

WHAT IF HITLER HAD DEFEATED RUSSIA?

There is no appeal against the verdict of history. What happened is irreversible and the historian, by definition, can do no more than study past events. Yet how difficult it is, sometimes, not to let the imagination run free for a few moments. How might Russia have evolved, for instance, had Stephan Razin or the leader of one of the many other peasant rebellions come to power? Did Napoleon ever have a real chance of conquering the Russian empire? What if the officers who led the Decembrist uprising in 1825 had succeeded? Official accounts have always resolutely disregarded the enticing 'ifs' of history, but this has not prevented others from enthusiastically continuing to debate them.

The discussion of such hypothetical alternatives in the Russian past is a more or less calm affair. When attention turns to the events of this century, however, the arguments become numerous and heated.

The Second World War, undoubtedly, is a crucial area of controversy. What would have happened to the world if the forces fighting against Hitler had been defeated? What then would have been the fate prepared for Russia and the other Soviet republics? How real were the chances of a Nazi victory? These are not idle questions, for the answers we provide enable us to understand more deeply the significance of the Allies' victory and appreciate the contribution made by the Soviet Union.

The current state of historical research offers convincing evidence for believing that Hitler and his satellites had no prospect of achieving an overall victory. After both the United States and the USSR entered the war the gap between the economic potential of the two sides became so great that even if luck had run the Germans' way they were doomed, sooner or later, to be defeated. Still, this unfavourable prognosis does not exclude the possibility

Counter-history – Dmitry Oleinikov and Sergei Kudryashov offer a fascinating speculation on what might have happened for the future of the world if Operation Barbarossa against the Soviet Union had been successful.

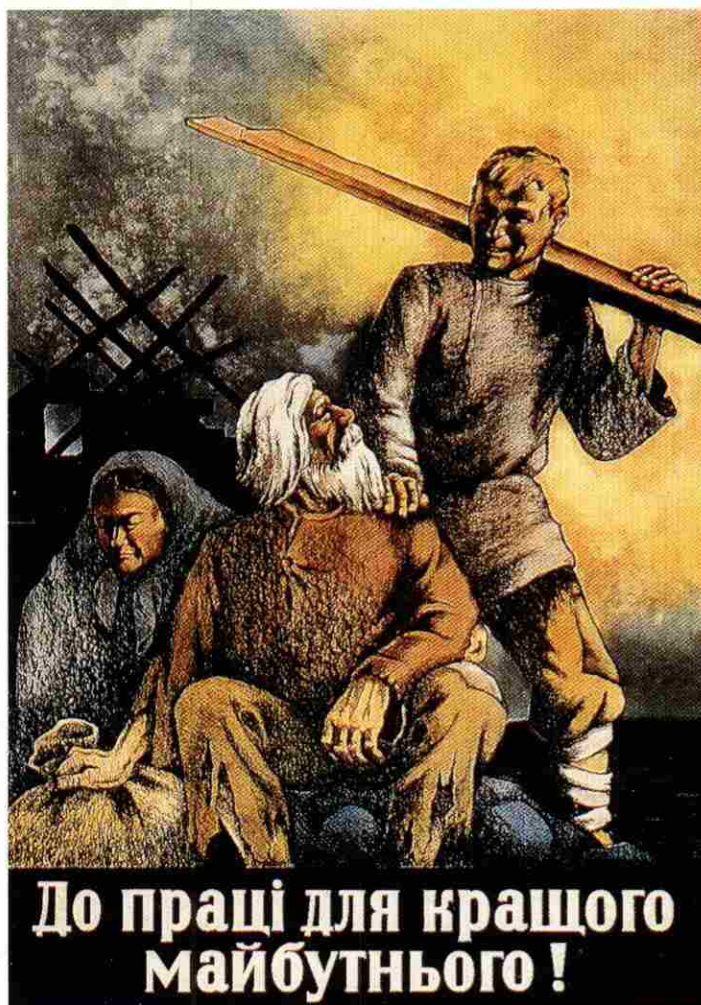
of a temporary victory, especially if the Germans had managed to rout the Red Army.

If we return, for a moment, to the staggering successes of the Wehrmacht in the first few months after it invaded the Soviet Union we can imagine the following hypothetical scenario. The Germans are on the outskirts of Moscow. Stalin decides to abandon the city. The train carrying the Leader and the members of the Politburo is attacked by German planes and, in a single stroke, the country loses almost all its top leadership. Deprived of any central direction, the Red Army ceases to offer effective opposition. Hitler is the victor. His forces occupy the main cities of the Soviet Union. Bolshevik resistance has been broken, it seems, and Russia is almost crushed. Surviving documents enable us to predict realistically what might have happened next.

The partisan movement in the former USSR remained without any central direction for a long while. However, such groups had been set up from the very start, in the summer of 1941, and the experience of organising sabotage and combat behind enemy lines later helped to spread resistance throughout the occupied territories. This spontaneous development took many forms. By May 1942 many villagers and townspeople could already take refuge from the oppressive social and economic demands of the New

Order by retreating to the mountains of the North Caucasus and into the forests of Russia, Belorussia and the Ukraine. The German military strategy was to surround and then isolate the surviving units of the Red Army. As a result, large quantities not only of light arms but also of artillery pieces and tanks were left behind and these fell into the hands of the partisans who began to organ-

ise autonomous areas. This was further aided by the German priority of establishing fortified bases for their troops. A network of partisan-run areas thus arose which were beyond Berlin's control. This was by no means necessarily a retention of Soviet institutions. Nationalist movements also offered armed resistance to the new German regime: the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists, once it had recovered from its crushing defeat at the hands of the Germans in late 1941, resumed the struggle against them. The cemetery of assassinated German officials in Minsk grew continuously and by 1943 contained 1,600 bodies. Among the first to die were Erich Koch, gauleiter of the Ukraine, and V. Kube, commissar general for Belorussia.



До праці для кращого майбутнього!

'Working for a better future' – a cheery exhortation in this 1943 German propaganda poster for the occupied Ukraine.



Russian partisans of the Suvorov guerilla unit near Smolensk and (right) German troops shelling buildings in Stalingrad – would the former have become more formidable and the latter more bogged down even if Moscow had fallen and Stalin been eliminated?

Neither should we underestimate the effects of passive forms of resistance. Civilians resented being treated like slaves and deployed age-old methods to undermine this twentieth-century revival of slavery. 'Much more dangerous than the active resistance of the partisans', acknowledged Abwehr 2, the military intelligence department of the South Army group, in late 1941, 'is the passive resistance we are encountering here: we have even less chance of overcoming such sabotage at work'. Throughout 1942 the Germans were forced to import Silesian coal into the major mining region of the Donbass.

Finally, the Soviet system still remained intact further to the East. The German army had halted, as planned, at a line running from Archangel through Kazan to Astrakhan. Retaining the territory already occupied was proving as difficult as its initial conquest. The German forces were sufficient to keep control of large population centres, major lines of communication and industrial areas, but no more.

West of the Volga the USSR ceased to exist. Karelia was united with Finland. After a sustained and deliberate bombardment by artillery of various calibre, Leningrad was effectively annihilated. The Finnish government had 'no use' for the city and for Hitler it symbolised the birth and success of a hostile political system. The Baltic states and part of Belorussia were subsumed in the Reich Commissariat Ostland and almost a third of the area's population was expelled eastwards, to the new Reich

Commissariat Muscovy. A further 20 per cent reduction was planned through birth-control measures: abortions and contraception were encouraged and a sterilisation programme using the methods of Professor Karl Klauberg was begun (after experiments in Nazi concentration camps Klauberg had declared in 1943 that one doctor working with ten assistants could sterilise up to a hundred women a day).

Another 25 per cent of the Ostland population was being prepared for transfer to West Siberia where, once the area was also occupied by the Germans, they would help to bring those 'fertile areas' under cultivation. Those not wanting to work for the Germans could still, for a while, flee eastwards or be sent to concentration camps. Each year a million Jews throughout occupied Soviet territory were exterminated as part of the 'final solution of the Jewish problem' and gypsies were slaughtered, man, woman and child.

Reich Commissariat Ukraine extended as far as Saratov and Stalingrad on the Volga, since it was intended to become Germany's bread-basket. The Crimea came directly under the Reich administration and in Sebastopol the statue of General Totleben, a hero of the Crimean War (and a Russian general of German origin), was restored. The area west and south-west of the city of Nikolaev, embracing Trans-Dniester, Bessarabia and Bukovina, was

handed over to Germany's ally Romania. Reich Commissariat Caucasian Region included the Astrakhan Region and became a major source of oil for the Germans: the local population was forcibly drafted to work on a vast new railway line running from Baku through Maikop and Rostov to Munich. Many Caucasian nationalities were encouraged to believe that the long-awaited end to Russian domination had come. (Arme-

**'Our policy towards the nations inhabiting the vast expanses of Russia must be to encourage every form of discord and division'.
Adolf Hitler**

nia, on the other hand, was handed over to Turkey to stiffen the latter's resolve). Everywhere the new *lingua franca* was German.

Hitler had wanted to raze Moscow to the ground, just like Leningrad. Pragmatic considerations halted him. The Reich Commissariat Muscovy stretched over a vast area of European Russia and was divided into three regions (Tula, Gorky and the North). The 'Ost' plan for colonising the Eastern territories specified that a policy of 'divide and rule' should also be implemented here and that the Russians should be 'inculcated with a sense' of their own regional allegiance. Below this level those appointed to head the area, district and village

authorities were, as a rule, local inhabitants. In a number of cases, the Germans made use of former administrators including Communists. Rural and urban populations were carefully registered and the Soviet passport was retained as the basic identity document. Those for some reason left off the registration lists were sent to camps for civilian prisoners or set to work for army service units.

A policy of Germanisation of the remaining Russian population, already reduced by 40 per cent, was pursued by substituting Latin for Cyrillic scripts in schools. Education was no longer free and for most people lasted no more than four years. The aims were extremely limited and specific. The individual should learn how to sign his or her name, and be taught that it was God's will that the Russians serve the Germans, and that He desired them to be honest, hard-working and obedient. An ability to read was considered unnecessary. Each year all children were tested to detect those with mental deficiencies. The right to education beyond the minimum was strictly limited and the fees increased with each additional year of study. The urban population was artificially reduced to the minimum level at which industry could still function. Tens and hundreds of thousands of Russians were transported to the Reich for use as *Ostarbeiter*, a cheap and hardy labour force for the master race.

The economy of the occupied territories was entirely subordinated to Germany's needs. Invaluable resources

were systematically removed and the largest remaining plants and factories were organised to suit German requirements. In the countryside the new authorities encouraged a traditional way of life and subsistence farming. Since the state and collective farms proved an excellent way of extracting food from the villages they were retained, to a large extent, by the occupiers as a way of preserving the peasants' collective responsibility. The Germans permitted the peasants to continue owning private garden plots. The particularly zealous and outstanding workers among them were allowed to acquire small workshops and enterprises, such as windmills and dairies.

The exchange rate of the rouble to the Reichsmark was fixed at 10:1, irrespective of inflation. Salaries and wages were rigidly set, starting at 400 roubles a month for a worker, and reaching a top level of 1200-1500 roubles for an enterprise director (an average meal then cost 30-50 roubles).

The population was left without any cultural life of its own. Every art-form and means of communication was used to propagate National Socialist ideas. The radio and dozens of newspapers in the different regions trumpeted the superiority of the Aryan race, the virtues of submissiveness and hard work, and anti-Semitism. Religion was tolerated but if necessary churches were demolished and their property seized.

The political activities of the population were severely limited and strictly supervised. Collaborators were used and encouraged but not recognised as 'equals'. National Socialist study circles were allowed but even they were under close observation. Youth organisations with up to 30,000 members existed in Ostland but were not very active.

German success in the war against Russia [sic] prompted Turkey and Japan to act more decisively. The latter began its military activities in the Far East by seizing North Sakhalin with its oil and coal from the USSR. This delayed the start of Japan's war against the USA and the tragedy of Pearl Harbor did not occur. In turn this meant that America was able to provide far more effective aid to Britain, which bore the brunt of the fighting in 1942. By spring that year vast forces

had been freed on the Eastern Front and could again be sent westwards. In Russia there remained fifty-six divisions with headquarters in Moscow, a large airforce, and the expeditionary force (eight infantry and four motorised divisions) which had been formed to

**'We are waging our crusade against Bolshevism not so as to liberate the "poor Russians", once and for all, from that affliction but in order to ensure the security of the German Reich and carry out the German policy towards the world. ... Therefore, there is no question of a war to establish an undivided Russia'.
Reichsleiter Rosenberg,
June 20th, 1941**

attack and eliminate the Russians' industrial base in the Urals. Add to these the units in the Caucasus-Iran group, which had marched through the Caucasus to Persia, and it still only accounts for a part of the military potential so released.

The main opponent engaging and destroying the German land forces had ceased operations. Yet even had the Red Army continued to fight, Germany would not have begun to feel the effect on its human resources until the autumn of 1943. Only then did the total number of Germans under arms drop below the level of

1941. Two million soldiers who now were not destined to die on the Eastern Front in 1942 could return westwards, to the northern shores of Germany and France.

As long ago as June 31st, 1940, Hitler had declared at a conference at the Berghof, 'if Russia is smashed Britain's last hope will be shattered'. At the beginning of January 1941 he would repeat: 'If the Russian threat were eliminated we could wage war on Britain indefinitely'. Germany had effectively lost the first phase of its air war against Britain between August and November 1940. In 1942 that campaign was renewed with increased vigour. Occupied Russian territory, with its output of non-ferrous metals, was expected, under the 'Göring plan', to produce a third of the needed aircraft, thereby greatly increasing German chances of success this time. Regular production of the Heinkel 117 bomber, a major new weapon in the war not only against Britain but also the USA, could now be set in motion. Neither did Germany lose 12,975 planes on the Eastern Front during 1942 (in 1944 the Allies would secure mastery of the skies during the Overlord operation with fewer aircraft).

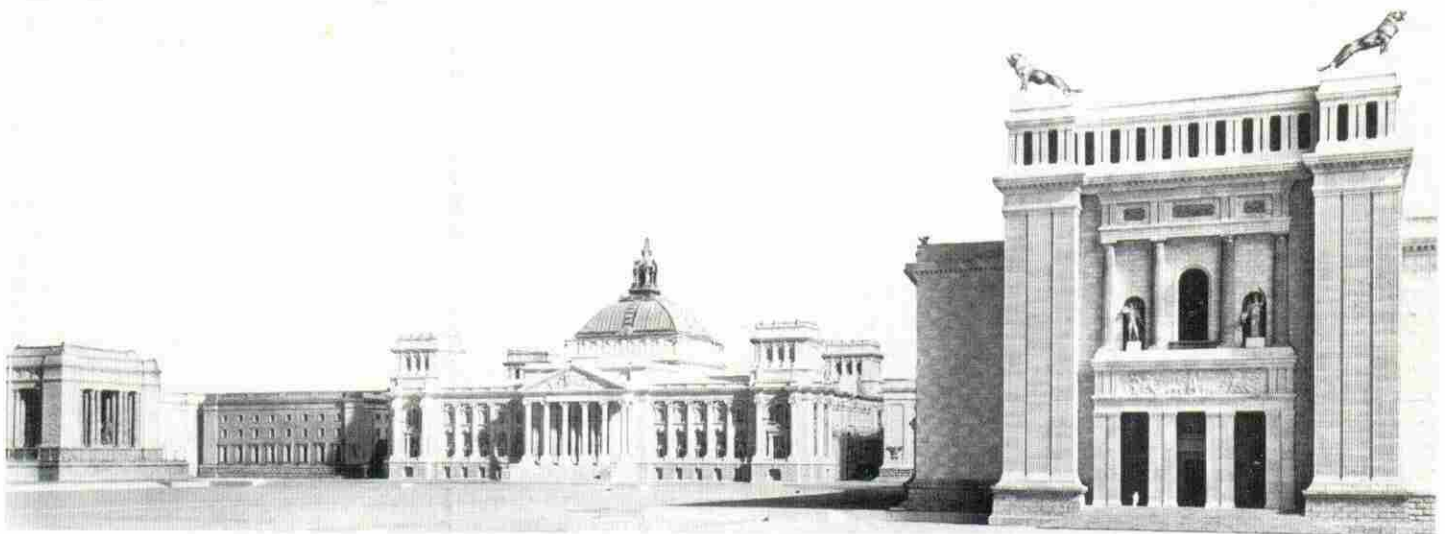
Of course, by 1942 Britain was better prepared for any German offensives. American troops were coming to her aid, and so were the US air force and fleet. Germany was not strong enough to win the Bat-

tle of the Atlantic but now had the capacity to implement Operation Sea Lion, postponed in 1940. To begin with, the war in the skies was renewed. This time Göring did not repeat this mistake of 1940 and his planes did not slacken their steady and much heavier bombardment of the airfields and observation posts of southern England. The direct invasion of Britain was 'not feasible until ... Germany has complete air superiority': this constant refrain from Hitler's General Headquarters defined the importance of the air-war in its strategy. All that now remained was to gather sufficient craft to effect a landing.

The Russians had sunk their fleet, just as on the Black Sea in 1855 and 1918, to prevent it falling into enemy hands, but in the Baltic and on Russia's rivers there remained a large number of vessels suitable for transporting soldiers and materials. These were shipped westwards and by September 1942 or, at the latest, May 1943, it was possible to launch Operation Sea Lion. The battles over the Atlantic and the Channel involving hundreds of planes, the bombing of London and Berlin and the struggle to establish a bridgehead in southern England was a war between Nazi-occupied Europe and the last outpost of freedom. The military, meanwhile,

Terrorising resistance - young Russian partisans being hanged in Minsk, October 1941.





made increasingly loud demands for every available means of fighting to be used, including chemical warfare. Work on the atom bomb proceeded apace. By 1945 southern England was hideously disfigured by war but German forces continued to maintain their foothold there. A war of attrition had set in.

The strength and the weakness of great empires has always lain in their vast territorial possessions. The Third Reich swelled rapidly at first but, at the end, suffered just as drastic a collapse. The constant haemorrhage of its campaigns against Britain and the USA prevented it from swallowing up Russia and the territory beyond the Urals – an area larger than the entire Third Reich itself. (Under peacetime conditions the Nazis had planned to devote ten years to their colonisation).

Hundreds of enterprises, producing 40 per cent of the USSR's wartime output, were evacuated to the Urals and beyond during 1941, together with the supplies of ferrous and non-ferrous metals, fuel, coal and human resources they required to function. Japan waged a bitter war to disrupt the air corridor linking the region with the United States and disable the railway from the USSR's Far Eastern ports. The area stretching from Perm, Magnitogorsk and Chelyabinsk in the Urals to Krasnoyarsk and Novosibirsk in Siberia became a new focus of Russian resistance just like Nizhny Novgorod and Yaroslavl during the seventeenth-century 'Time of Troubles'. The Soviet regime reorganised and reinforced itself here before unleashing a powerful counter-attack, a

Albert Speer's model for the grand square in Germania, the new name for an expanded Berlin to be completed in 1950 after Germany had won the war.

westward thrust under a campaign slogan first heard during the Patriotic War against Napoleon: 'Moscow has fallen, but Russia is not lost!' A growing resistance movement began to squeeze the brown of German Fascism off the map of Europe.

Germany increasingly lost command of the seas and the Atlantic in its struggle against Britain and eventually had to withdraw its forces, threatening to cover the island with bombs and showering the remnants of London with its V-2 rockets. A lengthy battle for control over the Channel was followed by a similarly ferocious struggle for the coasts of Europe. America had to expend great efforts not only in the Atlantic but also in helping to free the Far Eastern coastline of the USSR, and this hampered its fight against the Japanese. By the end of the 1940s the war was inexorably approaching the same denouement that was, in historical fact, achieved in 1943-45.

By then Roosevelt, Stalin, Churchill and Hitler (at last successfully assassinated) were no longer alive. European Fascism retreated from West, East and South towards Berlin, across a Europe devastated by almost ten years of war – a starving, homeless continent that had seen the mushroom cloud of nuclear explosions rise over Dresden and Hamburg. That atomic cataclysm was only part of the tragedy of the German nation. After witnessing for so long the barbarities of the Nazis against their fellow citizens, the French, English, Russians, Poles,

Ukrainians and Belorussians were far less restrained in their actions towards the defeated Germans than was the case in 'real history'.

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Translated by John Crowfoot
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An idyllic vision of agrarian plenty and private initiative painted in this German propaganda poster for occupied Russia – the 'untermenschen' reality would have been rather different.

