsk Fortified Area's concrete skeleton in September 1940 dwelt on the effects of inattention and apathy. The inspection commission reported that the fortifications and associated equipment were in deplorable condition. Equipment in depots lacked custodians; what remained in the emplacements was rusting and deteriorating; security was virtually nonexistent.<sup>151</sup> Some decommissioned fortifications were turned over to collective and state farms for use as vegetable storehouses, according to a high-ranking Red Army veteran who knew the older defenses well.<sup>152</sup>

Helping to derail the transition in the fortification program was the central military administration's entanglement in the unanticipated war with Finland. According to Khrushchev, who was in Moscow when fighting began on 30 November 1939, Stalin ordered military action in the expectation that "all we had to do was fire a few artillery rounds and the Finns would capitulate."<sup>153</sup> Kulik and Mekhlis thought the operation would require perhaps twelve days, and mocked a top artillery expert (Voronov) who thought their forecast naive.<sup>154</sup> Only Leningrad Military District forces were committed at the outset to an operation considered little more than a show of force. One hundred five days of battering by vastly superior Soviet forces were required to induce the

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<sup>151</sup>Ibid., 49.

<sup>152</sup>Petr Grigor'evich Grigorenko, "Sokrytie istoricheskoi pravdy—prestuplenie pered narodom," in *Mysli sumasshedshego*, "Biblioteka samizdata," no. 4 (Amsterdam: Fond imeni Gertsena, 1973), 68.

<sup>153</sup>Khrushchev, *Glasnost Tapes*, 54.

<sup>154</sup>Voronov, *Na sluzhbe voennoi*, 136.

doughty Finns to submit to Stalin's territorial demands, at a cost of nearly one hundred twenty-seven thousand Soviet fighting men—more than a thousand dead and missing for each day of the war.<sup>155</sup> Initially, Soviet battlefield commanders seemed powerless to coordinate the actions of infantry, artillery, and tanks. Their “elementary mistakes” led Marshal Carl Mannerheim, the Finnish commander-in-chief, to liken the first Red Army offensive to “a badly-conducted orchestra, in which the instruments were played out of time.”<sup>156</sup> Despite the ultimate success of the offensive of February-March 1940, which was engineered by Timoshenko (detailed to the North-Western Front from Kiev) and reflected adjustments to Soviet tactical doctrine, the Red Army's stumbling performance called into question its preparedness for a larger war.<sup>157</sup>

The conflict's end on 12 March 1940 brought the reckoning in the Defense Commissariat which had been brewing since the first weeks of combat punctured the regime's overblown image of the military power at its disposal. On the 28th, at an extraordinary plenum of the Central Committee, a chastened Voroshilov confessed that neither he, nor the General Staff, nor the command of the Leningrad Military District had had “any idea in the beginning of all of the peculiarities and difficulties connected with this war,” mainly, he disingenuously maintained, because military intelligence on Finland had been poor.<sup>158</sup> Stalin presided at a convocation of the military elite in the Kremlin from 14 to 17 April. The purpose of this inquest was to consider the lessons of the Red

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<sup>155</sup>Krivoshchev, *Grif sekretnosti*, 103, 121-23, 125.

<sup>156</sup>Carl Gustav Mannerheim, *The Memoirs of Marshal Mannerheim*, trans. Count Eric Lewenhaupt (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1954), 350.

<sup>157</sup>Van Dyke, *Soviet Invasion*, 103-187, details Timoshenko's contribution to the Red Army's improved combat effectiveness. Van Dyke believes the war with Finland “stimulated a profound reform of Soviet military doctrine and institutions,” although he acknowledges the reform's promise was not realized until 1943-44. (Ibid., 224.) For a different view (which I share), see Mark von Hagen, “Soviet Soldiers and Officers on the Eve of the German Invasion: Towards a Description of Social Psychology and Political Attitudes.” *Soviet Union/Union Soviétique* 18, nos. 1-3 (1991): 85-86. Von Hagen sees the defects of the Soviet military establishment highlighted by the war with Finland as systemic in nature, and therefore not amenable to straightforward remedies of the sort instituted under Timoshenko.

<sup>158</sup>“Uroki voiny s Finliandiei. Neopublikovannyi doklad narkoma oborony SSSR K. E. Voroshilova na plenum TsK VKP(b) 28 marta 1940 g.,” ed. Iu. A. Gor'kov, *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 1993, no. 4: 104; Van Dyke, *Soviet Invasion*, 214 n. 11.

Army's Pyrrhic victory and, tacitly, to judge Voroshilov's fifteen-year tenure as its keeper. Forty-six commanders (from regiment- to front-level) and officials from the central military administration presented their views on the Red Army's uneven and often unsatisfactory performance in combat to a large audience.<sup>159</sup> In his summation to close the conference, Stalin lamented the Red Army's lack of a "qualified, cultured, and trained command staff," and decried the "hat-tossing psychology" and "cult of Civil War tradition and experience" which, he declared, had inhibited mastery of "the new methods of modern war."<sup>160</sup> Voroshilov, indeed, was on the way out as army chief. Soon afterward, Stalin grumpily remarked to Zhukov that Voroshilov had "boasted, guaranteed, claimed that we would answer every blow with three, all is well, all is in order, all is ready, Comrade Stalin, yet it turned out...."<sup>161</sup> On another occasion, Stalin, alluding to Gamarnik, the dead deputy defense commissar and supposed traitor, pointedly told Voroshilov that one's assistants would let one down in the end.<sup>162</sup>

Voroshilov was replaced on 7 May 1940 by Timoshenko, a tough, shaven-headed soldier who had led a division in the First Cavalry Army, a man not averse to casualties, and one of the few ranking commanders to emerge from the war with added luster. On the same date, he, Shaposhnikov, and Kulik were named marshals of the Soviet Union, appointments which restored the number of marshals to the original total of five.<sup>163</sup> On 24 July Timoshenko was confirmed as GVS chairman by a joint Central Committee-Sovnarkom resolution, an act that completed the turnover.<sup>164</sup> Moving with dispatch and Stalin's blessing, Timoshenko enacted a broad program of reforms aimed at bringing the

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<sup>159</sup>A. O. Chubar'ian, preface to Kul'kov and Rzheshhevskii, *I. V. Stalin i finskaia kampaniia*, 3; Korotkov, *Istoriia Sovetskoi voennoi mysli*, 109.

<sup>160</sup>Kul'kov and Rzheshhevskii, *I. V. Stalin i finskaia kampaniia*, 275, 277-79.

<sup>161</sup>K. M. Simonov, *Glazami*, 307.

<sup>162</sup>Kuznetsov, *Krutye povoroty*, 76.

<sup>163</sup>Erickson, *Road to Stalingrad*, 16-17. Of the original five marshals (Voroshilov, Tukhachevsky, Egorov, Bliukher, and Budenny), only Voroshilov and Budenny remained alive.

<sup>164</sup>"Prikaz o sostave Glavnogo voennogo soveta," *Priказы*, 160-61.

Red Army's tactical and operational effectiveness in line with the fighting potential of its soldiers, who, in Finland, had shown dogged determination in the attack. In promoting what amounted to a sudden "rehabilitation of military expertise" in 1940, Stalin plainly was motivated by new-found doubts about the Red Army's ability to engage the Wehrmacht on equal terms.<sup>165</sup> In this respect, France's unforeseen defeat lent urgency to the manifest need to boost the Red Army's fighting power. When France formally acceded to Hitler's armistice terms on 22 June 1940, Stalin reacted by "racing around, cursing like a cab driver. He cursed the French. He cursed the English. How could they allow Hitler to defeat them, to crush them?"<sup>166</sup> Stalin knew his expectation of a drawn-out war fought away from the USSR had evaporated: a beaten, occupied France no longer would tie down Hitler's best divisions. Ironically, France's surrender placed the USSR in the same relative position in which the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact had left France in August 1939: facing the full, undivided military power of Germany without an effective Continental ally.<sup>167</sup> Accordingly, Timoshenko was empowered to raise the authority of the commander—particularly in relation to the military commissar, whose status was downgraded to that of the commander's political deputy—to tighten discipline, and to institute a severe, even brutal, training regimen.<sup>168</sup> For the first time, the traditional ranks of general and admiral (and flashy new insignia for them) were introduced in the Red Army: the 982 new generals and 74 new admirals had their photographs published in the capital's newspapers in June.<sup>169</sup> These initiatives simply would not have been conceivable in 1939.

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<sup>165</sup>Van Dyke, *Soviet Invasion*, 191.

<sup>166</sup>Khrushchev, *Glasnost Tapes*, 54.

<sup>167</sup>H. P. Willmott, *The Great Crusade: A New Complete History of the Second World War* (New York: Free Press, 1990), 104.

<sup>168</sup>For details of the initiatives associated with Timoshenko's tenure as defense commissar, see Kuz'min, *Na strazhe*, 269-73; Van Dyke, *Soviet Invasion*, 203-13; and Erickson, *Road to Stalingrad*, 18-24.

<sup>169</sup>Kuznetsov, "General'y 1940 goda," 30. On insignia, see Lipatov, *Uniforma*, 9.

Collectively, they also opened a fresh stage in the Red Army's institutional development, one part of a larger regime drive to make an unruly populace, which had been invited en masse to expose "enemies" among their superiors in 1937-38, more productive, disciplined, and responsive to authority.<sup>170</sup> Pressured by the revelation that the Red Army was a clumsy, deficient instrument and the emergence of a more powerful and immediate external threat than any confronted since the Civil War, Soviet military policy in spring 1940 veered away from the "charismatic" Bolshevism which had animated it during the late 1930s. Disconcerted by the implications of France's collapse, Stalin fostered a hasty revival of a "rational-legal" orientation in the military establishment, that is, an approach that expressly upheld command authority and championed military knowledge and technique, in the false hope that the Red Army's middling fighting power would improve sharply and rapidly.<sup>171</sup> Zhukov, for one, evaluated the embrace of military tradition and customary norms positively: praising Timoshenko's qualities as a military leader, he observed that Timoshenko had succeeded in bettering the army quickly.<sup>172</sup> As it was Timoshenko who presided over this shift in the military establishment's orientation in the regime's frantic pursuit of greater military effectiveness, his tenure as defense commissar (May 1940 to July 1941) marks a distinct break with the tumultuous period from 1937 to 1939. (Thus, Mekhlis left the Red Army in September 1940 to head the new People's Commissariat for State Control, but he returned to his former position as chief military commissar in June 1941 due to Stalin's panic at the German invasion.)<sup>173</sup> Yet in regard to how military policy was decided,

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<sup>170</sup>To those ends, a series of government decrees that were issued beginning in June 1940 lengthened the work day and work week, restricted labor mobility, and imposed criminal penalties for infractions of the labor code. See, for example, "Ukaz 'O perekhode na vos'michasovoi rabochii den', na semidnevuiu rabochuiu nedel'iu i o zapreshchenii samovol'nogo ukhoda rabochikh i sluzhashchikh s predpriatii i uchrezhdenii,'" 26 June 1940, in *Sbornik zakonov SSSR i Ukazov Prezidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR (1938 g.-noiabr' 1958 g.)*, comp. M. I. Iumashev and B. A. Zhaleiko (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo iuridicheskoi literatury, 1959), 421.

<sup>171</sup>A charismatic interpretation of Marxism would stress the heroic nature and imminence of revolutionary transformation, whereas a rational-legal one would seek conformity with the empirical laws governing long-term social development. (Hanson, *Time and Revolution*, 201-02.)

<sup>172</sup>K. M. Simonov, *Glazami*, 341. How substantial the improvement actually was is questionable.

<sup>173</sup>Rubtsov, "Mekhlis," 82-83; idem, "Vdokhnovitel' 'general'noi chistki' v armii," *Voenna-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1999, no. 5: 81; Ivkin, 182, 422. Mekhlis, of all people, presented a fundamental critique of the "military ideology" (continued next page)

Timoshenko's appointment "changed nothing at all," according to Kuznetsov, Stalin's naval commissar at this time.<sup>174</sup> He was referring, of course, to Stalin's total domination of decision-making.

Besides exposing the emptiness of Voroshilov's public boasts and private assurances so soon after Poland's new partition placed the Red Army face-to-face with the Wehrmacht, the sobering war with Finland came at a key juncture in another respect. It slowed the final framing of detailed plans for installing the infrastructure in the annexed territories needed to support the Red Army's first strategic echelon. Even Zakharov, an apologist for the regime's pre-war decisions, had to admit that the opening of a full-scale war with Finland "diverted attention from the resolution of other organizational tasks." As an example, he cited the structure and allocation of the tank force, questions on which Stalin and the high command vacillated fecklessly.<sup>175</sup> Delay and hesitation in resolving essential organizational, operational, armament, and infrastructure matters contributed to the disarray pervading the central military administration at the end of Voroshilov's tenure, and added to the strain on overtaxed unit commanders when Timoshenko began to issue orders that compelled change in established routines and relationships. Timoshenko himself inherited a snarl of problems, a fact documented in a formal *akt* (compiled by Zhdanov, Malenkov, and Voznesenskii) surveying the military establishment that Voroshilov was required to sign. Concerning the organization of the central administration, the report noted the existence of thirty-four separate entities and the fuzzy division of authority among the several deputy defense commissars, which, it charged, had led to "delay in the resolution of issues within [Defense Commissariat] directorates." According to the section on "Operational Preparation," an up-to-date war plan did not exist; moreover, the General Staff lacked

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which informed the Red Army's training program and the outlook of its personnel at a GVS meeting on 13 May 1940. His report is said to have met general approval. ("Lozhnye ustanovki v dele vospitaniia i propagandy," ed. D. L. Brandenberger, *Istoricheskii arkhiv*, 1997, nos. 5-6: 82-99.)

<sup>174</sup>Kuznetsov, *Krutye povoroty*, 48.

<sup>175</sup>Zakharov, *General'nyi shtab*, 180.

data on the condition of border defenses and was not even aware of decisions taken in that regard by the field commands. As a whole, “preparation of the theaters of military operations for war” was said to be “extremely poor in all respects.” Several months into the year, orders to implement planned fortification work in 1940 had not been issued, and the matter of procuring arms for the new fortified areas demanded “the fastest possible resolution.”<sup>176</sup> By spring 1940, then, very little had been done to realize the decision in principle, taken in autumn 1939, to fortify the new border and make the annexed territories a solid rampart. Yet disarmament of the defenses inside the previous border was proceeding apace, and by July 1940, as Khrenov’s account shows, the great majority of the older fortified areas no longer were operational.<sup>177</sup>

Large-scale construction of permanent fortifications along the new border began only in summer 1940, too late for more than a fraction of the planned total to be battle-ready in June 1941.<sup>178</sup> Timoshenko’s directives on fortification work were issued to the Belorussian Special and Kiev Special Military Districts on 26 June 1940, four days after France capitulated formally.<sup>179</sup> These orders signify the real start of the crash fortification program of 1940-41. Work on ten to twelve fortified areas opposite Finland, East Prussia, and German-held Poland probably was underway by the end of July. (Emplacements for the Brest Fortified Area reportedly were being put up along “a wide front” on the bank of the Western Bug in August.) Additional fortification construction was started in spring 1941, together with preparatory surveys for fortifications on the new border with Romania.<sup>180</sup> The whole undertaking resembled some mammoth industrial

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<sup>176</sup>“Akt o prieme,” 193-94. See also “Prikaz o khode oboronitel’nogo stroitel’stva,” *Prikazy*, 178, which opens by acknowledging that “final approval of defensive work for the present year has been delayed somewhat....”

<sup>177</sup>Khrenov, *Masty k pobede*, 65.

<sup>178</sup>Other infrastructure work in the annexed region also suffered from a tardy start: for example, construction of fuel depots began only in summer 1940. (Kurkotkin, *Tyl*, 59.) A final decision on how to revamp the transportation network in the territory seized from Poland reportedly was adopted “only at the end of 1940.” (Kovalev, *Transport*, 26.)

<sup>179</sup>V. A. Anfilov, *Bessmertnyi podvig* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo “Nauka,” 1971), 162.

<sup>180</sup>Egorov et al., *Inzhenerye voiska*, 185; Khor’kov, “Ukreplennye raiony,” 49; Sidorov, “Ukreplennye raiony,” 46; Sandalov, *Perezhitoe*, 63.

project of the First Five-Year Plan: the number of fortified areas being built simultaneously in the western USSR in June 1941 (about twenty) nearly equaled the *total* number built or begun there from the late 1920s through 1939. Day-to-day management of the program was vested in the Directorate of Defensive Construction inside the Main Military Engineering Directorate, the latter headed by Khrenov, a new major-general of engineer troops.

The plan quickly went awry. A Timoshenko order of 2 October 1940 complained that “defensive construction was proceeding poorly,” criticized and threatened seemingly every manager involved, and demanded corrective action by the Main Military Engineering Directorate and the district military councils, especially concerning preparations for work in 1941.<sup>181</sup> Following Khrenov’s “depressing” inspection of construction sites, he tartly summarized, in a report delivered on 12 October to the chief of the General Staff, the unpalatable result of the GVS decision to abolish most of the older fortified areas before replacements on the new border could possibly be ready: “The primary military strength of our country, the field forces, remains unsupported, and the [theater of military operations] is unprepared for operations by the field forces.”<sup>182</sup> The GVS met twice in February and March 1941 to consider ways to hasten the flagging program. By then, Zhukov (the third chief of the General Staff in less than a year) had replaced Meretskov, dismissed by Stalin in January after a round of war games had cast doubt on the ability of prospective front- and army-level commanders to execute the war plan.<sup>183</sup> According to Zhukov, “sharp disagreements” pitted him and Timoshenko against Kulik, Shaposhnikov, and Malenkov. Zhukov’s opponents ostensibly proposed to deal with the shortage of fortification artillery by appropriating guns from the older fortified areas. Zhukov maintained that he and Timoshenko objected to this idea because

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<sup>181</sup>“Prikaz o khode oboronitel’nogo stroitel’stva,” *Prikazy*, 178-80.

<sup>182</sup>Khrenov, *Masty k pobede*, 68.

<sup>183</sup>Zakharov, *General’nyi shtab*, 239-50, summarizes the course of the war games. Zakharov pointedly notes that the incomplete condition of the new fortified areas was disregarded in the scenarios and the evaluation of game results. (*Ibid.*, 249.)

they thought the original defenses might still prove useful; moreover, the artillery models in question were not suited for the design of the structures then being built. The dispute was referred to Stalin, who ruled against Zhukov and Timoshenko. It probably was in late March or April 1941 that some artillery from the older fortified areas began to be taken out of depot storage and jury-rigged in the new fortifications.<sup>184</sup> The guns for the emplacements of the Brestk Fortified Area that were completed and armed by June came from the Mozyr Fortified Area, one of the original thirteen.<sup>185</sup>

Stalin's disgruntlement is evident in a Politburo resolution of 8 March 1941. This edict censured Khrenov, who had headed the Main Military Engineering Directorate for only eight months, but had doubted the prudence of vacating and disarming existing defenses. For his supposed "inability to cope with the position," Khrenov was banished and demoted. (In a plaintive appeal to Zhdanov, Khrenov protested that nobody ever had faulted his work, and nobody wanted to talk to him now.) Program management authority was taken away from the Main Military Engineering Directorate and put in a separate office under Shaposhnikov,<sup>186</sup> a deputy defense commissar since his own surprising removal as chief of the General Staff in August 1940.<sup>187</sup> Shaposhnikov's new portfolio was confined to fortification-building and to military engineering generally by a

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<sup>184</sup>Zhukov, *Vospominaniia i razmyshleniia*, 1:350; Gor'kov and Murin, "Neopublikovannoe interv'iu," 8 n.

<sup>185</sup>Sandalov, *Perezhitoe*, 71.

<sup>186</sup>Vopros NKO. Postanovlenie Politbiuro TsK VKP(b), 8 March 1941, *Izvestiia TsK KPSS*, 1990, no. 2: 202; Khrenov to Zhdanov, 17 March 1941, Volkogonov Papers, reel 4, frame 116.

<sup>187</sup>Shaposhnikov's subordinates were stung by his transfer, a late repercussion of the war with Finland. (Vasilevskii, *Delo vsei zhizni*, 92.) Shaposhnikov had not been culpable in the failure of the initial Soviet offensive against Finland, as the GVS had assigned responsibility for its planning to the Leningrad Military District, then commanded by Meretskov. (O. Manninen, "Pervyi period boev," in O. A. Rzheshhevskii and O. Vekhviliainen, eds., *Zimniaia voina 1939-1940*, vol. 1, *Politicheskaiia istoriia* [Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," 1998], 145-47.) Ironically, it was Meretskov who briefly (until January 1941) replaced Shaposhnikov as chief of the General Staff. Although he had acted as Shaposhnikov's deputy for more than a year in 1937-38, Meretskov, like his own replacement (Zhukov), was not ready to serve as head strategic planner and overseer of the General Staff's myriad activities. According to Vasilevskii's account of a conversation he had with Shaposhnikov, Stalin admitted to Shaposhnikov that he had been proven correct about the difficulty of a war with Finland; however, replacing the top leaders of the Red Army, namely, Voroshilov and Shaposhnikov, would show foreign powers that the conflict's lessons had been assimilated fully.

Timoshenko order of 15 March 1941.<sup>188</sup> By sacking Khrenov and placing Shaposhnikov in charge, Stalin tried to alleviate intractable resource shortfalls and redress a faulty policy with administrative tinkering; still, giving a marshal and deputy defense commissar, in effect, a single assignment betrayed his growing unease. More construction manpower was mobilized on an urgent basis, as laborers were easier to muster than the requisite building materials, weapons, special military equipment, and expertise. Beginning in April 1941, 160 engineer battalions from border military districts and 41 from internal ones were diverted to fortification work.<sup>189</sup>

As signs of the Wehrmacht's inexorable eastern build-up proliferated during spring 1941, the presumptions and decisions that had led to the Stalin Line's abandonment began to be reconsidered, albeit tentatively, fitfully, and too late to stabilize the Red Army's precarious force posture. Although there is no evidence that Timoshenko, Zhukov, or any of the commanding generals of the front-line military districts considered the war plan inadequate at the time, the facile assumption that a war with Germany would be fought almost wholly beyond Soviet borders began to fade. Indeed, the scale of the Wehrmacht's deployment finally did overcome, in part, the long-standing Soviet aversion to rear-area defenses. The Stalin Line had been vacated and ignored because it was too far removed from the new border for the offensive bent of Soviet military strategy; however, as it began to appear that the covering armies might have to absorb a very weighty attack, the older fortified areas returned to the General Staff's calculations. However, given the derelict condition of these defenses in spring 1941 and the far-forward positioning of the bulk of the first strategic echelon, their potential value was much less than it had been before 1939.

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<sup>188</sup> "Prikaz o raspredelenii obiazannosti mezhdu zamestiteliami Narkoma oborony SSSR," 15 March 1941, in *Priказы*, 257.

<sup>189</sup> Derevianko et al., *Nachalo voiny*, 439.

In this connection, on 8 April 1941 Zhukov ordered the Western Special and Kiev Special Military Districts to prepare to activate, by the tenth day of war, six of the seven unfinished fortified areas on which work had stopped in 1939. (They were to remain in a state of *konservatsiia* “until [the receipt of] special instructions,” however.) To that end, the district commands were directed to organize cadre fortified area headquarters and to determine the required quantities of weapons and “the simplest” internal equipment for emplacements. They also were to complete this calculation for the modernized emplacements installed in 1938-39 in the original fortified areas. This guidance was a fatuous half-measure: it still assumed that the initial operations would unfold in a measured, almost orderly way, as Zhukov admitted.<sup>190</sup> Despite its unrealistic basis, the 8 April order does represent an acknowledgement that the defenses inside the original border had been cast aside casually and prematurely. It also is Zhukov’s principal defense against criticism that he failed to alter the course of the fortification program to respond to the alarming military situation in spring 1941.

Acknowledgement of the need to resume and complete the unfinished fortification projects also appears in the controversial war plan draft of May 1941, whose hand-written text (by Vasilevskii) spoke of the desirability of pre-emptively striking a massed German invasion force. This deployment scheme was composed hurriedly at a time when the Red Army itself had begun to creep up on war by undertaking a secret (yet limited) mobilization, but only after Zhukov had engaged in “long and exceedingly sharp” discussions with Stalin.<sup>191</sup> The draft contains a short passage on fortifications that was penned in near the end by Lieutenant-General Nikolai F. Vatutin, the chief of the Operations Directorate and Zhukov’s deputy. It deviated from the axiom that no enemy would be able to invade and occupy Soviet territory. Outlining future tasks, the passage reads:

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<sup>190</sup>Zhukov, *Vospominaniia i razmyshleniia*, 1:351-52.

<sup>191</sup>*Ibid.*, 361; Gor’kov, *Kremi’. Stavka. Genshtab.*, 71-73.

At the same time, it is necessary to force the construction and armament of fortified areas [i.e., those on the new border] to the utmost, to begin construction of fortified areas on the rear line Ostashkov, Pochep and to provide for the construction of new fortified areas in 1942 on the border with Hungary, as well as to continue construction of fortified areas along the line of the old state border.<sup>192</sup>

This evidence of the revival of General Staff interest in the older fortifications in May 1941 is significant, but the most striking aspect of the text is its reference to proposed rear-area defenses between Ostashkov and Pochep. The distance between these medieval Russian towns is about 475 kilometers; a north-south line connecting them would cross the provinces of Tver', Smolensk, and Briansk, in other words, it would span the most direct approach to Moscow from Warsaw. Lying some 700 kilometers east of the border in 1941, an Ostashkov-Pochep fortified belt would have been situated quite a distance behind the Stalin Line and the original frontier, and could have served as a defense line for the high command's reserve armies (the second strategic echelon). The implication of a proposal to erect fortifications across western Russia is that at least Vatutin, who came to the General Staff from the Kiev Special Military District in 1940, could not rule out the possibility of dire circumstances that would entail the loss of much or all of Belorussia—a stance far removed from the standard planning assumptions of past war plans. There is no evidence that the draft strategic deployment plan of May 1941, with its allowance for drastic pre-emptive action against a German concentration, was endorsed by Stalin.<sup>193</sup> Nevertheless, the unprecedented features of the draft—namely, its consideration of a pre-emptive strike *and* defenses in Belorussia and the Ukraine and,

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<sup>192</sup>Gor'kov, "Gotovil li Stalin uprezhdaiushchii udar," 44. The draft plan in its entirety appears as an annex to this article. A virtually identical version of this plan appears as "Zapiska narkoma oborony SSSR i nachal'nika Genshtaba Krasnoi Armii predsedatel'iu SNK SSSR I. V. Stalinu s soobrazheniiami po planu strategicheskogo razvertyvaniia vooruzhennykh sil Sovetskogo Soiuzna na sluchai voyny s Germaniei i ee soiuznikami," undated, but not earlier than 15 May 1941, in *1941 god*, 2:215-20, but the passage in question (219) inexplicably omits the words in italics: "...nachat' stroitel'stvo ukrepaionov na tylovom rubezhe Ostashkov, Pochep i predusmotret' stroitel'stvo novykh ukrepaionov v 1942 g. na granitse s Vengriei..." The Gor'kov text is deemed more reliable. For an apparently similar case of textual alteration, see n. 141 in the present chapter.

<sup>193</sup>Gor'kov, "Gotovil li Stalin uprezhdaiushchii udar," 29-39; *1941 god*, 2:296 n. 3.

behind those, a fortified line across western Russia as well—attested to a developing sense of dread on the General Staff's part in the weeks before Hitler's blow fell.

As the western border military districts were being hectored to speed construction and make just-built emplacements at least provisionally combat-ready, the decision to deactivate the completed fortified areas inside the previous border was overturned too. A Politburo resolution of 4 June specified the numbers and types of fortified area units that were to be raised by 1 October 1941, and raised the Red Army's peacetime strength by 120,695. This supplementary authorization, to be called up in two waves, represented the number of men needed "to maintain the permanent garrisons of the fortified areas of the first line at 70% and the fortified areas of the second line at 30% of war-authorized strength."<sup>194</sup> As "the fortified areas of the second line" must refer to the older ones, that is, to those disarmed in 1940, Stalin obviously had been persuaded by Timoshenko and Zhukov to permit their restoration to the Red Army's active force structure. This was a singular, if tardy and anxiety-ridden, alteration of a force posture which had long envisioned forward defense only, and then only briefly.

The German onslaught triggered a frenzied rush throughout the western USSR to restore the Stalin Line to battle-readiness, a futile endeavor given the swiftness of the German advance and the deterioration of those defenses since their disarming.<sup>195</sup> There were some nasty surprises for Soviet commanders. In Belorussia, for example, the 4th Army of the Western Front was ordered on 25 June to take up positions in the Slutsk Fortified Area and make a stand there and on a nearby river. Yet the Slutsk fortifications,

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<sup>194</sup>"Ob ukrepaionakh. Postanovlenie Politbiuro TsK VKP(b)," 4 June 1941, *Izvestiia TsK KPSS*, 1990, no. 2: 207. The Red Army's peace- and war-authorized strengths were increased by 120,695 and 239,566 personnel, respectively, which shows that the fortified areas in question were being restored to the peacetime force structure.

<sup>195</sup>"Komanduiushchemu voiskami Severo-Zapadnogo fronta ob otvode organizatsii polevogo stroitel'stva v raiony Pskovskogo, Ostrovskogo, Sebezhskego i Polotskogo ukreplennykh raionov," 23 June 1941; "Komanduiushchemu voiskami Zapadnogo fronta ob otvode organizatsii polevogo stroitel'stva v raiony Minskogo i Slutskogo ukreplennykh raionov," 23 June 1941; "Voenному совету Kievskogo Osobogo voennogo okruga ob uskorenii formirovaniia chastei ukreplennykh raionov," 2 July 1941, in *General'nyi shtab v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny: Dokumenty i materialy*. (continued next page)

to which a single battalion of guards had been assigned, stood empty and disarmed. It was hardly “the solid, iron-clad barrier” which Major-General A. A. Korobkov had expected to find.<sup>196</sup> In the Ukraine, Lieutenant-General Konev’s 19th Army was ordered on the 28th to deploy around Kiev, and the Kiev Fortified Area was put under Konev’s command.<sup>197</sup> He was dismayed to discover the fortifications there “in a state, so to speak, of long-term storage”: neglected and devoid of weapons, the concrete machine-gun and artillery emplacements were “overgrown with grass and tall weeds.”<sup>198</sup> The most successfully improvised use of an older fortified area involved an army of the South-Western Front: in early July the 5th Army, under Major-General Mikhail I. Potapov, was able to withdraw and occupy the Korosten Fortified Area, from which Potapov organized a counter-attack that tore into the flank of Army Group South as it raced toward Kiev.<sup>199</sup> As for the isolated, half-finished fortifications on the new border, though tenaciously defended, they were reduced or bypassed on the first day of the war. Some emplacements near Brest Litovsk and Vladimir-Volynskii sheltered the terrified wives and children of the officers in the units manning them.<sup>200</sup>

## VII

In turning from the structure, personalities, and operating style of the post-purge high command to its performance in guiding the Red Army’s preparation for war and

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1941 god., comp. A. D. Efremov et al., vol. 23(12-1) of *Russkii arkhiv: Velikaia Otechestvennaia*, ed. V. A. Zolotarev (Moscow: “TERRA,” 1998), 30, 61.

<sup>196</sup>Sandalov, *Na moskovskom napravlenii*, 111-12.

<sup>197</sup>“Direktiva Stavki GK komanduiushchim voiskami Kievskogo Osobogo voennogo okruga i Iugo-Zapadnogo fronta o perepodchinenii Kievskogo ukreplennogo raiona,” 28 June 1941; “Direktiva Stavki GK No. 0060 komanduiushchemu 19-i armii o sosredotochenii armii i podgotovke oborony Kiev,” 28 June 1941, in *Stavka V GK. Dokumenty i materialy. 1941 god.*, comp. A. M. Sokolov et al., vol. 16(5-1) of *Russkii arkhiv: Velikaia Otechestvennaia*, ed. V. A. Zolotarev (Moscow: “TERRA,” 1996), 26-27.

<sup>198</sup>Konev, “Vospominaniia,” 32. On the poor state of the Kiev Fortified Area in June 1941, see also N. I. Suprunenko et al., eds., *Kiev sotsialisticheskii*, vol. 3, bk. 1 of *Istoriia Kiev*, ed. Iu. Iu. Kondufor et al. (Kiev: Izdatel’stvo “Naukova dumka,” 1985), 304-05.

<sup>199</sup>Vladimirskii, *Na kievskom napravlenii*, 126-64, details these battles.

<sup>200</sup>A. Krupennikov, “Severo-zapadnee Bresta,” *Voenna-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1966, no. 6: 30; Vladimirskii, *Na kievskom napravlenii*, 71 n. 1.

advising Stalin, a study of the fortification program is instructive. In essence, Stalin and the high command commissioned the disarming of existing defenses before serious work on their replacements could possibly begin; later, under the pressure of a looming military threat, they ordered the dilapidated older defenses to be restored (an impossibility in the limited time available) when the new construction effort foundered. A review of the fortification effort yields a simple decision model that probably is broadly applicable to Soviet military development from 1938 to 1941: at the outset, false self-assurance; a misguided decision; delayed and unsteady implementation; threats and peremptory measures to spur performance; harmful, unanticipated consequences; and, lastly, hasty and ineffectual remedial action. Indeed, one suspects that these features are representative of the decision-making style of the Stalin regime generally, especially after it reached its politically mature form.

An analysis of the fortification program must recognize that responsibility for its wrong-headed redirection in 1939-40 cannot be laid solely at the feet of Stalin and the GVS. The impractical and haphazard attempt to erect a vast chain of fortifications on the new border was a concomitant of the Red Army's risky, forward-weighted force posture in the annexed territories. The strategy of forward defense—attractive due to its compatibility with a speedy transition to the offensive—was based on a paradigm of the initial period of war in which the Red Army would have about two weeks to match the mobilization and concentration of the main part of the German invasion army once hostilities had been initiated. It was the chiefs of the General Staff and the professional planners under them who failed to discern that the Wehrmacht's campaigns in Poland and France effectively had collapsed the initial period of war, and thereby “dramatically elevated” its significance for a conflict's subsequent course.<sup>201</sup> In the Polish and French campaigns, operations were at a high tempo and on a large scale from the start; the German forces engaged in them required no further preparatory measures. To orient the

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<sup>201</sup>Roberts, “Planning for War,” 1310.

planning that culminated in the Soviet war plan of October 1940, the professional military persisted in using a model of the initial period that was familiar and institutionally congenial, as it allowed planning to be centered on the conduct of front-level offensives into enemy territory after a brief, ancillary phase of defense at the border.<sup>202</sup> Hence, on paper, the Red Army could continue to fight an offensive war in Europe, as its leaders had long wished, and as they had anticipated since at least 1936, the date of the first war plan to follow the start of the mass production of modern arms by the new defense industry.<sup>203</sup> In this respect, Timoshenko's concluding speech at the December 1940 conference of ranking officers is noteworthy: he dismissed the European campaigns of 1939-40 as "nothing new" in a strategic sense.<sup>204</sup>

Notwithstanding these fallacies of assessment by the professional wing of the Defense Commissariat, the doctrinal imperative to fight for every *vershok* of Soviet land barred any reconsideration of military strategy and force posture in 1940 following France's disappearance as a counter-weight to Germany. The 1939 draft *Field Regulation* had declaimed that the "invincible, all-shattering" Red Army would carry the war to the enemy, its mission to secure his "complete defeat and... a decisive victory with little blood." After a revision, the document was circulated in summer 1940: it still spoke grandly of fighting "offensively" (while conceding that there could be no universal offensive) and of the possibility of a virtually bloodless victory.<sup>205</sup> Mekhlis and Kulik parroted such simple-minded axioms of Stalinist military doctrine in discussions of policy matters, as Vasilevskii and Khrulev have affirmed. By comparison, Shaposhnikov

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<sup>202</sup>Ibid., 1294-95, 1314, 1321. See also my own "Stalin Line," pt. 2, *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 6, no. 1 (1993): 52-53.

<sup>203</sup>Gor'kov, *Kreml': Stavka. Genshtab.*, 55.

<sup>204</sup>Zakliuchitel'naia rech', " *Nakanune voiny*, 339. Timoshenko did allow that the experience of war had revealed "major changes" in operational art (i.e., the conduct of operations).

<sup>205</sup>*Polevoi ustav RKKA (PU-39)*, 9; *Polevoi ustav Krasnoi Armii 1940 g.* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Voennoe Izdatel'stvo Narkomata Oborony Soiuzo SSR, 1940), 9, 11. The cover of each document is stamped "proekt." On the revision of the 1939 draft and its distribution in summer 1940, see the introduction to *Voprosy taktiki v Sovetskikh voennykh trudakh (1917-1940 gg.)*, comp. A. B. Kadishev et al. (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1970), 21.

was a voice of professional reason, but his reported advocacy of a defense in depth based on the older fortified areas was short-lived; he evidently succumbed to the political and institutional pressures to invest the annexed territories with scores of divisions and the cumbersome support infrastructure they required.

Strategically, a defense in depth would have ceded land and the initiative to the enemy early in a war: in effect, the Red Army would be yielding in advance to German strength, an obnoxious prospect for “the most offensive of all the offensive armies which have ever existed.”<sup>206</sup> And Stalin, for one, simply was not inclined to accept a force posture that would have carried the appearance of a diminished degree of control over his recent territorial gains, whose rapid Sovietization required saturation with military, border, and internal security forces (in addition to an army of Party and state security officials). Hence the new frontier would be fortified extensively and defended stubbornly by a phalanx of covering armies: two-thirds of the first strategic echelon was arrayed within a hundred kilometers of its four-thousand-kilometer expanse. Timoshenko’s 1940 initiatives, for all their significance in creating a new climate in the Red Army which stressed professional proficiency rather than Bolshevization, did not impinge on military strategy or force posture. Directed mainly at the tactical (i.e., *chast’* or unit) level, they aimed, first and foremost, to improve tactical training and establish the supremacy of the unit commander. (Thus, military councils remained in place atop armies, military districts, and the Defense Commissariat as organs of collegiate leadership.) Indeed, military strategy is conspicuous by its absence from Timoshenko’s program and preoccupations, although a strategic overhaul—or at least a searching review of first principles—definitely was in order. But the strategic realm was preeminently Stalin’s preserve. Moreover, as discussed above, the professional military remained wedded to the traditional model of strategic deployment that underpinned the war plans of 1938 and 1940 and conformed to its preference for offensive operations. And as a proposed

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<sup>206</sup>*Polevoi ustav RKKA (PU-39)*, 9.

change in basic planning assumptions would have required a tense and possibly confrontational explanation of their rationale before Stalin, Timoshenko and the successive chiefs of the General Staff had a major disincentive for conceptual innovation.

These considerations were instrumental in steering the fortification program in 1939-40, when Stalin and the GVS made the decisions that wrecked the integrity of all of the fixed defenses in the western USSR in June 1941. A forward defense at the new border, as called for by a fancifully ambitious, self-confident military strategy and the ideological mandate to implant socialism in the annexed lands, did not require fortifications that had been marooned deep inside Belorussia and the Ukraine by diplomatic success. A tentative reconsideration and partial reversal of this imprudent stance came only in the grave circumstances of spring 1941, much too late to lend balance to a force posture that had the covering armies perched unsteadily on the edge of Stalin's realm.

From the standpoint of defense against German attack, the territorial gains of 1939-40 were of questionable value. The Wehrmacht had to fight its way through a swath of territory that often was defended stalwartly, but valuable time, limited resources, and an enormous amount of energy were wasted in the attempt to duplicate the military infrastructure that had been installed in the western border military districts as configured before 1939. The reorientation of the fortification program in 1939-40 exemplifies the instability and incoherence brought to the planning and oversight of Soviet military expansion in the years immediately preceding the German invasion by the consolidation of the Stalinist political system in 1937-38. The system's ruinous effects on the quality of decision-making at the top of the regime largely nullified Stalin's success in seizing a sizeable territorial buffer for his country on the eve of a cataclysmic war.

## Conclusion

### Dilemmas of Soviet Military Development

The deep-seated discord among the Soviet regime's fundamental military goals emerges readily from an examination of the history of the Red Army and its high command from 1918 to 1941. As the events of this formative period affirm, the growth of Soviet military power was never solely, or even mainly, a straightforward process of maximizing force effectiveness for different military missions. From the time of the Red Army's founding, the admixture of nakedly political and ideological imperatives with conventional military functions presented the Party leadership and the high command with refractory dilemmas. Stemming from the inherent tension between certain cardinal ends of Soviet military development, these quandaries necessitated the striking of unsettled and occasionally untenable balances among concurrent lines of policy, and at times entailed oscillation toward a damaging or unsound extreme. These observations apply especially to the Red Army's history during the tumultuous 1930s.

As the army of a revolutionary regime, the Red Army manifestly was different in kind from its potential adversaries, but it still had to be effective in any head-to-head combat with them, particularly after genuine security threats to the USSR emerged in Europe and Asia in the early 1930s. Indeed, the Red Army eventually had to match the very high degree of operational-level effectiveness (if not small-unit effectiveness in battle) of the army of Nazi Germany, the USSR's most deadly and determined enemy. The archetypal problem was to marry, within the command corps, military expertise and skill to revolutionary commitment and political rectitude. After wrenching years of adjustment during and after the Civil War, by the mid-1920s the Party leadership and the high command had accepted the need for the military establishment to be centered on a

standing army with a hierarchical command structure staffed by professionals; simultaneously, the Red Army was to uphold its revolutionary *raison d'être* and serve, as Mark von Hagen has detailed in *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship*, as “a school of socialism” for the men passing through its ranks. Initially, while the regime’s own command corps of Party members was being recruited and nurtured, the dilemma of melding machine-age military prowess with Bolshevism was addressed by retaining the control mechanisms that were devised soon after the Red Army’s founding amid a burgeoning civil war, when its fighting power had rested squarely on “class-alien” elements from the Imperial Army. Accordingly, the military command structure of the peacetime army continued to be seeded with the military commissars and state security operatives in whom control functions were vested originally.

It was early in the Red Army’s existence—during the Lenin succession—that sustenance of its revolutionary character metamorphosed into the inculcation and exaction of political fealty to the Stalinist faction of the Politburo. This campaign was spearheaded by the Political Administration, which answered to the central Party *apparatus* from 1924-25, and by the special departments of the state security service, that is, the very elements placed throughout the Red Army to expose and suppress “counter-revolutionary” elements among *voenspetsy* and conscripts during the Civil War. These control agencies endured to become constants of Soviet military life and hallmarks of the Soviet military command and control system. Their retention in the Red Army in peacetime represented an implicit acknowledgement by the regime that the political temper of commanders and soldiers alike would continue to call for assiduous cultivation and close scrutiny, just as they had from the outset of the Red Army’s existence.

Vying for the mantle of Lenin’s rightful heir in the prolonged succession struggle sparked by his incapacitation and death, Stalin sought to ensure that the Red Army would at least be neutral in his contests with Trotsky and Zinoviev. To that end, he mounted a creeping takeover of the RVS, an aim advanced decisively by the installation of

Voroshilov as military and naval commissar after Frunze's sudden death in 1925, though Voroshilov had to operate as the head of a nominally collective military leadership until 1934. The group of Red commanders and Stalin partisans that coalesced against Trotsky continued to lead the Red Army well into the 1930s, and proved surprisingly durable given the antagonism which had developed by 1928 between Voroshilov, the professional revolutionary cum military chief, and Tukhachevsky, the professional officer cum Bolshevik. Apart from Tukhachevsky's haughty disdain for Voroshilov's lack of education and professional qualifications—and Voroshilov's resentment of his urbane partner in command, a relative newcomer to the Party—their conflict grew from the nature of Voroshilov's principal charge, which was not inherently military at all: to ensure the military establishment's loyalty to the regime and to advance and protect Stalin's interests within it.

In general, in the decade after Lenin's death, Stalin extended his control of the Red Army (and of security policy generally) in a fashion which was incremental and opportunistic, but also insistent. Stalin and Voroshilov paid close attention to the composition of the high command and the political allegiances of its members; in 1934 they instituted a major administrative reform that abolished the RVS and boosted Voroshilov's standing and authority over the military districts and the central administration. By 1935 the structure of military administration and policy-making was centralized and controlled directly by Stalin and his protégés to a much greater degree than it had been at the time of Voroshilov's appointment, when the RVS, still a harbor for Zinovievites, had overseen a disjointed central headquarters and a threadbare army. More able than the oafish Budenny, the Red Army's other proto-Stalinist, Voroshilov was instrumental in fastening Stalin's system of personalized control on a vital state institution.

Yet Stalin's military goals were far more expansive than placing the military establishment securely under his sway, as shown by his 1931 invitation to Tukhachevsky

to return to Moscow to be the Red Army's chief of armaments and Voroshilov's deputy. Stalin believed that a great socialist state under conditions of "capitalist encirclement" must have a strong, modern army to protect itself, to promote its revolutionary mission, and to foster "Soviet patriotism" among its personnel. As an advocate of technology with a penchant for monumentalism, he intended to see that a growing Red Army bristled with an array of modern weapons, whose mass manufacture was a prime goal of the First and Second Five-Year Plans. In essence, Stalin's military program, allied to high-tempo industrialization, aimed to harness the USSR's prodigious human and natural resources to generate overwhelming military power in Europe and Asia. The vast project to rearm, expand, and reorganize the Red Army that was initiated in 1929 (and proceeded ceaselessly through 1941) demanded an authoritative intellectual engine and guide, a role for which Tukhachevsky was best suited. In bidding Tukhachevsky to help pilot the Red Army once again, Stalin recognized the regime's need for Tukhachevsky's ability and professional judgment, and tempered his own dislike and suspicion to such an extent that he actually apologized privately to Tukhachevsky for a past rebuke. Stalin could afford to extend an olive branch, as he knew that Voroshilov was in a position to watch his precocious, headstrong new deputy, who would operate within a cocoon of surveillance and restraints on his freedom of action.

Just as elaboration and direction of the Red Army's modernization and growth demanded a union of executive leadership, technical know-how, and administrative skill at the top, so did the masses of arms that new factories began to disgorge in 1933-34 require commanders who combined technical literacy, military proficiency, and political reliability—tens and tens of thousands of them. To secure and retain such men, the regime set out to improve the officer's arduous and often harsh life, especially relative to civilian occupations. The officer corps did gain much from the more stratified society being created by industrialization, urbanization, and Stalinist state-building; indeed, the induction of leading commanders into the Central Committee beginning in 1930 proclaimed, in effect, that the Party had co-opted the command elite. The prestige,

authority, and material welfare of the pre-war officer corps were at a peak in 1935-36, when, to all appearances, a stable and secure military command had come to identify wholly with the regime. In fact, the professional military officer *was* integrated into the Party at this time, when the institutional and industrial foundations of Soviet military power were laid for decades afterward. These were signal accomplishments for Stalin's regime, and they go a long way to explain the enduring symbiosis between the high command and the Party leadership.

Stalin and Voroshilov justifiably could take pride in the enormity of the Red Army's technical and political transformation from 1925 to 1935; however, it remained an incomplete and, in important respects, defective achievement whose faults worsened in the years immediately prior to the Nazi invasion. On a purely managerial level, the Red Army was fettered by the same administrative and human weaknesses that often snarled the machinery of Soviet government as it tried to coordinate or fulfill directives from the Kremlin or the people's commissariats. In the Red Army, these woes came to the fore as modernization and expansion multiplied the number of formations and units in the ground, air, and air defense forces as well as increased the number of specialized activities that had been absent or rudimentary in Frunze's day. Functions such as aircraft maintenance, motor vehicle repair, fuel supply, and radio communications necessitated standard procedures, special equipment, and technical training wherever military forces were stationed. It was in just such combat-essential support functions that the Red Army remained wanting as the force structure grew by leaps and bounds from 1938 to 1941. On paper, the Red Army fielded thousands more tanks, guns, and aircraft in 1941 than did the Wehrmacht and its minor allies, but individual units were short of weapons, essential equipment, supplies, and spare parts (as well as seasoned leaders, of course) due to the feverish rate at which the force structure was inflated in misguided preparation for war. Had the military purge not eliminated hundreds of the Red Army's ranking commanders and specialists, their experience and presence in the General Staff, the central directorates, and the headquarters of military districts, armies, corps, and divisions

(especially new ones) would have been a steadying influence, easing the inescapable strain of precipitous growth. As a recent analysis has concluded, unbridled expansion did leave the Red Army “unmanageable,” but a largely brand-new higher officer corps—able only to grope its way forward—and mismanagement by a revamped, Bolshevized high command contributed greatly to the disorder.<sup>1</sup>

The sensational details of Tukhachevsky’s fall tempt one to stress the personal rivalries and intrigues among military leaders that anticipate the Great Purges, yet they should not obscure the discordant quality of the Stalinist military project. Beneath the sleek veneer of military parades and ceremonial pronouncements, the main lines of Stalin’s program (for example, maintaining tight control of the military establishment; making the command staff a disciplined arm of the Party; fostering military professionalism and effectiveness) ultimately were at odds. Thus, measures to boost the prerogatives, stature, and stability of military command, albeit within an overall milieu of Party control, implied a greater degree of professional autonomy for the command elite than Stalin finally was prepared to tolerate. The subordinate levels of the command staff could hardly be expected to develop self-confidence, initiative, and flexibility if the professional wing of the high command lacked license to act in such a way—yet, in fact, no sphere of professional activity was free of political and ideological prescriptions, a state of affairs for which the Tukhachevsky group’s savage end provided an exclamation point. The waxing power of the high command’s political figures during the 1930s became overweening and irresistible in 1938 with the creation of the GVS, which was dominated by an invidious Stalinist clique consisting of a kind of arch-commissar from the central Party *apparatus* (Mekhлис), a career military commissar (Shchadenko), two marshals and Stalin cronies (Voroshilov and Budenny), and a bungling marshal-to-be (Kulik). Professional military advice, probably carefully hedged, was supplied chiefly by Shaposhnikov, who had to tread guardedly. Tukhachevsky’s long series of clashes with Voroshilov over military policy can be attributed partly to personal differences, but the

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<sup>1</sup>Reese, *Stalin’s Reluctant Soldiers*, 205.

top professional officers who rose to the high command or had to deal with it from 1938 to 1941 themselves chafed at Mekhlis's and Kulik's penchant for arbitrary meddling, which they were able to indulge.

Stalin's sharp policy shift in spring 1940 was, in a sense, forced, as its impetus was external and unanticipated. The Red Army's worrying performance in Finland and France's startling collapse jolted him into jettisoning the Bolshevization campaign to which Voroshilov and Mekhlis had devoted themselves. Voroshilov's dismissal after nearly fifteen years as the Red Army's overseer, Timoshenko's installation as his successor, the introduction of generals' and admirals' ranks (all of which occurred on 7 May 1940), and Mekhlis's departure from the high command in September 1940 were highly symbolic moves: they show that Stalin had resolved that the Red Army's condition called for a powerful, immediate infusion of traditional military values and norms. A watershed in Soviet military development was at hand, but it succumbed to Stalin's shock at the German invasion, which prompted him to recall Mekhlis, restore the military commissar, and set the *osobisty* upon the doomed command of the disintegrating Western Front before he settled in 1942-43, for the duration of the war, on the course explored in 1940.

Stalin's haste and urgency in commissioning the military policy initiatives of 1940 underscore the Red Army's extraordinary vulnerability to the political crusades of an ideological dictatorship whose leader aspired to realize Marx's transcendent vision. The Great Purges can be seen as Stalin's audacious bid to spur the regime's flagging revolutionary drive by rejuvenating its key institutions with a new cohort of leaders and to secure unalterably his own position as socialism's builder in the world's first socialist country. As was the case in other state institutions, political mobilization in the Red Army entailed the expulsion and liquidation of the great majority of its established figures (with several conspicuous exceptions), clearing the way for promising "men without names" to be advanced unduly rapidly and often prematurely. The deliberate,

purposeful lethality of the high-level component of the military purge is striking, as any systematic targeting of the military elite was a delicate and potentially dangerous operation; moreover, in any event, military growth would have provided ample opportunities for the promotion of subordinate officers in due course. Hence Stalin's vigorous endorsement of accelerated promotion for the anonymous command mass, a process predicated, at the upper levels, on the ouster and elimination of ranking officers, plainly was motivated by overarching political and ideological imperatives of the sort that had triggered other centrally-initiated upheavals (e.g., collectivization). By comparison, Hitler's murderous strike against Ernst Roehm's personal force of Nazi irregulars (the *Sturm Abteilungen*) in 1934 was a simple, limited operation to redistribute the balance of power inside his regime by crushing a restive wing of the Nazi Party.<sup>2</sup> Stalin and Voroshilov did rid themselves of the latter's pack of critics, but the destruction of the Tukhachevsky group merely kicked off an extended campaign of terror whose end was to effect an internal revolution in the institutions of the fledgling socialist order.

In orchestrating the downfalls of Tukhachevsky, Iakir, Uborevich, and Egorov, all stalwarts of the pre-purge high command, Stalin overturned its uneasy balance between his partisans and the largely self-made professionals. For the high command, Bolshevization meant realization and enforcement of the supremacy of Stalinist values: it involved creation of a supreme military council (whose members initially included Stalin himself) to restore collegiate direction of the military establishment and to give Party leaders a direct, commanding voice in military affairs, akin to what they had enjoyed during the Civil War. Ironically, the GVS of 1938-40 was the least qualified and functional high command of the interwar period at a time when the regime's need for professional competence and experience at the top had never been greater. The ruinous military strategy and force posture of 1941 (exemplified by the reorientation of the fortification program) had roots in the offensive credo which had captured professional military thinking by the early 1930s, but the GVS's predilection for decision-making on

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<sup>2</sup>Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 439, 477.

the basis of or in step with Stalinist dogma weighed heavily in the top-level mismanagement which brought disorder to the Red Army and sapped its fighting power. In truth, Timoshenko and Zhukov, both tough, able commanders, did not have enough time to repair the lingering damage to Soviet military capability from fanatic Bolshevization or to mitigate the strains of too-rapid, ill-conceived growth. In only this very qualified sense can Soviet historians' lament that history left the USSR too little time to gird itself for war with Nazi Germany be said to ring true.

The disparities in the regime's military goals run like hidden fault-lines through the extraordinary program for the Red Army's modernization and growth that the Politburo adopted in 1929, whose premises concerning the USSR's security requirements guided Soviet military development for decades to come. On an elementary level, the Red Army was shot through from the start with controls whose purpose was to enforce a stern political and ideological conformity, especially on the part of the professional command, which was to be made a disciplined arm of the Party; however, the regime also wished to have an established, fit, and self-possessed command corps (and motivated, self-reliant fighters) at its disposal. Stalin fastened a tightening grip on the military establishment through his personal agents and the state security service, yet he recognized, for a time, the regime's need for coherent, competent conception and direction, on several levels, of its extensive plans for military development. Lastly, Stalin's unshakable resolve to "build socialism" and to guide the USSR's advance to communism required, in his mind, that the coercive power of the state be used to eradicate the human restraints to progress (even potential ones) toward those ends—and, of course, this imperative prevailed over the immediate need for a stable and experienced command staff in 1937-38. Such intractable dilemmas of Soviet military development depleted the Red Army in a variety of ways; their fundamental nature strongly suggests that the regime was incapable of fielding a combat-effective army before 1942-43, that is, until the specter of the socialist system's imminent demise had compelled Stalin to place the pursuit of military effectiveness above all else until victory was his.

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