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## VIKTOR SUVOROV AND OPERATION BARBAROSSA: TUKHACHEVSKII REVISITED

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*On the sixth of July 1941 at 0330 hrs Moscow Time, tens of thousands of Soviet guns tore the silence into shreds, informing the world that the Red Army's great liberating march had begun. The Red Army's artillery, in numbers and quality, is superior to the rest of the whole world's titanic reserves of ammunition were concentrated at the Soviet frontier. The firing tempo of the Soviet artillery swiftly grows, transformed into a hellish roar on the thousand-kilometer front [stretching] from the Black Sea to the Baltics. The first artillery salvo was timed to coincide to the minute when thousands of Soviet aircraft crossed the state frontier. The German airfields, positioned right up to the border, were extremely unlucky, as the German pilots had no time to get their planes into the air. A huge collection of aircraft had been gathered at the German airfields. They are parked wingtip to wingtip, and the fire spreads from one airplane to the next, like the fire in a box of matches.<sup>1</sup>*

*The artillery preparation picks up intensity. At the frontier itself, the Soviet battalions and regiments brought to readiness by the alert are receiving their vodka. In the forests near the border, a thunderous "Urah" rumbles as the troops are read the combat order of Comrade Stalin—the Supreme Commander-in-Chief: "The day of reckoning has arrived. Soviet intelligence has uncovered Hitler's treachery, and the time has come for him to be accountable for all his evil deeds and crimes! Heroic Warriors, the world is watching you and awaits liberation!" In violation of all established standards and restrictions, the soldiers are told the quantity of Soviet troops, tanks, artillery,*

<sup>1</sup>Viktor Suvorov, *Ledokol: Kto nachal vtoruyu mirovyu voinu?* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo AKT, 2000), pp. 410–411.

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*aircraft, submarines taking part in their march of liberation. Once again, a thunderous "Urah!" rumbles over the forest meadows and clearings.*<sup>2</sup>

The above is excerpted from the chapter "The War That Wasn't" in Victor Suvorov's *Ledokol: Kto nachal vtoruyu mirovuyu voynu?* or *Icebreaker: Who Started the Second World War?* The author, Victor Suvorov, is a pseudonym for a former Soviet military intelligence officer, Vladimir Bogdanovich Rezun, who defected to the United Kingdom in 1978. Subsequent to his defection, he wrote several books dealing with the Soviet armed forces and his career as a Soviet *GRU* (*Glavnoye razvedyvatil'noye upravleniye* or military intelligence) officer. But, it would be *Ledokol* which would propel him to the front ranks of controversy.

In his book, Suvorov advanced a number of sensational theses. After the death of Lenin in the early 1920s, Stalin viewed Germany as the linchpin to communizing Europe, stalled by Communist defeats in Poland. World War I had given birth to the victory of Bolshevism in a Red Russia. The rise of Hitler and the Nazi Party, attacking and destroying the western democracies, would serve as the "icebreaker" for ushering in a new era of a Sovietized Europe. A prostrate capitalist Europe, its imperialist armies bled white and exhausted from fighting, would be no match for a Red Army, massively supplied with the newest fighting equipment in unimaginable quantities, coming to the aid of the beleaguered proletariat in fulfillment of its sworn and sacred socialist duty.

Suvorov contended that it was Stalin who intended to attack Germany in 1941 and that Hitler's "Operation Barbarossa" launched against Russia in June 1941 was, in fact, a "preventive war" designed to forestall Stalin's imminent attack against Germany. Supported by a large number of Soviet military memoirs and open source military publications, Suvorov asserted that both Stalin and Hitler were seeking world domination, driven by their respective ideologies. Stalin's means to bring this about was to transform the Second World War into a revolutionary war, bringing Lenin's vision of a Red Europe into reality. On the ashes of a vanquished Europe, the Red Army, with its overwhelming numerical and qualitative superiority, would stride forward and "liberate" Europe from the Nazi yoke. *Den' M* provides the date this "march of liberation" would be launched: July 6, 1941.<sup>3</sup> Hitler's preemptive attack caught the massive forward deployments of troops and materiel close to the border, maldeployed, surprised, and unprepared. Barbarossa caught the Red Army off balance, vulnerable, and unable to erect adequate defenses in time to stem the onrushing blitzkrieg tide.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 411–412.

<sup>3</sup>Viktor Suvorov, *Den' 'M': Kogda nachalas' vtoruyu mirovuyu voynu?*, (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo AKT, 2000), p. 132.

*Ledokol* first appeared in Britain in the June 1985 issue of *Royal United Services Journal*, subsequently emerging in a book-length Russian-language edition three years later, and in English in 1990. It was the first of a trilogy. Suvorov's second book, *Den' M* or *M-Day* was subtitled, *Kogda nachalas' vtoraiia mirovaya voina?* (When Did the Second World War Begin?) and was published in 1994.

If *Ledokol* outlined in some detail the Stalinist preparatory plan for revolutionizing Europe, *Den' M* purportedly set the mobilization timetable. On August 19, 1939, at a meeting of the Politburo, Stalin decided to set in motion his grand design. Chief of the General Staff, Marshal Boris Shaposhnikov was entrusted with designing a mobilization plan for the campaign.<sup>4</sup>

The last book of the trilogy is entitled, *Posledniaia respublika, The Last Republic*. In Victor Suvorov's vision of post-war history, Stalin is victorious, Nazism is defeated, and the last free western democracy is assimilated into the Soviet Empire. The enormous Palace of Soviets building project in Moscow—never completed—was to be the monument to European communization, according to Suvorov.<sup>5</sup>

It was the rapid Nazi victory over France in 1940 that stunned Stalin and threw his revolutionary plans into disarray, demolishing Suvorov's theory of grand design. According to the eminent Soviet military historian John Erickson:

“There was no longer any prospect of protracted war in the west leading to the mutual exhaustion of the belligerents, no royal road to a revolutionary Europe. Germany was no longer tied down in the west. The situation now brought Russia face to face with Germany.” On hearing the news of France's fall, Stalin is reputed to have commented, “The Germans will now turn on us, they will eat us alive.”<sup>6</sup>

In “The Icebreaker Controversy: Did Stalin Plan to Attack Hitler?” historian Teddy J. Uldricks cogently argues Suvorov's two main theses:

“...first, that in 1941 Stalin was preparing to launch a war of aggression on central and western Europe in order to spread communism, and second, that Operation Barbarossa was nothing more than a defensive, preemptive response to that threat once the Germans perceived it.”

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 215.

<sup>5</sup>Viktor Suvorov, *Posledniaia respublika: Pochemu sovetskii soyuz proigral vtoruyu mirovuyu voinu?* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo AKT, 2001), pp. 62–73.

<sup>6</sup>John Erickson, *The Soviet High Command: 1918–1941* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1962), p. 14.

Suvorov's trilogy is dedicated to proving the first premise, and as Uldricks points out, "simply assumes the latter supposition to be true."<sup>7</sup>

Through his superb scholarship in documenting the unfolding history in the immediate pre-war year, Gabriel Gorodetskii effectively rendered the latter thesis as simply untrue. Operation Barbarossa was aggressive, not defensive. Hitler's offensive planning for Barbarossa preceded any of this "conjured up" evidence of Soviet attack intentions. Hitler's motives included solidifying German hegemony in the Balkans, securing the natural resources of the Soviet Union, pressuring England to come to terms, acquiring *Grossraum* for expanding the German population, and destroying the Bolshevik-Jewish conspiracy in Russia.<sup>8</sup> The controversy among historians is whether primacy should be assigned to long-range ideological considerations (*Mein Kampf*, the acquisition of Western Russia's farmland for the German population, etc.) or to near-term tactical matters of foreign policy and economics (securing and protecting Romanian oil, control of Bulgaria, etc.) The first premise—that the Red Army was preparing a war of aggression/liberation—cannot be dismissed so readily.

The recent release of historical data from Russian Federation Ministry of Defense archives and the declassification of key documents have made it possible to trace exactly what "strategic designs" did materialize in Russia, as opposed to an idea based on superficial and cursory perusal of postwar memoirs. Erickson noted in "Barbarossa, June 1941: Who Attacked Whom?" that between 1928 and 1941, seven major operational war plans were drafted, complete with 15 reviews and revisions. These war plans were drafted in great secrecy by the General Staff, the Chief of the General Staff, Deputy Chief of the General Staff Operations Directorate and approved by the Commissar of Defense, and ultimately, Stalin himself.<sup>9</sup>

It was the disastrous performance of the Red Army in the 1939–1940 Russo-Finnish Winter War, which brought home to Stalin and Marshal Kliment Voroshilov, the Commissar of Defense in 1940, the Red Army's disastrous state of leadership, training, and preparedness. (Incredulously, Suvorov believed the Russo-Finnish War to be a victory for Soviet forces; Western strategists simply were incorrect in their forecasts and predictions.

Stated Suvorov: "There is still the objection: The "Mannerheim Line" was penetrated, but at what cost! At any cost! Do you really think we're

<sup>7</sup>Teddy J. Uldricks, 'The Icebreaker Controversy: Did Stalin Plan to Attack Hitler?', *Slavic Review* 58 no. 3 (Fall 1999) p. 634.

<sup>8</sup>Gabriel Gorodetsky, *Grand Delusion: Stalin and the German Invasion of Russia* (London: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 86–88.

<sup>9</sup>John Erickson, 'Barbarossa, June, 1941: Who Attacked Whom?', *History Today*, (July 2001), p. 14.

interested in any kind of cost? We had our great OBJECTIVE.”<sup>10</sup> The last update to the Soviet defense ministry’s war plan dated back to March 1938.

The 1938 plan, drawn up by Marshal Shaposhnikov, foresaw a European war fought on two fronts: in the east and the west. Marshal Shaposhnikov believed that the main axes by the Germans would be from north of the Pripet Marshes and from forces concentrated in East Prussia and north of Warsaw. The dual axes thrust reflected the assumptions that armies at that time were too large and resilient to be knocked out by one, decisive attack, the German Wehrmacht’s blitzkrieg tactics, notwithstanding. The mission of the covering forces along the border was to stall the aggressor long enough to enable powerful counterattacks by reinforcement echelons rushed up from the interior.<sup>11</sup>

A thorough understanding of the concepts of “*Glubokii boi*” and “*Glubokaya operatsiya*,” propounded by the purged Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevskii, is fundamental to Moscow’s plans for thwarting the German attack. It is perhaps here that Suvorov committed his most grievous error, observing the extensive preparations for implementing this plan, but without fully understanding Tukhachevskii’s fundamental concept about the flexibility inherent in defensive and offensive operations, nor the amount of immense preparation required to implement it.

In the 1920s, Soviet military theorists formulated and implemented the combined arms concept and the theory of deep battle (“*glubokii boi*”) and deep operations (“*glubokaya operatsiya*”). The difference between the two lies in the scope of the mission and the size of the units involved. The essence of the concept is the desire first, to achieve the simultaneous suppression of the enemy’s offensive thrusts with strikes throughout the depths of his tactical zone and limited offensive tactical thrusts. This is accomplished by the breakthrough of the enemy’s tactical defensive zone in a selected sector, follow-up strikes throughout the enemy’s tactical rear area, and the subsequent rapid exploitation of tactical success into operational-level success. Nonetheless, while the breakthrough and exploitation tactical phases were critical, winning air supremacy, isolating the zone of conflict from approaching enemy reserves, and blocking enemy logistical efforts were also thought to be important considerations for the achievement of operational success.<sup>12</sup>

The execution of “*glubokii boi*” and “*glubokaya operatsiya*” necessitated the creation of new combat formations, abundantly reported by

<sup>10</sup>Suvorov, *Poslednyaya respublika* (Moscow: Izdatd stvo AKT, 2001) pp. 168–169.

<sup>11</sup>Erickson, ‘Barbarossa, June 1941: Who Attacked Whom?’, p. 14.

<sup>12</sup>US Army Intelligence Agency, *Soviet General Doctrine for War*, Vol. 1, ‘Theory of Deep Operations (Battle)’, (Washington DC: Intelligence and Threat Analysis Center, 1987), pp. 2–28, 2–30.

Suvorov. This included the echelon for the attack, exploitation echelons, reserves, and airborne and aviation groups. An echelon for the attack contained the bulk of the main force with shock groups (“*udarnyye gruppy*”) designated for the conduct of the main breakthrough at the tactical-level. Delaying groups (“*skovyvayushchiye gruppy*”) were designated to halt and fix enemy forces and prevent their reinforcing against the main attack. The exploitation echelon (“*eshelon razvitiya proryva*”) was intended to develop tactical success into operational success. Mobile groups of armies and “fronts” made up of tank corps or armies, mechanized corps, and cavalry corps became this exploitation echelon. Theoretically, they were to be committed through breakthrough sectors or gaps to effect a rapid encirclement, block enemy reserves, and conduct other missions to develop the offensive. Combined arms, antitank, and special reserves served as contingency forces. Aviation and airborne groups were also integral parts of the battle formation of an operation. These were the formations Suvorov observed being rushed forward to the new post-1939 borders.<sup>13</sup>

Unfortunately, neither Stalin nor time was in the Red Army’s favor as German planning took a menacing look to the East. According to David M. Glantz’s and Jonathan House’s *When Titan’s Clashed*, Stalin’s 1941 Red Army was in extreme disarray, and although its overall strategy could be described as defensive, its official operational concepts remained offensive.<sup>14</sup> Stalin’s pre-war delusionary tactic—to pacify through appeasement and delay the ultimate onslaught—cost the Red Army dearly on June 22, 1941.

“The troops were also handicapped by the political requirement to defend every inch of the existing frontier. One of the scenarios that Stalin feared in 1941,” according to Glantz and House, “was a German provocation, a seizure of some small salient of Soviet territory instead of an all-out invasion. This concern reinforced the tendency to plan a *continuous, frontal defense along the border* (italics added) rather than the type of fluid battle maneuver that had made the Red Army so effective during the Civil War.”<sup>15</sup>

Stalin assigned the mission of providing covering forces for the border to Beria’s NKVD. The mission of the NKVD border guards then was twofold; to prevent any provocation to the Germans, and provide the critical time—in the event of a German attack—to blunt and halt the enemy and allow the time for the rear echelons to advance to the “*ukreplennyye raiony*” or fortified forward areas, implement Tukhachevskii’s “*Glubokii boi*” and “*Glubokaya operatsiya*,” and go over to a strategic counteroffensive

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>David M. Glantz, Jonathan House, *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1995), p. 33.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

before the Germans reached the Dnepr River. But, as Glantz and House observed, “the actual border was thinly manned by NKVD security troops, and the forward defenses were in many instances overrun before they could be manned on 22 June.”<sup>16</sup>

The plan of operations called for the fortified regions to take the brunt of the enemy attack, thus permitting the main body of the Red Army to be mobilized and concentrated. The Soviet General Staff was gambling on the fact that in “a few days” the frontier districts could be fully manned. In 1939 Shaposhnikov had indicated that full mobilization and concentration would require 8–20 days. It was therefore to be a battle for the frontiers, insofar that the first stage of a future war was foreseen. Under these circumstances a great deal depended on the proper deployment of the forces in the key western military districts, on an effective mobilization plan efficiently managed and on the organization of reserves.<sup>17</sup>

In his landmark study, *Russia at War, 1941–1945*, Alexander Werth cites the official archival “*History of the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union*”: “The whole defence of the State frontier was based on the assumption that a surprise attack by Germany was out of the question, and that a powerful German offensive would be preceded by a declaration of war, or by small-scale military operations, after which the Soviet troops could take up their defensive positions.”<sup>18</sup>

However, not only were the key defensive forces ordered to blunt and halt the German attack understrength, but General Staff planning had fatally mis-estimated the axis of the main German blow. The weak line of Soviet covering forces was not only concentrated too far forward in positions defensibly untenable with their exposed flanks, but the General Staff expected the main German thrust south of the Pripet Marshes.

On the July 21, 1940, Hitler, in discussing plans for the invasion of Britain, came to his central point that the latter was confirmed in her resistance by hope of Russia. For his part, Stalin dallied with the English to tie down Germany. And, as John Erickson in *The Soviet High Command*, so graphically described it: “Out of the hat of a supposed and strangely convenient Stalinist intrigue with the British, Hitler produced his strategic rabbit—‘tackling the Russian problem.’”<sup>19</sup>

Planning went forward and the transfer of German troops to the eastern border began. Lecturing in the presence of Hitler at a *Reichskanzlei* conference on the December 5, Chief of the German General Staff Halder

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>17</sup>John Erickson, *The Soviet High Command*, p. 569.

<sup>18</sup>Alexander Werth, *Russia at War: 1941–1945* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1964), p. 140.

<sup>19</sup>John Erickson, *The Soviet High Command*, p. 560.

observed that to the north of the Pripet Marshes a more favorable condition existed for large-scale movements than to the south. Directive no. 21, Operation Barbarossa, issued from the Fuhrer's Headquarters on December 18, 1940, ordered two Army Groups would operate on the northern sector of a zone of operations divided by the Pripet obstacle; "the main effort will be made *north* of this area."<sup>20</sup> (Italics in original.) Nowhere has any documentary evidence, political, diplomatic, or from intelligence sources, ever surfaced that suggested Soviet Russia's preemptive preparations galvanized Hitler's planning for Barbarossa.

In the same month Hitler concluded a war with Russia was necessary, General-Major Vasilevskii, supervised by Shaposhnikov, ordered a revision of the 1938 plan. It reaffirmed the location of the northern main German thrust, but put less emphasis on a German drive to the southwest, toward the Ukraine and Kiev. Timoshenko contested the plan's undue emphasis on the area north of Warsaw and East Prussia. Why not concentrate on a route south of Warsaw for a drive into the Ukraine, Timoshenko argued.<sup>21</sup>

On August 16, 1940, the planning revision continued under a new Chief of Staff, Meretskov. Under his supervision, the new war plan called for the Red Army to complete its deployment in not less than two weeks; halting the German thrusts, the Red Army would unleash a powerful counteroffensive, taking offensive operations to the enemy's territory. On October 5, Meretskov's revision was submitted to Stalin for final approval. The plan was refused. Stalin urged the General Staff to "reconsider." He believed that Germany needed Ukrainian grain and Donbas coal to wage a protracted war, and therefore the main German thrust would be an attack to the southwest, toward Kiev.<sup>22</sup> These considerations would figure prominently in June 1941.

This revision reaffirmed the primacy of the southwestern theater of operations, embodied the principle of the "retaliatory blow" (*otvetnyi udar*) and was predicated on the belief that only a portion of Soviet forces would be engaged to halt the German offensive thrust; this delaying action at the border would allow time for Red Army forces to concentrate before launching a decisive counter-offense.

John Erickson astutely pointed out that this is the key to understanding that this preoccupation with the southwestern theater of operations—the stalwart belief the Germans needed the Ukraine economically to support a protracted conflict with the USSR.<sup>23</sup> This concentration on the Kiev

<sup>20</sup>John Erickson, *The Road to Stalingrad* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 48.

<sup>21</sup>John Erickson, 'Barbarossa, June 1941: Who Attacked Whom?', p. 14.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.



Special Military District as the focus of the main German thrust, known well by both Timoshenko and Zhukov, proved to be the root cause of the subsequent massive Soviet strategic maldeployment. Significantly, neither new war plan, nor the deliberations within the special command conference convened in December 1940, made any mention of surprise as a factor to be reckoned with.

A critically important link in the evolution of Soviet war planning and operational preparation came with a two-phase exercise held during the first week of January 1941. Devised specifically to test the new war plan, Generals Pavlov and Zhukov alternatively played attacker and defender. The first phase of the exercise took place in the northern theater and demonstrated that terrain and fortifications in East Prussia would make any Soviet counteroffensive a protracted undertaking. In the southwestern theater, however, Zhukov produced a “brilliantly successful” counteroffensive, which appeared to confirm the argument that this theater should receive priority reinforcement.

Stalin was not impressed. When asked, “Who won?” he received no clear reply. Meretskov was sacked as Chief of the General Staff, replaced by Zhukov.<sup>24</sup> Stalin now fully understood that the Red Army was in no condition to conduct major offensive operations.

The so-called “successes” of the January 1941 war games were illusory. They assumed a scenario unrelated to real German war plans and the location of the main attack in the north. Surprise played no part in the planning. General Zhukov’s updated war plan of March 11, 1941, retained and confirmed the priority of the southwestern theater at a time when the GRU reported increased German movements to the east. Again, Zhukov’s updated plan identified the main German force concentrations aligned on a southwest axis to occupy the Ukraine.

The March update focused on two key assumptions. The first was that German forces would deploy on the border ten to fifteen days after concentrating. Secondly, the Red Army would take the offensive only after successfully repelling an enemy attack and the main force would be engaged only some days after the frontier battles. The whole organization of the border defense rested on the assumption that the Red Army would not be taken by surprise, that decisive offensive actions would be preceded by a declaration of war, and that enemy operations would be initiated with limited forces only, thus giving the Red Army time to fight covering actions to facilitate mobilization.<sup>25</sup> This was Marshal Tukhachevskii’s “*glubokii boi*” and “*glubokaya operatsiya*” revisited.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

But, as noted above, Stalin hamstringed the border defenses by ordering them to deploy along the entire length of the border, occupying even those salients, which jutted westwards and thereby weakened the flanks. Zhukov knew that the reserves assigned to deal with enemy penetrations at the border were far from adequate; nor did any provision exist for coordinating the operations of the first and second echelons. Finally, and it is this which calls into question the whole grand notion of a preemptive plan, the operational or tactical groups of forces (much less the “secret concentrations” which Tukhachevskii envisaged and Suvorov reported) were far from being organized to deal with enemy attacks.<sup>26</sup>

On May 5, 1941, Stalin made his famous speech to military academy graduates. The text now made available disputes contentions that this was a “call to arms” for an aggressive, offensive war against Germany. The speech was intended to counter impressions of Red Army weakness, counter German over-confidence in the Wehrmacht, and bolster army morale should war materialize. On that same day, the GRU reported to Stalin of the German order of battle: 103–107 divisions had moved to the east, facing the Soviet Union, and more divisions were on their way.<sup>27</sup>

Stalin’s strategy since signing the 1939 Non-Aggression Pact of deterring and deferring war with Germany was in a shambles. For Zhukov and the General Staff, the GRU’s report destroyed their entire concept of war. The true meaning of the latest intelligence was devastating and the USSR was confronted with an undeniable threat of the first magnitude. Zhukov understood that there would be no delaying battle on the frontier, allowing the bulk of the Red Army to mobilize, concentrate, and deploy. The Wehrmacht was fully mobilized, its rear services organized, and it was positioned to preempt any Red Army deployment, and poised to launch a surprise attack.

There were discussions to preempt the anticipated German assault. A controversial plan dated May 15 called for a preemptive offensive operation by 152 Soviet divisions to destroy 100 German divisions. The first strategic objective was the destruction of German forces south of Brest, the second objective and attack in the center and northwest to capture Poland and East Prussia. The Soviet order of battle, however, could not support a preemptive (*uprezhdaiushchii udar*) attack.

Erickson pointed out the dilemma facing Stalin and Zhukov:

“The western and south-western fronts could only muster 102 divisions. Movements of second echelon elements and reserves would only be completed in June–July. To establish the requisite ‘correlation of

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p.16.

forces' [*sootnosheniye sil*] would require 60 days, by which time German strength would have increased still further. The Red Army was in no condition to launch a strategic offensive on this scale. The moment of truth had arrived for the General Staff and the Red Army: either launch a pre-emptive attack, or order general mobilisation."<sup>28</sup>

Stalin ordered neither. The Red Army could neither attack nor defend. No doubt recalling the disastrous train of events of 1914 when the mobilization was ordered, Stalin refused to issue the order for general mobilization, and increased readiness. This is essentially the situation the Red Army, a "Stumbling Colossus"— aptly described, found itself in June 1941. The victim of misdirected deployments based on directives of October 1940 and the strategic design founded in the January 1941 war games. Stalin had neither the intention nor the capability to embark on a "preemptive" war. As documented below, Stalin's stubborn and blind adherence to a war avoidance strategy ruled out any strategies for preemption, and even for defensive moves because they might be considered provocations.<sup>29</sup>

One scholar who has successfully assailed Suvorov's claims from a diplomatic perspective drew his ammunition from primarily historical and diplomatic archives. Gabriel Gorodetskii's *Grand Delusion: Stalin and the German Invasion of Russia*, thoroughly refuted Suvorov's depiction of a campaign of aggression stealthily and cynically plotted in the Kremlin through the use of first-person memoirs of Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs V.M. Molotov, for example. Gorodetskii painstakingly portrayed Stalin as a desperate leader using all means at his disposal to avoid a German attack, while energetically trying to prepare for the inevitable.

Militarily, Stalin's 1940–1941 Red Army was struggling in the aftermath of the purges, in various transition stages trying to implement the General Staff's new plans and directives, and stretching to protect dramatically expanded borders with poorly trained, newly recruited soldiers. Politically and diplomatically, appeasement and the projection of Russian traditional attempts to secure his vulnerable southwest frontier and to extend Soviet interests in the Balkans drove Stalin's policy toward Germany, and not to spread revolution as Suvorov asserts.

Drawing on his extensive research in the Russian Presidential Archives and Soviet intelligence reports, Gorodetskii convincingly argued that it was control over the Turkish Straits and the Russo-German rivalry in Bulgaria that were key to relations between Moscow and Berlin. Stalin's ultimate objective was not the conquest of Europe, according to Gorodetskii,

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*

but to secure an advantageous position for the USSR at an expected postwar peace settlement.<sup>30</sup>

Further, Gorodetskii put into focus Stalin's obstinate refusal to trust intelligence reports, especially those from Churchill, warning of Germany's plans to attack the Soviet Union. Stalin deeply distrusted England's ulterior motives for providing this information, believing that Churchill would resort to any means to drag the Soviet Union into the war and thereby relieve the pressure from the German war effort against the embattled island.

*Grand Delusion* confirmed the widely accepted interpretation that Stalin did not expect a German attack before England was subdued or before some sort of ultimatum from Berlin, understanding that Germany's defeat in WWI was due to fighting on two fronts. Gorodetskii concluded that Stalin did not intend to launch a revolutionary assault on Europe, but instead pursued a delicate balance of asserting traditional Russian national interests (especially in the Balkans) while attempting to forestall German aggression through cooperation with the Reich.

"Stalin's refusal," Gorodetskii wrote, "to reckon with the potential consequences of a miscalculation, while adamantly pursuing this appeasement and avoiding provocation at all costs, was perhaps the single most significant factor in the calamity which befell the Russians on 22 June."<sup>31</sup> In reality, Stalin's fear of German power and his perceptions of Soviet weakness—dramatically illustrated by the Russo-Finnish War—were more significant determinants of Soviet policy toward Berlin than were his desire for more territory or his dreams of spreading revolution in Europe.

Stalinist pre-war policy toward the Third Reich was a complex and frequently shifting balance of elements involving both appeasement and the pursuit of historical Russian national aims in the Balkans. Stalin hoped that that a policy of cooperation with Germany would buy time in which Soviet defenses could be strengthened while German strength might be depleted in its struggle with the Western powers. This cooperation was extended to the economic sphere. Soviet exports to Germany included such critically important commodities as grains, nonferrous metals, petroleum products, lumber, and cotton. This trade was vitally important to the success of the German war machine, allowing it to escape much of the impact of the allied economic blockade.

Stalin's policies were aimed at appeasing Hitler to buy time to forestall a war for which the USSR was not yet prepared. Stalin was convinced that Hitler would not attack until after he had defeated England. With England unbowed in June 1941, it seemed that a policy of playing for time and space

<sup>30</sup>Gabriel Gorodetsky, *Grand Delusion: Stalin and the German Invasion of Russia* (London: 1999) p. 53.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 321.

was still viable. Further appeasement from V. Molotov's NARKOM (People's Commissariat) of foreign affairs, Stalin hoped, could postpone the inevitable war with Nazi Germany until May 1942, when the Soviet Union would be better prepared and equipped to withstand the assault. ("...*kogda osnashchennaya novoi boevoi tekhnikai Krasnaya Armiya smogla by vstretit' vraga dostoino.*"<sup>32</sup> (Stalin speech, May 5, 1941)

The growing weight and reliability of the evidence for an impending German attack," wrote Teddy J. Uldricks, "was not enough to shake Stalin's desperate faith in the continuing efficacy of placating Hitler. Failure to abandon that tactic, revise Soviet strategic doctrine to provide for a defense in depth, and deploy his forces accordingly were Stalin's last, and nearly fatal, mistakes prior to Barbarossa."<sup>33</sup>

Thus, despite evidence presented by Suvorov to support his theses that Stalin envisaged attacking Nazi Germany in July 1941, concrete historical and diplomatic evidence fails to support his assertions. Stalin's political directives pre-supposed that Hitler would be faithful to the Soviet-German Treaty of August 1939 and that appeasement of Germany would keep the Soviet Union out of war. This led not only to an attitude of mind-invoking lack of vigilance and the deliberate ignoring of military warnings of the growing German threat, but also to specific orders not to adopt provocative military deployments along the Soviet Union's frontiers. The powerful units that Suvorov observed being sent forward covered a harsh reality: the purges of the 1930s had deprived the army of thousands of talented leaders, and caused a break in the continuity of training programs as well as a switch away from the realistic concept of military doctrine of the Tukhachevskii period. A feverish sense of realism began only after appreciation of the lessons of the Russo-Finnish war.

Malcolm Mackintosh has commented that,

Perhaps the truest comment is that the 15 months between the end of the Finish war and the German invasion were used by the Soviet military and political authorities to dismantle the 1939 organisation, without progressing very far with its replacement by a new and up-to-date establishment, according to a realistic timetable.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup>'Stalin's Secret Speech' (Moscow: Nezavisimoye voennoye obozreniye, #15 (330), 25 April 03)

<sup>33</sup>Teddy J. Uldricks, 'The Icebreaker Controversy: Did Stalin Plan to Attack Hitler?', p. 643.

<sup>34</sup>Malcolm Mackintosh, 'Red Army Before Barbarossa', *History of the Second World War, Part 21* (New York: Marshall Cavendish USA Ltd, 1973), p. 572.

In those precious 15 months, so much time was spent in discussing what ought to be done, that when the invasion came, the old had not been completely abandoned, and the new was still being argued over.

In hindsight, the great maelstrom of controversy that Suvorov generated has forced many scholars of this period to reexamine certain emotional premises and conclusions they had become so comfortable with that they were accepted as virtual dogma. In the final analysis, however, when reexamined, the conclusions—although at times a bit grizzled and worn around the edges, or even altered to fit political expediencies—were borne out by historically supported counter-arguments that leave little license for misinterpretation or misjudgment. Incontrovertibly, Hitler, inspired by the megalomaniacal ideology of *Grossraum*, in June 1941 viciously attacked a vulnerable, unprepared, and maldeployed and purged Red Army. Had Hitler waited, as Stalin had hoped in his May 5, 1941, speech to the assembled graduates of the arms academies, instead, in 1942, this author might have written a different appraisal of Mr. Suvorov's scholarship and Operation Barbarossa.

**SIDEBAR:** Victor Suvorov's theses that the Soviet Union was preparing a surprise attack on Nazi Germany and its East European allies, and Operation Barbarossa was basically a preemptive response to the Kremlin's nefarious, aggressive plans, ignited a firestorm of intense criticism from a large segment of the historical community. Regardless of what one might think of Suvorov's style of tabloid sensationalism and the replacement of scholarly and disciplined research and documentation with supermarket journalism, his arguments have been thoroughly refuted by a wide spectrum of historians in the court of sober reason. Nonetheless, any credible investigation into the veracity of Victor Suvorov's assertions surrounding Hitler, Stalin, and the June 22 attack on the USSR could not ignore the amplitude and impassioned heat of discussion his controversial theories generated. The high ground was taken by scholars in Europe and North America by Suvorov's defenders, who were prepared to meet the enemy with fixed bayonets.

In Germany, for example, the preventive war thesis became imbedded as part of a series of historical controversies, known as the *Historikerstreit*, or historians' debate, which surfaced during the late 1980s. Stalin, some German scholars argued, was the inheritor of the Leninist legacy to launch a military crusade against the strongholds of capitalism.

Teddy J. Uldricks recounted an Austrian philosophy professor who reinterpreted the fundamental nature of World War II as "a Soviet attack on the capitalist world." The Second World War, in this professor's view,

was essentially manufactured by Stalin in order to justify a Russian counteroffensive that would give the Soviet dictator total control of the Eurasian landmass “from Kamchatka to the Bay of Biscay.”<sup>35</sup>

In the United States, one author has argued that Stalin is at least as guilty as Hitler is in perpetrating World War II. From his perspective, Stalin wanted another European conflagration to assist his conquest of central, and possibly even of western, Europe.<sup>36</sup>

Nowhere, perhaps, has controversy over the icebreaker thesis generated more mass media appeal than in Russia, Germany, and Israel. Uldricks believed that the debate in the Russian press reflected the appetite of many post-Soviet readers for “unstintingly negative” portrayals of the communist past and the opportunity to excoriate Stalin. And in Germany, Suvorov has found a grateful readership among some segments of the population because he provides some sort of justification or even partial exculpation for the Nazi war effort.<sup>37</sup>

Nor did Suvorov remain passive and suffered his critics with diffident aplomb. In the second book of the trilogy—*Den' M*—Mr. Suvorov was stung by the fact that certain scholars refused to accept his view of the historical record; he made a reference to the publication of an “angry open letter” by a group of American experts with thinly veiled disdain for criticizing his first articles concerning the fundamental truth (*istina*) of the June 13, 1941, TASS communiqué.<sup>38</sup> Further, Mr. Suvorov, in response to criticism that top secret documentation supporting the preparation of Soviet aggression has not been found, and therefore, historians can neither defend nor refute his version of history, he responded that the documentation would be discovered, that is, if “they” wanted it to be found. (*Yesli zakhotyat.*)<sup>39</sup>

He believed there is a conspiracy of sorts manufactured by academic professors, who, for their entire careers and their degrees, prizes, dachas, and so on, owe their reputations to a foundation belief that Stalin was an innocent victim of Nazi perfidy. If such documentation were found, these prestigious professors would then have to admit to error, and be recognized as undeserving of previous acclaim and accolades.<sup>40</sup>

And, in *The Last Republic*, Mr. Suvorov lashed out at Gorodetskii, in particular, and a long list of Russian general officers whose research did not support his views.<sup>41</sup> Curiously, among the long list of general officer

<sup>35</sup>Teddy J. Uldricks, “The Icebreaker Controversy: Did Stalin Plan to Attack Hitler?”, p. 632.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 633.

<sup>38</sup>Viktor Suvorov, *Den'M*, p. 389.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 389–390.

<sup>41</sup>Viktor Suvorov, *Posledniaia respublika*, pp. 364–365.

offenders is Colonel-General Dmitrii Volkogonov, a virtuous man of courageous integrity, who this author had the privilege of meeting prior to the general's death. General Volkogonov, with degrees in philosophy and history and access to the classified Ministry of Defense archives, lost his position at the Main Political Administration and was abandoned by his friends and reviled by the military hierarchy. His unpardonable offense was to dare to offer an accurate historical account—bereft of political dogma and Communist Party interference—of the initial period of the Great Patriotic War.<sup>42</sup>

In conclusion, the 1941 Red Army preparations to launch a war of conquest simply remains unproven, given the extent of its disarray due to a number of military, diplomatic, and political factors. This author is in agreement with Uldricks in his speculation that in 1942, Stalin might have entered the war against the Third Reich—when military preparations had been completed—to counter the hegemony of a Nazi-dominated Europe. In the final analysis, the Suvorov notion of a Communist grand plan to Sovietize a war-weakened Europe and preemptively attack Germany is rendered moot by Hitler's decision in December 1940 to destroy the Bolshevik regime.

<sup>42</sup>Dmitrii Volkogonov, *Etyudy o vremeni* (Sketches on Time), (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Novosti", 1998), p.

Viktor Suvorov: *Ledokol: Kto nachal vtoruyu mirovuyu voynu?* Moscow, 2000

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