Sixty Years After the Nazi-Soviet Pact

Albert L. Weeks

What Were Stalin's Plans on the Eve of the Great Fatherland War, 1939-1941?

The demise of communist rule in Russia in 1991 triggered intense discussion about depictions of the past boilerplated in Communist Party-guided Soviet historiography. With the partial opening of archives of Soviet civilian, military, and the security police authorities, the contents of the Orwellian Memory Hole, to which so many historical truths were committed in the Stalin period, began to be exhumed, with the result that wholesale revisionism has been sweeping through Russian historical science for the past eight years. In this process almost no stone has been left unturned. One of the great “white spots,” as Russians call intentional omissions in the Soviet historical record, concerns Josef Stalin’s intentions and plans during and after the signing of the crucial Nazi-Soviet agreements and secret protocols drawn up by Berlin and Moscow sixty years ago this August-September [1999].

One school of thought follows the conventional line that has dominated history books in the Soviet Union and abroad up until recently, saying, namely, that Stalin’s military policy was largely defensist from 1939 until the German invasion of the Soviet Union, June 22, 1941. That is, Stalin had no offensive or preemptive Grand Strategy vis-à-vis Germany or any other prospective capitalist enemy. He intended merely to keep the USSR out of a world war, predicted as “inevitable” by Marxism-Leninism, as long as possible. In this way, the Soviets would have time to build up their defenses in the expectation of a coming global conflict that sooner or later would involve them as well.

Among such “defensive” moves, this school maintains, were the Soviet territorial acquisitions of 1939-1940. These included half of Poland, all of the Baltics, part of Finland as well as Northern Bukovina and Bessarabia. Termed a “buffer zone” by the defensists and Soviet-period apologists, these territories were not the fruit of a deliberate Soviet expansionist policy, it is argued. Rather, they added up to protective measures wisely taken by Stalin against the day of a German invasion. That they remained parts of the USSR is deemed irrelevant. The invasion, an unforgivable double-cross, took Stalin by surprise precisely, it is alleged, because he allowed Soviet Russia to become a “sitting duck” and “dupe.” Foolishly, he trusted his alliance...
with Hitler even as the latter so obviously deployed German invasion forces on the Soviet western frontier in spring 1939. Stalin ignored the warnings of an attack proffered by Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin's own best foreign agents, one of whom predicted the precise date of the invasion. Stalin, in any case, distrusted the Western powers, those duplicitous "Munich appeasers" who, it is alleged, had refused serious Soviet overtures to build collective security guarantees against the Axis expansionism.

Interestingly, the defensist argument about Soviet Russia was also given out by orientation officers to American soldiers in World War II. These officers later referred to such manuals as The USSR Institutions and People: A Brief Handbook for the Use of Officers of the Armed Forces of the United States. "The Nazi-Soviet Pact," says the handbook,1 "was accepted by the Soviet people as an act of wisdom [gaining time] for them...in which to prepare for the Nazi attack which came in June 1941.... Soviet-advocated measures failed largely because the democratic powers mistrusted the Soviet Union. [The Soviet people felt] that the overtures made to the Soviet Union by Great Britain and France in the summer of 1939 lacked a basis for realistic and effective measures against Germany."

Having pursued a policy of joining the League of Nations and defining and touting the principle of non-aggression and "collective security," Stalin, who at this stage in the mid-1930s thrust forward Maxim Litvinov to instrument this "peace-minded" policy, sought seriously to curtail Hitler. However, Stalin was frustrated in this sincere endeavor, alleges this school, by the reluctance of England and France to join in establishing collective security. As Professor Alvin Z. Rubenstein phrased it, "Ideologically-derived perceptions [on the part of England and France] shaped the behavior of the Western leaders to a greater extent than they did Soviet policy."2 Because of Western suspicions, indicated Rubenstein, who perhaps reflected a consensus among historians, the Franco-British Munich appeasement policy evolved into abandonment of the Soviet's principal east European ally, Czechoslovakia, and with it the abandonment of the Soviet pursuit of collective security. Litvinov himself was abandoned by Stalin in early 1939 when the rigid, orthodox close aide to Stalin, Molotov, took over foreign affairs from Litvinov. The Soviets, it was perceived by some, would now look out for themselves and pursue bare-knuckled Realpolitik, but always in the name of defense.

In contrast to this line of argument, the second, or offensist, school claims that Stalin all along was plotting an offensive war of his own—above all, against Germany and ultimately against all of "capitalist-imperialist" Europe. As Molotov said in his memoirs, referring to Stalin's view of three world wars: "Stalin looked at it this way. World War I has wrested one country from capitalist slavery. World War II has created a socialist system. A third world war will finish off imperialism forever."3 Statements, secret or open, made by leading officials and the Soviets' own military planning point in this direction, it is claimed by these historians. These include Stalin's secret speech to the military graduates, May 5, 1941, that rattled with offensive sabers; two successive, pre-June 1941 Red Army field manuals contained exclusively offensist principles rather than defensive ones; and a significant military strategy paper addressed to Stalin, May 15, 1941, by the Red Army's topmost senior officers (Vasilievsky, Timoshenko, and Zhukov) advocated preemptive war.

The defensists counter that there is no proof Stalin ever saw this document. But, it might be asked, would the generals dared to have made such recommendations to Stalin, who not long before
had bloodily purged the General Staff, if offensist principles did not harmonize with his own views?

On the ideological front, the revisionists refer back to Lenin's "Report on Peace," November 8, 1917. The Soviet leader had then called on the Western "laboring and exploited masses" to end their nations' participation in war (World War I) and, following the Soviet example, "emancipate" themselves "from all forms of slavery and exploitation." The socialist "new order," Lenin continued, "will not be bound by treaties." We have "lit the torch of world revolution," he wrote in the draft of the first post-1917 Program of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks). The Soviets will "carry the revolution into the most advanced countries and in general into all countries." In a speech on March 7, 1918, Lenin declared: "History marches forward on the basis of liberation wars."

Such principles were never abandoned. The revisionists note that, with the establishment of the Comintern in 1919, Lenin's long-nurtured dream of encouraging global Sovietization was finally realized. Soon Soviet diplomacy was running on "two tracks." Perhaps a better analogy for the twofold, if not duplicitous nature of Soviet foreign policy and behavior in the international arena would be an iceberg. The visible portion consisted of "legalistic" diplomacy, talk of "peaceful cohabitation" (later termed "peaceful coexistence") for the purpose of gaining time and misleading the "deaf, dumb and blind" enemy and enhancing Soviet power worldwide while also, tangentially, abetting the global revolutionary cause of Sovietization.

The larger, submerged portion of the iceberg consisted of global subversion via legal and/or illegal Communist Parties organized within countries throughout the world. These fifth-column forces, infiltrated into all layers of society in the given capitalist or Third World countries, served, to use Stalin's later phrase of 1952, as international "shock brigades." As the armed components of Marxist-Leninist "internationalism," they were tasked with preparing the way for Soviet-style socialism via armed seizures of power and guerrilla actions, abetting Soviet homeland interests by means of pacifist propaganda and outright sabotage within the given countries (e.g., as in Britain, France, and the United States during the Nazi-Soviet "honeymoon" of 1939-1941). Or they would serve as sleeper forces waiting to be called into action by Moscow Center in case of war in the name of socialism. In times of peace, they would prepare the ground for Soviet-style takeovers whether by countries or by regions. Hundreds of billions of dollars, as it has been recently disclosed by Russian sources, were invested in these enterprises.

The offensist historians further maintain that Stalin actually hoped for war so that revolution could be "exported on the tips of bayonets," as Soviet spokespeople and military hawks had openly declared in meetings of the Third Communist International (Comintern) in the 1920s and 1930s. He relished—indeed, encouraged—German expansionism against France, The Lowlands, and Britain hoping to see all the combatants self-destruct. Meanwhile, Stalin, it is alleged by some writers of this school, was planning to launch a preemptive war against Germany that was to begin either by July 1941 (a minority view) or at the latest by mid-1942. The Red Army would sweep clear through Europe meeting the rebellious masses as it carried the red banner westward.

In 1939 and in 1940-1941, these Russian historians note that several of Stalin's closest aides—Molotov, Zhdanov, Mekhlis, Shcherbakov—spoke assuredly of "extending the frontiers of socialism" on the wings of the "inevitable" coming war. Wilhelm Pieck, the German Com-
munist leader, predicted the following in his notes from an Information Meeting in Moscow, February 21, 1941:

Revolutionäre Beendigung durch Massen ohne Aussicht des Sieges schwindet—Int Verbrüderung—Revolution mit Unterstützung SU. (Revolutionary end by the masses [all] the more [possible as] the prospect of victory [by Germany] dwindles—international fraternization—revolution with the support of the Soviet Union.)

Likewise, Premier Molotov told Lithuanian Foreign Minister Vintas Krėvé-Mickevicius on June 30, 1940:

We are now more than ever convinced that our brilliant Comrade Lenin was not mistaken when he declared that a second world war would enable us to seize power in Europe, just as we did in Russia after the First World War. For this reason you should be starting now to introduce your people to the Soviet Union, which in future will rule all of Europe.

Five years before the start of World War II, Stalin added ominously:

War will surely unleash revolution and put in question the very existence of capitalism in a number of countries, as was the case of the first imperialist war.... Let not the bourgeoisie blame us if on the morrow of the outbreak of such a war they miss certain ones of the governments that are near and dear to them, and now are today happily ruling by the grace of God.... It can hardly be doubted that a second war against the USSR will lead to the complete defeat of the aggressors, to revolution in a series of countries of Europe and Asia.... Victory in revolution never comes of itself. It must be prepared for and won.

In his memoirs during his retirement in the 1970s, Molotov admitted that one of his tasks was to “broaden as far as possible the borders of the fatherland.” He added: “We didn’t do badly in this respect.” In other words, the “buffers” became outright annexations, enhancements of the boundaries and power of the USSR.

Defensists responded to this by insisting that such revolutionary-sounding phrases from the top Soviet leaders were little more than braggadocio, or as Russians say, “vranyo,” that the Sovietization of Europe was pie-in-the-sky. But was all this mere ideological posturing or “window-dressing”? No, said the revisionists. The usefulness of war was a central part of Soviet Grand Strategy. Lenin made, later Stalin glossed, the prediction that two types of war lay in the future—1) inter-imperialist and 2) imperialist wars of aggression against the USSR. The first type of war was inevitable, they said, flowing as it did from the “last stage of imperialism” in which mounting “contradictions” between capitalist states inevitably turn into wars. The latter, anti-Soviet war was likewise inevitable as long as the “capitalist encirclement” was intact.

Since all such wars abet revolution (proletarians are against imperialist wars in which the capitalist oppressors use the toilers as gun fodder), it made sense for the Soviets to aggravate “inter-imperialist contradictions” as much as possible while girding up their loins for the second type of war which, said Marxism-Leninism, would escalate into a world “war of liberation” for all the toilers. The contradictions tactic was tangibly designed, as Lenin and Stalin wrote and Soviet diplomacy contrived, to egg Japan into conflict with the United States, the European powers against the latter, and the European capitalist powers against each other. (This policy was updated even as late as the Brezhnev period in the 1970s with Soviet attempts to sow dissent within the NATO alliance.) Documenting these teachings, and underlying active Soviet diplomacy and the global subversion practiced by the Third Communist International (Comintern), or
“General Staff” of world revolution, are the various statements made by Stalin and his top aides.

Still, it may be asked, how far was Stalin prepared to go, and how soon, in order to wink at or even help unleash a second world war, assuming that that was his plan, and by means of it to realize the long-established, explicitly stated Soviet goals of world domination?

World War II—or more precisely August-September 1939, as indicated by Pavel Sudoplatov, top aide to Beria of the NKVD,—was the pivotal period in the practical realization of Soviet expansionist goals. Here presented to the Soviets, it is argued, was the long-awaited, ideal situation: the harnessing of two-track diplomacy to the liberating, “revolutionary” catalyst of war so that, working in tandem, both could realize Soviet expansionist goals at this uniquely opportune moment in history. On their part, the defensists dismiss this interpretation.

As to the mid-1930s collective-security gambit assigned by Stalin to the allegedly moderate Foreign Affairs Commissar Maxim Litvinov, the revisionists claim that this was merely a diversion on the dictator’s part to frighten Germany into striking a deal with Moscow, which was only pretending to be closing ranks with the Western capitalist states. Indeed, Stalin aborted all such discussions as soon as a deal with the Nazis was in the works.

It should be added that the ten-year experience in Soviet-German military collaboration from the 1920s to the early 1930s was followed by a period of abundant bilateral trade. German economic assistance to the industrialization of Soviet Russia under Stalin, in fact, was in some respects more significant than that of the United States, despite the latter’s help in building railroads, the Dnepropetrovsk dam, and Soviet tractor and textile factories. Between 1921-1938, Germany exported to Russia over $2 billion in commodities; the United States, $1.4 billion. After Hitler came to power, the Soviet security police, or NKVD, collaborated with the German Gestapo. (An article in the post-Soviet weekly Argumenty i Fakty documents Soviet invention—by one Dr. Berg—of gas chambers in the form of four-wheeled vehicles used for human extermination. The NKVD also turned over to Heinrich Himmler the T/O’s for its impressive network of Soviet labor camps, the forerunners of such Hitler “death camps” as Auschwitz and Buchenwald.) Then later, of course, by the August-September 1939 secret protocols and other agreements, Soviet raw materials—oil, grain, cotton, chrome, iron, etc., that by the special agreement of 1940 were to total over three million tons—were shipped to Germany on schedule and used in the war against the Western Allies. The Soviets kept their end of the bargain on these shipments right up to June 22, 1941, despite German reneging on their end.

The defensists, to the contrary, insist that Germany notwithstanding, Stalin was serious about collective security. However, he suspected the British and French were not. Moreover, he seems to have believed that an appeasement policy, perhaps eventually becoming an anti-Soviet alliance with the Axis, was a more likely decision to be made by London and Paris than agreeing to serious collective security arrangements with the USSR. (This assumes, however, that Stalin was not playing the divide-and-conquer card, for which there is considerable evidence.) Did not the flight of Hitler aide Rudolf Hess to England in May 1941 indicate that England was interested in cutting a deal with Hitler? So, reasoned Stalin, it was best to hitch his star to the German juggernaut. Or so some historians interpret Stalin’s actions in that period.

Yet Sudoplatov, writes in his memoirs, Special Tasks, of the crucial importance of the Stalin deal with Hitler against the
background of Soviet revolutionary expansionism. “Although originally this [expansionist] concept was ideological in nature, it acquired the dimensions of Realpolitik. This possibility arose for the Soviet Union only after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed [in August 1939]. In the secret protocols the Soviet Union’s geopolitical interests and natural desires for the enlargement of its frontiers were for the first time formally accepted by one of the leading powers of the world.” According to Colonel Grigory Tokaev, Red Army officer in the Soviet Military Administration in Germany at the end of the war, NKVD confidant of Stalin’s and aide to Lavrenti Beria’s deputy, General Ivan Serov, the Soviets were counting on war to expedite Sovietization to the West. This was a view, he said, widely held in the upper echelons of the civilian and military leadership in the Kremlin: “The basic objective remained the same—to ‘Sovietize’ the whole of Europe. [Stalin’s] ultimate objective was global domination.” Other well-informed ex-Soviet military officers or officials, who became exiles in the West before, during, or after World War II, make analogous statements.

The background for Soviet-German friendship is also pertinent to the discussion. After World War I, Germany was viewed by Lenin, and later by Stalin, as Europe’s chief aggrieved “have-not” power. It was, therefore, vulnerable to Soviet overtures of friendship (since Russia was not a party to the Versailles Treaty and, in fact, opposed it). The Soviets calculated that the “inter-imperialist” struggle had entered a new phase with the humiliating treaty that sought to impoverish Germany and its working class. By the terms of the Soviet-Finnish War, in the winter of 1939-1940, the Soviets gained additional “protection” in the form of acquiring geostrategic territory at Finland’s expense on the Soviet northern frontier. Later Stalin demanded all of Bukovina but in discussions with the Germans agreed to Soviet incorporation only of the northern portion. These acquisitions are not viewed by defensists as outright expansion. Nor, oddly, do the defenses make a link between these acquisitions of 1939-1940 and the creation of four republics to the USSR, bringing the total number to sixteen.

By the invasion of June 22, 1941, argue
the offensist historians, the Wehrmacht had simply gotten the jump on Stalin. The Soviet dictator’s overweening arrogance and self-confidence in his relationship with Hitler had blinded him to what was going on. In other words, Hitler had preempted the would-be preemptor, Stalin. The defensists contend that this line is “pro-Nazi” and is unsupported by evidence. They note that Hitler and the generals likewise protested, disingenuously, that Operation Barbarossa had been carried out because Stalin was planning to attack.

What about the immediate pre-June 22, 1941 period? What sorts of military defensive—or offensive—measures did Stalin actually undertake? These could be tangible hints of what the Soviet dictator was planning vis-à-vis Germany.

Noting the Red Army’s offensist posture just before June 22, 1941, offensist writers, including several contemporary Russian military historians, maintain that Stalin’s militarization of the Soviet Union and its impressive rate of defense production during the two pre-World War II Five-year Plans of the 1930s—which, significantly, as these historians argue, were matched by a clearly offensist military strategy—meant one thing: a long-term plan for eventually waging offensive war. Andrei Kokoshin, former First Deputy Minister of Defense, President Yeltsin’s top military adviser and Secretary of the Security Council, put it succinctly in his 1995 book, Armiya i politika (translated in 1998 under the title, Soviet Strategic Thought 1917-91), in reference to Soviet military strategy from 1917 to 1991: “The offensist character of Soviet military strategy was quite obvious.”

Stalin’s secret speech of May 5, 1941, to Red Army military school graduates is another case in point. No full stenographic text of the speech is available. But it has been pieced together on the basis of several extant versions reported by witnesses to the speech. These are analyzed in the new volume, Drugaya voina 1939-1945 (The Other War 1939-1945), a collection of essays under the general editorship of Russian Academician Yuri N. Afanasiev. This volume reproduces parts of three versions of the text of the Stalin speech.

In his address in the Grand Kremlin Palace just weeks before the Germans invaded, Stalin reversed his and Molotov’s allegations of 1939-1940 that England and France were the principal “instigators of a new war.” Germany had now become the main “warmonger,” Stalin declared. Too, he continued, an end must be put to the perception of “German invincibility.” The time has come, he indicated, to organize matters in troop preparation, indoctrination, and procurement of arms in order to prepare to wage offensive war. The Stalin speech was immediately followed by a reception for the Red Army graduates at which Stalin elaborated on his earlier speech. His remarks contained, says a writer in the Afanasiev volume, revealing statements of an offensist tenor, of the “necessity to change from defensive preparations to offensive ones.”

Followup glosses on Stalin’s remarks were given in reports in succeeding days and weeks by such top officials as Molotov, Zhdanov, Malenkov, Shcherbakov (who was in charge of military indoctrination), and by Generals Alexander Vasilevsky and Nikolai Vatutin. In their elaborations of the Stalin speech and reception in the period just before the German invasion, these officials and senior military officers, always referring to Stalin, touted the Stalin-dictated “military policy of conducting offensive actions.” A declaration of Lenin’s was brought out: Any war fought against capitalist powers by the USSR “is a just war, no matter which side starts the war.” (This statement was repeated word for word in Soviet military literature, even in the era of thermo-nuclear weapons and East-West detente.)
Such a war, as planned by the Soviets, claims this school, given the Soviets’ own, long-established Tukhachevskian blitzkrieg tactics, would launch the Red Army into Europe as a liberator as prophesied by Lenin. On the ruins of a defeated Germany, a paralyzed France and Britain, and a remote America that by then would be confronted with a mostly Red Eurasia, revolution would be carried westward on the “tips of bayonets,” to quote Soviet “Red hawk” terminology in reports to the Comintern. In this way the frustration felt by the Soviets (and Stalin personally) from the losses in the 1920 Soviet-Polish War would be redeemed.

With reference to the 1920 Soviet-Polish War, protagonists of Soviet offensivism cite the recently published Lenin stenogram, under the title “Ya proshu zapisyvat’ men’ she: eto nedolzhno popadat’ v pechat’” (“I intend to write less lest it fall into the hands of the press”). In it Lenin predicted in 1920 that with Poland Sovietized, the Red Army would be deployed at Germany’s very borders. Thus positioned, it could then wage an “offensive war” against the West, eventually carrying “liberation war” into all of Europe. “We will impress on the workers,” he declared, “that a new level of revolutionary activity has arrived.... We will exploit every opportunity [from our base in Poland] to go from defense to offense.... We will learn how to wage offensive war.”

The offensivist school disputes the notion of Stalin’s innocent, as it were, acquisition of a needed “buffer zone” by the terms of the Nazi-Soviet agreements. Far from acquiring a buffer facing Germany, this school argues, Stalin had succeeded in moving Soviet borders dangerously nearer the new German frontier—the frontier that the Wehrmacht one day could cross in a blitzkrieg attack against the Soviets. Or was it planned by Stalin to happen the other way around, namely, that Stalin had moved his forces forward in order to realize his strategy of waging a surprise, preemptive war against Germany? Perhaps by summer 1942, Stalin had also increased the extent of Soviet territory in typical “tsar-commissar” fashion.

Nor, significantly, did Stalin immediately build defenses in the newly acquired territories to the west, claim these writers. No “Stalin Line” was erected when the old fortifications were dismantled along the former, pre-1939 Soviet frontier.

In a recent issue of the Russian General Staff quarterly journal, Voennaya mys’ (Military Thought), former Deputy Chief of the General Staff late in the Soviet period, General M. A. Gareyev, notes a dialogue between Stalin and General Georgi K. Zhukov, Chief of the General Staff just prior to the German invasion (cited in Vol. 15, p. 25, of the Works of Stalin, the latter three volumes of which were published in Moscow, 1997):

Stalin, on Zhukov’s proposal in May 1941 to fortify the old, pre-1939 Soviet border: “What?? You intend to withdraw that far?” Zhukov: “I am used to preparing for the worst.”

Thus, instead of following a policy of defense in the newly-acquired territories—the Baltics, Northern Bukovina, and Bessarabia, and in Ukraine and Byelorussia—Stalin, claims this school, deployed mostly offensive troops. These consisted in the main of airborne troops and mechanized divisions following, as it were, Tukhachevsky’s offensivist/deep-penetration formulas as echoed in two successive offensivist-angled Red Army field manuals published in the years preceding the German invasion. These forces were trained and equipped to execute rapid, offensive strikes and deep, behind-the-lines penetrations into enemy territory. Such tactics had been used exemplarily in the 1940-1941 military exercises conducted in the Soviet Union under the guidance of Zhukov. The latter
had actually employed these tactics in combat against the Japanese when he commanded Soviet forces in Khalkin-Gol in Mongolia in the border war of August-September 1939.

Yet authors disagree on what inferences were drawn by Stalin and his top commanders from these exercises. The defensists claim that the conclusions were largely defensive in nature; the offensists say that they were offensive. The former claim further that what was meant by "offensive operations" were offensive counterattacks after the enemy's attacks, not all-out, preemptive preventive-war attacks.

In countering this argument, the offensists refer to the important document, dated May 15, 1941, "Considerations on a Plan for the Strategic Deployment Forces of the Soviet Union in Case of War with Germany and Its Allies." This was cast in the form of a memorandum entitled, "To the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR, Comrade Stalin." The draft was written by Deputy Chief of Operations General Vasilievsky and signed by General Zhukov and Marshal Timoshenko—respectfully, Chief of the General Staff and People's Commissar of Defense. Whether Stalin read the strategic document is not known. These "Sooobrazheniya" (Considerations) are fully reproduced in Afanasiev's volume. The relevant passage reads:

In order to prevent [a German attack], I deem it necessary not to give the enemy the initiative in launching the attack but rather to preempt the enemy's deployment and to attack the German Army at the moment when it is at the stage of deployment so that it is unable to organize the front and coordinate all types of its troops.

The Afanasiev author, military historian Yu. A. Gorkov, underlined the word, "preempt."

At the same time, claims the offensist school, the Soviets built military airfields in forward areas that could be used for launching both tactical and strategic air attacks, thus preemptively taking the Germans by surprise. These, in fact, were the vulnerably deployed frontline forces that Hitler decimated in his blitzkrieg that began on Sunday, 0300, June 22, 1941, and which lasted at full fury for two horrendous weeks. Significantly, the burden of the Soviets' newest equipment and its best trained soldiers—in fact, two-thirds of the entire Red Army at that time—were deployed in these western frontline areas. This buildup represented a 250 percent increase in Soviet combat strength in just two years. Between 1939 and 1941 Soviet military manpower had grown from under 2 million to over 5 million, and from under 100 divisions to more than 300.

But because the Wehrmacht got the jump on the Red Army, Soviet losses, despite or because of Stalin's demand after the June 22nd attack that the Red Army should immediately—and as it turned out in many cases, prematurely—wage counter-offensives, were staggering. Officers who did not succeed in this were executed on Stalin's orders. For the offensist school this amounts to one more proof of the degree of extreme forward deployment of vulnerable offensive rather than defensive Red Army forces.

It likewise illustrates the virtual absence of a Stalinist military policy of tactical and/or strategic withdrawal (retreat). The neglect of defense, in fact, is candidly referenced by a number of post-Communist Russian military writers. Most of these writers attribute this neglect to the predominantly offensist nature of Soviet tactics and strategy at that time.

Thanks to these deployments and Stalin's expectation of a formal declaration of war (or at least opening skirmishes rather than an all-out blitzkrieg along several fronts as actually occurred), the Red Army was caught unprepared on
Sunday rest day. On the first day of the German attack, the Western district alone suffered the loss of 738 aircraft, most of which were destroyed on the ground. In the first few hours of war, the Germans achieved total air supremacy all across the 2,000-mile-plus front, destroying a staggering total of 1,200 aircraft in one day. The forward deployment of Red Army troops on the Central Front in the notoriously vulnerable Byalostok area west of Minsk all but invited a disastrous pincer encirclement of Red Army troops by German panzers and infantry leading to the destruction or capture of a nearly a half-million Red Army soldiers. In the opening phase of Barbarossa, millions of troops fell into enemy hands, either through voluntary surrender or forceful capture. In just two weeks, the German forces appeared to be on their way to winning the war.

After six months of Barbarossa, according to present-day U.S. Army analysts, the Soviets had lost the equivalent of an estimated 229 divisions of troops, combining and counting together all motor-rifle, tank, mechanized, and cavalry forces. In the first four months of the Wehrmacht's campaign, according to recently compiled statistics in Russia, the Soviets had lost nearly 7 million troops (the Germans captured and interned no less than 4 million of these); plus 22,000 tanks and up to 25,000 aircraft. German losses in men, by contrast, were on average less than half the Soviet losses. By November 1942, Soviet losses—dead, wounded, or captured—totaled over 11 million men to the Germans' 4 million. Yet the latter had waged offensive war in which a conventional rule of thumb predicts that the offensive side may be expected to lose many more troops than the defenders.

The debate over just what Stalin was planning in 1939-1941 is more than an academic exercise. A new generation of Russian youth now has new secondary school textbooks in their hands. This writer has examined several of these histories and finds that, for the most part, Communist propaganda about events and domestic and foreign policy under Lenin and Stalin and their successors from 1917 to 1991 has been purged. Yet some lingers on. In the name of historical truth, as well as the therapeutic uses of exposing and condemning past Communist behavior, it is crucial to fill the "white spots" in the Soviet record.

The Communists are still extremely active in today's Russia. And, ominously, they still refuse in many ways to recognize their party's past mistakes, lies, and inhumanity. Even Mikhail Gorbachev, in the heyday or "glasnost," stubbornly refused to acknowledge the very existence of the 1939 secret protocols.