

Stalin and the Soviet Union



Questions and Analysis in History

STEPHEN J. LEE

ROUTLEDGE

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SERIES PREFACE

Most history textbooks now aim to provide the student with interpretation, and many also cover the historiography of a topic. Some include a selection of sources.

So far, however, there have been few attempts to combine *all* the skills needed by the history student. Interpretation is usually found within an overall narrative framework and it is often difficult to separate out the two for essay purposes. Where sources are included, there is rarely any guidance as to how to answer the questions on them.

The Questions and Analysis series is therefore based on the belief that another approach should be added to those which already exist. It has two main aims.

The first is to separate narrative from interpretation so that the latter is no longer diluted by the former. Each chapter starts with a background narrative section containing essential information. This material is then used in a section focusing on analysis through a specific question. The main purpose of this is to help to tighten up essay technique.

The second aim is to provide a comprehensive range of sources for each of the issues covered. The questions are of the type which appear on examination papers, and some have worked answers to demonstrate the techniques required.

The chapters may be approached in different ways. The background narratives can be read first to provide an overall perspective, followed by the analyses and then the sources. The alternative method is to work through all the components of each chapter before going on to the next.

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1

STALIN'S RISE AND RULE

BACKGROUND NARRATIVE

At the time of Lenin's death in 1924, Stalin was forty-five. He had become a member of the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party in 1912 and arrived in Petrograd in February 1917 after a period of enforced exile in Siberia. He played only a minor role in the October Revolution and a relatively inconspicuous part in the Civil War. He did, however, spend the period between 1917 and 1924 building up his position within government and the Party. By the time of Lenin's death he had accumulated the posts of People's Commissar for Nationalities in 1917, liaison official between the Politburo and the Orgburo in 1919 and General Secretary of the Party in 1922. These roles gave him a greater overview than was possessed by anyone else: the implications are examined in [Analysis \(1\)](#).

This did not mean that Stalin would automatically become Lenin's successor. Indeed, his ambitions incurred Lenin's distrust to the extent that, in his Political Testament, Lenin warned against Stalin and, in a codicil added in January 1923, recommended his removal from the post of General Secretary. However, Lenin died before any further action could be taken and Stalin was soon able to put himself forward as one of the contenders for the succession.

At first Stalin was seen by other Bolsheviks as less of a threat than Trotsky who, it was thought, might use his influence with the army to introduce a military dictatorship. Hence Kamenev and Zinoviev joined with Stalin in a power-sharing triumvirate. This was committed to pursuing a policy of 'Socialism in One Country', based at this stage on giving priority to the cautious pursuit of economic recovery within Russia through the continuation of the New Economic Policy (NEP), which had been started by Lenin in 1921. Ranged against this approach was the more radical Permanent Revolution favoured by Trotsky. This incorporated proposals for revolution abroad and radicalism at home—including rapid industrialisation and the introduction of collective farming. These views

failed to gain widespread acceptance and Trotsky was increasingly marginalised during the course of 1925.

Then, between 1925 and 1927, Stalin became involved in a conflict with Kamenev and Zinoviev, who now considered Trotsky a lesser threat and therefore lined up with him to form the 'Left Opposition'. Stalin promptly aligned with the Party's 'Rightists', especially Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsy. This alliance secured the expulsion of Trotsky, Kamenev and Zinoviev from the Party. During the course of 1929, the Rightists were, in turn, attacked, as Stalin removed Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsy. By the end of 1929 Stalin's position as leader was secure. Bukharin warned that 'Stalin will strangle us. He is an unprincipled intriguer who subordinates everything to his lust for power.'

Meanwhile, Stalin had also changed the emphasis of his policy. Socialism in One Country came to mean the abandonment of the moderate NEP and the pursuit of a more radical programme of collectivisation and rapid industrialisation. In effect Stalin was now implementing ideas similar to those of Trotsky—although without the connection with Permanent Revolution.

[Analysis \(1\)](#) explains the reasons for the rapid shifts and changes that helped place Stalin in power, while [Analysis \(2\)](#) considers what type of rule Stalin actually established.

ANALYSIS (1): WHY DID STALIN SUCCEED LENIN?

Stalin's rise to power between 1924, when he appeared to have been ruled out of the succession by Lenin's codicil, and 1929, when he had eliminated all credible alternatives, has inevitably attracted a wide range of explanations. These need not necessarily be exclusive of each other: indeed, a combination is more likely to reflect the complexity of the background and issues involved.

A general starting point is the cyclical pattern that has frequently been applied to revolutions. Between 1793 and 1794, for example, the French Revolution had experienced a radical phase, often known as the Reign of Terror. This had been sharply reversed by the *coup d'état* of Thermidor, in which the policies and leadership swung to the right, eventually to be taken over by the military under Napoleon Bonaparte. By 1802 the French Republic had been converted into the personalised rule of Napoleon.

The Bolsheviks drew lessons from this pattern that helped shape future events. One of the main advantages that Stalin had was that he was seen as a much safer alternative to Trotsky. The latter was associated by many with a possible Bonapartist threat, largely because of the way in which he had built up the Red Army during the Civil War between 1918 and 1921. Because of this deterministic belief that revolutionary patterns might repeat

themselves, Trotsky was feared and isolated which, ironically, enabled Stalin to emerge. In exile during the 1930s, Trotsky redefined the lessons of history by associating Stalin with the Thermidorian reaction and with the slide towards Bonapartism —by which time the damage had already been done. The lessons of history differ according to the power of those who interpret them. The Bolsheviks, by trying to avoid repeating one mistake, merely committed another.

What made Stalin appear historically ‘safe’ to the Bolsheviks was the general perception of him at the time. He was considered pedestrian: Trotsky referred to him as ‘the Party’s most eminent mediocrity’. He certainly lacked Trotsky’s intellectual ability, had no contacts with European culture and spoke no European language apart from Russian. These points, however, worked to Stalin’s advantage. He was considered to be safer than Trotsky, who was clearly influenced by contacts with Western Europe. For this reason, Stalin’s obvious Slavic influences were advantageous, particularly since the failure of Trotsky’s plans for revolution elsewhere in Europe boosted the credibility of Stalin’s emphasis on isolationism. Trotsky was condemned in a Party Central Committee Resolution in January 1925 for ‘a falsification of communism in the spirit of approximation to “European” patterns of pseudo-Marxism’. (1) Trotsky was also considered to be intolerably arrogant by his colleagues, a perception that blinkered all the other leaders to the even greater dangers of his underestimated rival.

For beneath Stalin’s bland and grey exterior was a singularly ruthless and opportunist character. While posing as a moderate, he waited for the opportunity to attack other candidates for the leadership —first Zinoviev and Kamenev, then Bukharin. Historians have remained in agreement about Stalin’s attributes here. Martin McCauley’s view is typical: ‘He was a very skilful politician who had a superb grasp of tactics, could predict behaviour extremely well and had an unerring eye for personal weaknesses.’ (2) In particular, he was able to capitalise on Bukharin’s inability to convert his plausible economic theory into a credible programme, on Kamenev’s lack of vision and on Zinoviev’s organisational weakness. Stalin, by contrast, showed consistent skills in grouping around him an alternative set of allies—men like Kalinin, Kuibyshev, Molotov and Voroshilov.

Particularly important in Stalin’s rise was his manipulation of the central organs of the Communist Party. The process was mutually reinforcing. As General Secretary in 1922, Stalin controlled the Party organisation and the promotion of its leading members. They, in turn, came to support him against his potential rivals. The Communist Party was officially a democratic institution, in which the local parties elected the central Party Congress which, in turn, produced the membership of the Central Committee. The Central Committee then elected the Politburo, the key

decision-making body. The membership of the local parties was determined by the Secretariat, which was, from 1922, under Stalin's control. Over a period of time, therefore, Stalin's supporters gradually moved into the upper levels of the Party. They were given the added incentive of filling the vacancies of those removed above them—who were usually Stalin's main rivals.

This Party base enabled Stalin to outmanoeuvre his rivals at all stages. It also meant that he was consistently more secure than Trotsky. At first sight this seems odd. Trotsky had, after all, had a powerful military base. As Commissar for War, he had developed and expanded the Red Army in defeating the threats from the Whites. He was also renowned for his powers of oratory, for his administrative abilities and for his skill in mobilising the limited resources of Bolshevik Russia at the time of its greatest peril. For these reasons Trotsky has been referred to as 'the dynamo of the militarised Bolshevik state'. (3) But this apparent strength was also a major source of weakness. Trotsky was essentially a man of the state, which had, of course, become subject to the Party—over which Stalin had consolidated his position. Hence Stalin controlled the methods by which Trotsky could be outmanoeuvred. Trotsky, admittedly, had control over the means by which Stalin could be overthrown but, for ideological reasons, this was too strong a measure to use. Yet, because he had this potential power, other Bolshevik leaders were persuaded that Trotsky posed a Bonapartist threat and therefore supported Stalin.

But even this would have had limited effect if he had not been assisted by objective circumstances, the most important of which was the threat of the impending collapse of Bolshevism into chaos, to which two main factors contributed. The first of these was the failure of revolution abroad. Trotsky's reputation had been closely tied to the spread of communism in Europe. But the opportunities for this had all disappeared by 1919. The Spartacists failed to seize power in Germany, while the Bela Kun regime was overthrown in Hungary in under a hundred days. The benefit to Stalin was enormous. According to Colletti, 'The first rung of the ladder which was to carry Stalin to power was supplied by the Social-Democratic leaders who in January 1919 murdered Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht... The remaining rungs were supplied by the reactionary wave which subsequently swept Europe.' (4) Against this Stalin could project a solid, traditionally Slavic appeal that was more in keeping with his emphasis on Socialism in One Country.

The second factor favouring Stalin was the insecurity of Bolshevik economic policies. The two strategies proposed for the 1920s appeared to be alarmingly antagonistic. On the one hand was the planned retreat of the NEP—what Lenin described as 'one step forward, two steps backward'. Bukharin interpreted this as meaning that the economy should now progress at the pace of 'the peasant's slowest nag'. On the other hand,

Trotsky and the Leftists argued for increasing the pace of industrialisation to implement socialism. Russia was therefore caught up in a conflict involving a new peasantry, which benefited from a revived capitalism allowed by the NEP, and the urban workers who had more to gain from accelerated socialism. Stalin was actually one of the few leading Bolsheviks who were able to make the necessary adjustments between these extremes, being adaptable to the conditions of the time. The early 1920s favoured the NEP and the Rightists, whereas the procurement crisis of 1927 demonstrated that the NEP was no longer working and hence needed a radical rethink. His struggle against Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsky was therefore seen by many at the time as a balanced reaction to a policy that had failed by all objective criteria. This may or may not have been true, but the important factor is that the majority of the Party thought this way. They also considered that they had good grounds for supporting the leader to whom many owed their places. Stalin therefore confirmed support for his position by reading correctly the signs of the economic times. A recent view is that ‘Machine politics alone did not account for Stalin’s triumph’; rather ‘the salient political fact’ of 1928–9 was ‘a growing climate of high party opinion’. (5) Stalin’s ability to bend like a reed therefore owed much to the prevailing wind of circumstances.

One final issue needs careful analysis. The rise of Stalin can be seen too much as the calculation of a supremely rational Party machine taking advantage of an efficient dictatorship already established by Lenin. What we have already seen *might* point in this direction. Or the reverse could apply. The revolution had experienced an emergency in the form of the Civil War, which had created widespread chaos. Policies and organisations were thrown into the melting pot. Stalin was an average politician by normal criteria but his rather basic skills were enhanced by these circumstances. He succeeded not in producing order overall but in controlling particular pressure points. Trotsky was right about Stalin’s ability but wrong about the situation that allowed the latter to prevail. The situation in Russia favoured the pragmatist, who had built up his base within the Party. This had been made possible by the use of certain skills that had been misinterpreted—part of a more general political enslavement to the ‘lessons’ of history.

Questions

1. Was Trotsky’s description of Stalin as ‘the Party’s most eminent mediocrity’ a true one?
2. Why, against Lenin’s express wishes, did Stalin assume the succession?

ANALYSIS (2): WHAT SORT OF DICTATOR WAS STALIN BETWEEN 1929 AND 1941?

Interpretations of Stalin are beginning to change. This is for two main reasons. The first is that historians have already done much to revise earlier views about Hitler and Nazi Germany. It was always likely that Stalin would be next in line for their attention. Second, the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 released a considerable amount of material not previously seen and also altered many earlier conceptions about the type of regime Stalin had established. There are now two main images of Stalin and students have never had a greater opportunity to develop their own interpretations of the period—based on either, both or neither.

Traditional views

The traditional view of Stalin is easily recognisable. Once he had established himself in power by 1929, his regime became utterly ruthless and, because of this, was the most efficient of the totalitarian dictatorships. Politically it was more rigidly controlled than Nazi Germany or Fascist Italy. Neither Hitler nor Mussolini swept away the previous political systems of his country; instead, they simply added another layer and created administrative problems. In Russia, by contrast, the Bolsheviks had destroyed the Tsarist political system, rejected the Western democratic alternative to which the Provisional Government might eventually have led, and radically altered Russia's institutions. Lenin had set up a system of soviets that were subordinated to the Bolshevik Party. Stalin took this further: he exerted greater personal control over the Party and therefore headed a fully integrated system of political control. His personalised dictatorship was much more successful than Hitler's or Mussolini's.

To intensify this control and to ensure its permanence, Stalin unleashed a flood of coercion and terror that was unprecedented and unparalleled. The NKVD and the purges were responsible for the deaths of many millions of Soviet people. This was on a scale unequalled by Mussolini's OVRA or Hitler's SS, even if one includes the Nazi policy of genocide against the Jews. The sheer efficiency of this control meant that Stalin was never seriously threatened politically; he could even afford to introduce progressive changes like the 1936 Constitution, knowing that he could easily stamp out any move towards meaningful opposition to him.

Stalin was able to use his political power to introduce a series of economic changes. These were, admittedly, of mixed success. His policy of collectivisation, launched in 1928, was a disaster in terms of agricultural production. It also resulted in widespread peasant opposition. His whole intention, however, was to exploit agriculture as a means of subsidising

industrial growth which, in the long term, was a major success. The first three Five-Year Plans succeeded in developing heavy industry to the point where it was ultimately responsible for the survival of the Soviet Union during the Second World War. It managed to do this without having to resort to any sort of dependence on outside investment; success was achieved by exploitation of the Soviet population. Peasants were obliged to subsidise industrial growth through the sacrifice of their profits in agriculture, while peasants and workers alike had to give up any hopes of acquiring consumer goods as heavy industry took priority over light industry. In other words, Stalin's economic policy was ruthless but arrived at an effective industrial outcome.

Stalin was also responsible for some major social and cultural changes, again enhancing his own power. He reversed the radicalism of the Lenin era, which had aimed to achieve greater equality, to weaken the family and to experiment with new approaches to education. Stalin restored differentials, based on economic performance, revived the family as the basic social unit and brought traditional methods back to education. These measures, together with his emphasis on a traditionally Russian culture, were all designed to enhance his own image and to ensure that he was able to exert effective control through well-defined social channels.

Even foreign policy was dominated by Stalin. Although there has always been some debate as to what his precise objectives were, he nevertheless determined its overall rationale and dictated what course it should take. He made errors among his successes but was unquestionably one of the most pragmatic of all the statesmen contributing to the international scene between the wars. The Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, drawn up with Germany in 1939, was the creation of an adept planner or a supreme opportunist; either way, it was the cynical act of a ruthless dictator at the peak of his power.

Revised views

Such is the traditional view of Stalin, which links his ruthlessness with the overall effectiveness of the Soviet Union as a totalitarian regime. We are now seeing the early stages of an alternative view of Stalin that will inevitably raise some eyebrows and incur some resistance.

It is important to emphasise that one thing has *not* changed. Stalin is still seen by most historians as perhaps the most ruthless dictator of the twentieth century, responsible for the deaths of many millions and prepared to make cynical use of terror on a massive scale. It remains extremely difficult to attempt to justify Stalin's actions, and many historians are still anxious not to be seen to be rehabilitating Stalin as a character. Some, indeed, build this into their otherwise radical reinterpretations

almost as an apology. Stalin therefore remains largely condemned for his actions.

What is beginning to change is the assumption that ruthlessness of necessity brought efficiency. Instead, Stalinist Russia is now starting to be seen as even more ramshackle than Nazi Germany, with Stalin being pushed by circumstances as much as he controlled them. His effectiveness is therefore being cut down to size so that he has been reduced to the same level as Hitler. The overall argument for this is summarised below.

Stalin achieved power partly through his own abilities, but largely through circumstances that were moving in his favour. Lenin's Bolshevik regime had run into the buffers by 1921 and had had to resort to the New Economic Policy and a general relaxation of the earlier, radical War Communism. By 1927, however, moderation was failing to deliver results, so radicalism was revived with renewed energy. This coincided with Stalin's consolidation of power, so that he was able to take the initiative in launching a series of new programmes such as collectivisation, the Five-Year Plans and political centralisation. In this respect Stalin was reactivating the earlier dynamism of the Bolsheviks and was stealing some of the policies for which he had condemned Trotsky to exile. He was determined to push ahead with this radicalism through economic and social change, making full use of his greatly enhanced political power.

So far, there is much continuity with the traditional line on Stalin. But then comes a major departure. Far from being a model totalitarian dictatorship, the Stalinist political system was remarkably defective. The main problem, as shown in [Chapter 2](#), was that there was less power at the centre than is commonly supposed. The core of both the administration and the Party had enormous difficulty in exerting controls over local officials and institutions. Although Stalin took the *initiative* for most of the policies of the period 1929–41, he frequently lost control over their *implementation*, as here the initiative passed to the localities. Usually what happened was that local officials and groups pressed on too enthusiastically in carrying out their orders, creating widespread chaos that then had to be dealt with by the centre applying the brakes. This, in turn, would transfer to local inertia so that, again, the centre had to recreate the initial momentum. There were therefore violent swings of the pendulum: local interests sought to interpret central policies in the most favourable way, in response to which the centre had to take corrective action. As a general principle, therefore, Stalin's political power was used initially in a *proactive* way, but then became increasingly *reactive*. At times he came dangerously close to losing control altogether. This pattern can be seen in four main areas.

The first is the purges. The traditional assumption is that Stalin was entirely responsible for the terror that swept the country during the 1930s and again after 1945. Certainly he initiated it. But it is highly questionable

whether he was able to control it, and it could well have assumed a momentum far beyond what he had intended. [Analysis \(2\)](#) in [Chapter 2](#) shows how the purges were exacerbated by local forces that interpreted Stalin's orders in their own way, whether on collective farms or in factories. The incidence of terror ebbed and flowed as Stalin sought constantly to regain the initiative.

A similar picture emerges with the economy ([Chapter 3](#)). Stalin launched a policy of collectivisation in 1928, only to find that it was implemented too rapidly and unsystematically. Local party officials and detachments of the NKVD exceeded their quotas, for which they were rebuked by Stalin in 1930. When the brakes were applied, local interests became more defensive so that a second offensive had to be launched and the whole economy became caught up with the purges. In industry, too, local managers had their own reasons for reinterpreting instructions from the centre. The overall result was that economic changes were defective in their planning and execution.

Stalin's social changes have also been misinterpreted (see [Chapter 4](#)). He did not reverse a radical Bolshevik trend: this is too positive a perception. The situation was that the changes made by the Bolsheviks were already beginning to slow down under the impetus of the NEP after 1921. Stalin attempted to revive the radical policies in relation to the family and education—only to find that these added to the chaos of the early 1930s that was apparent in politics and the economy. For this reason there was a swing back to support for traditional social institutions and a revival of conservative educational policies. This has been seen as part of a deliberate effort to underpin Stalin's personal authoritarian status. It could, however, be interpreted as a more instinctive reaction to escape the consequences of a programme that was not working.

Even Stalin's foreign policy had examples of measures to compensate for mistakes and for periodic loss of control over events. [Chapter 5](#) shows how he actively assisted the rise of Hitler up to 1933, only to discover that he had helped create a monster that he could not control. For this reason he sought security in a Franco-Soviet pact in 1935 which, in turn, was wrecked by the Anglo-French policy of appeasement towards Germany. Faced with this situation, Stalin was pushed increasingly towards agreement with Hitler. The Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of 1939 was the climax of a series of adjustments and attempts to regain lost initiative.

Of these two broad approaches to Stalin, [Chapters 2](#) to [5](#) will develop the latter. [Chapters 6](#) and [7](#) will convey a similarly revisionist interpretation of the period 1941–53.

Questions

1. Why does historical interpretation change?

2. How, in general terms, has the interpretation of Stalin's dictatorship between 1929 and 1941 changed?

SOURCES

1.

STALIN'S RISE TO POWER

Source A:

**extracts from Lenin's Testament (24 December 1922) and
the codicil added to it in January 1923.**

(24 December 1922)

Comrade Stalin, having become General Secretary, has concentrated limitless power in his hands, and I am not certain that he will always be careful enough in his use of this power.

(4 January 1923)

Stalin is too rough, and this shortcoming, while completely tolerable in relations among us communists, becomes intolerable in the post of General Secretary. Therefore I propose to the comrades to think over the means of transferring Stalin from this post and appointing to it some other person who is superior to Stalin only in one respect, namely, in being more tolerant, more loyal, more polite and more attentive to comrades, less capricious, and so on. This circumstance may seem an insignificant trifle. But I think that, from the point of view of preventing a split and from the point of view of what I have written... about the relations between Stalin and Trotsky, it is not a trifle, or it is the kind of trifle that is capable of acquiring decisive significance.

Source B:

from a speech by Stalin to the Fifteenth Congress in 1927.

Our Party is a living organism. Like every organism, it undergoes a process of metabolism: the old and obsolete passes away [applause], the new and growing lives and develops. [Applause] Some go away, both at the top and at the bottom. New ones grow, both at the top and at the bottom, and lead the cause forward. That is how our Party grew. That is how it will continue to grow.

The same must be said about the present period of our revolution. We are in the period of a turn from the restoration of Industry and agriculture to the reconstruction of the entire national economy, to its reconstruction on a new technical basis, when the building of socialism is no longer

merely in prospect, but a living, practical matter, which calls for the surmounting of extremely great difficulties of an internal and external character.

You know that this turn has proved fatal to the leaders of our opposition, who were scared by the new difficulties and intended to turn the Party in the direction of surrender. And if certain leaders, who do not want to sit firmly in the cart, now fall out, it is nothing to be surprised at. It will merely rid the Party of people who are getting in its way and hindering its progress. Evidently, they seriously want to free themselves from our Party cart. Well, if some of the old leaders who are running into trash intend to fall out of the cart—a good riddance to them!

Source C:
**from an eyewitness report on Stalin by the American
 journalist Louis Fischer, who accompanied an American
 labour delegation on a visit to the Soviet Union in 1927.**

Trotsky waves the magic wand of a magnetic personality and captures his interlocutor. Stalin does not. But as he talked to us hour after hour my respect for his strength, will, and faith grew. He built up this impression as he built up his political position—slowly, methodically, brick by brick. Nothing Stalin said throughout the interview was brilliant. He was pedestrian, solid and simple. His statements interested professors of economy and would have been intelligible to factory hands. The questions had been submitted to him in advance, and he probably prepared the answers in advance. Sometimes he did not grasp the meaning of the question, and rambled before he reached its pith, but finally he did get to the point. His replies were always long and thorough. His mentality lacked the witty epigram or the remark with insight which can light up a whole field of thought. He ploughed long and deep. His complete composure, the complete absence of nerves, and his calm voice reflected inner power. One could see that he might be a man of iron.

Source D:
**a later comment by Khrushchev, Stalin's successor, on
 Lenin's Testament.**

Stalin himself has always regarded Lenin's reference to him as more of a compliment than otherwise. In an address to a later Congress he repeated the words, adding, 'Yes, Comrades, I am rude to those who seek to weaken the Party by their activities and I shall continue to be rude to such people'

Questions

- *1. (i) Explain the term ‘General Secretary’ (Source A). [2]
(ii) Other than Trotsky, name two of ‘the old leaders who are running into trash’ (Source B). [2]
2. To what extent is Lenin’s view of Stalin, contained in Source A, confirmed by Stalin himself in Sources B and D? [6]
3. How useful and reliable are Sources C and D as assessments of Stalin? [6]
4. ‘Stalin’s rise to power was due to his own strengths and ruthlessness.’ To what extent do Sources A to D, and your own knowledge, confirm this view? [8]

Worked answer

- *1. *[The first question is a factual one, and the answer should be as short and as precise as possible. Generally, where one mark is allocated, a single word or phrase will do. Where there are two marks, two points, one explaining the other, will be expected.]*
(i) The ‘General Secretary’ was in overall charge of the Bolshevik Party. In this capacity, he controlled the various organs of the Party’s Secretariat.
(ii) Kamenev and Zinoviev.

SOURCES

2.

STALIN AS LENIN’S SUCCESSOR

**Source E:
from an official biography of Stalin published in Moscow
in 1947.**

Stalin’s whole career is an example of profound theoretical power combined with an unusual breadth and versatility of practical experience in the revolutionary struggle...

Everybody is familiar with the cogent and invincible force of Stalin’s logic, the crystal clarity of his mind, his iron will, his devotion to the Party, his ardent faith in the people, and love for the people. Everybody is familiar with his modesty, his simplicity of manner, his consideration for people, and his merciless severity towards enemies of the people... Stalin is wise and deliberate in solving complex political questions where a

thorough weighing of pros and cons is required. At the same time, he is a supreme master of bold revolutionary decisions and of swift adaptations to changed conditions.

Stalin is the worthy continuer of the cause of Lenin, or, as it is said in the Party: Stalin is the Lenin of today.

Source F:
from Trotsky's *Stalin: An Appraisal of the Man and His Influence*, completed in 1940 and published in 1947.

Stalin represents a phenomenon utterly exceptional. He is neither a thinker, a writer nor an orator. He took possession of power before the masses had learned to distinguish his figure from others during the triumphal processions across Red Square. Stalin took possession of power, not with the aid of personal qualities, but with the aid of an impersonal machine. And it was not he who created the machine, but the machine who created him. That machine, with its force and its authority, was the product of the prolonged and heroic struggle of the Bolshevik Party, which itself grew out of ideas. The machine was the bearer of the idea before it became an end in itself. Stalin headed the machine from the moment he cut off the umbilical cord that bound it to the idea and it became a thing unto itself. Lenin created the machine through constant association with the masses... Stalin did not create the machine but took possession of it.

Source G:
from a speech by Khrushchev to the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (February 1956).

When we analyze the practice of Stalin in regard to the reaction of the Party and of the country, when we pause to consider everything which Stalin perpetrated, we must be convinced that Lenin's fears were justified. The negative characteristics of Stalin, which, in Lenin's time, were only incipient, transformed themselves during the last years into a grave abuse of power by Stalin, which caused untold harm to our Party...

He discarded the Leninist method of convincing and educating; he abandoned the method of ideological struggle for that of administrative violence, mass repressions, and terror. He acted on an increasingly large scale and more stubbornly through punitive organs, at the same time often violating all existing norms of morality and of Soviet laws...

Collegiality of leadership flows from the very nature of our Party, a Party built on the principles of democratic centralism...

Whereas during the first few years after Lenin's death Party Congresses and Central Committee Plenums took place more or less regularly, later,

when Stalin began increasingly to abuse his power, these principles were brutally violated...

Central Committee Plenums were hardly ever called... In practice Stalin ignored the norms of Party life and trampled on the Leninist principle of collective Party leadership...

Source H:
**a decision of the Twenty-second Congress of the
 Communist Party of the CPSU (1961) on the mausoleum
 of Lenin.**

1. The Mausoleum in Red Square by the Kremlin Wall, created to perpetuate the memory of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, the immortal founder of the Communist Party and the Soviet state, the leader and teacher of the working people of the whole world, is henceforth to be known as: The Mausoleum of Vladimir Ilyich LENIN.
2. It is acknowledged as inappropriate to retain the sarcophagus containing the coffin of I.V.Stalin in the Mausoleum any longer, since Stalin's serious violations of the behest of Lenin, his abuse of power, his mass repressions against honest Soviet people, and other actions in the period of the cult of personality make it impossible to leave the coffin with his body in the Mausoleum of V.I.Lenin.

Questions

1. Explain the references to
 - (i) 'Lenin's fears' ([Source G](#)) [2]
 - (ii) 'Central Committee' ([Source G](#)) [2]
- *2. How do Sources [E](#) and [F](#) differ in their presentation of Stalin's specific strengths? How would you explain these differences? [5]
3. What comments might the historian make on the usefulness of [Source G](#) as an overall assessment of Stalin? [4]
4. What does the content and language of [Source H](#) show about the attitudes of the Party to the Soviet leadership? [4]
5. 'Stalin was not the natural successor to Lenin.' Do these sources, and your own knowledge, support this view? [8]

Worked answer

- *2. *[This question requires a combination of material from the sources ('How do Sources E and F differ...?') and inferences and knowledge which go beyond the sources ('How would you explain these differences?'). It would be best to write two separate paragraphs.*

References should be made to the sources, but any quotations should be kept very short.]

Source E is overwhelmingly positive about Stalin's strengths, while Source F is generally negative. One difference concerns Stalin's intellect: Source E refers to his 'profound theoretical power' and 'the crystal clarity of his mind', while Source F maintains that he was neither 'a thinker' nor 'a writer'. Another difference is the perception of his personal qualities. Source E refers to 'his devotion to the Party' and his 'love for the people', while Source F emphasises that he took over 'before the masses had learned to distinguish his figure from others'. The former allowed him to be a 'worthy continuer of the cause of Lenin', but the latter considers that he merely 'took possession' of the machine created by Lenin.

The basic reason for these differences is that the two sources were produced in different circumstances and served different purposes. Source E was a piece of official propaganda, produced during Stalin's administration and designed to reinforce and legitimise his power. Source F, on the other hand, was written in exile by Stalin's main opponent; it was therefore bound to seek to vilify Stalin while attributing his success to a system that he had not created.

STALINIST POLITICS AND TERROR

BACKGROUND NARRATIVE

By the time Stalin had become a member of the leadership triumvirate in 1924, he was already well placed in the Party that Lenin had led to power in 1917. He also inherited the political infrastructure of the Soviet system from the Bolshevik period. This took the form of the 1918 Constitution of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR), to which Stalin added the 1924 and 1936 Constitutions: these first established and then refined the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Meanwhile, he had also secured his position within the three key components of the Communist Party—the Politburo, the Central Committee and the Orgburo. After 1929 Stalin tried to tighten the Party's grip on the state institutions—the soviets and the Council of People's Commissars, while at the same time increasing his own control over the Party itself. Everything seemed to point to the emergence of a more personalised regime that Stalin intended to use to bring about an economic transformation. Since this would require subordinate institutions and a compliant workforce, the way ahead was through intensification of dictatorship.

The process involved a considerable degree of coercion and the deliberate use of terror. To some extent this had already been applied before 1924. Stalin now reactivated the earlier Cheka in the form of the GPU, OGPU and the NKVD. His ruthlessness had already been shown in his systematic destruction of the alternative leadership between 1924 and 1929. During the period of the first Five-Year Plan and collectivisation the focus was on those who were considered to be resisting economic change, including the kulaks and managers in industry. The assassination of Kirov in 1934 was used by Stalin to sharpen the political focus to the terror, in the form of show trials and extensive activities by the NKVD against the populace at large. The first show trial in 1936 disposed of Kamenev and Zinoviev, the second (1937) of Piatakov and Sokolnikov, and the third, in 1938, of Bukharin, Rykov and Yagoda. The purges also affected the army

and the navy (the latter losing all eight of its admirals). By 1939 the terror was reduced, only to be revived after the end of the Second World War.

These developments in the political structure and in the purges have traditionally been used to emphasise the increase in Stalin's power as a direct result of a totalitarian dictatorship. Terror, power and efficiency have therefore been closely associated. [Analysis \(1\)](#) questions the extent of the efficiency of Stalin's political system, while [Analyses \(2\)](#) and [\(3\)](#) consider the implications of this for the effects of the purges.

ANALYSIS (1): HOW POWERFUL WAS STALIN?

The traditional interpretation of Stalin's power is that he made use of the political institutions established by the Bolsheviks during the period 1918–24 and personalised his control over them to create the most ruthlessly efficient totalitarian regime of the twentieth century. This process is known as the Stalinist Revolution. There are two separate propositions here. One is that such a change did actually take place; the other is that it was effective. The first is easier to substantiate than the second.

There is little disagreement that Stalin used and developed Lenin's power base, in the process adding his own. He converted the Leninist Party into his own natural medium and capitalised on the Bolshevik infiltration of all state institutions, including the soviets, by the various Party committees. He had also benefited from the strengthening of the Party by the elimination of other political groups, such as the Socialist Revolutionaries and Mensheviks, in the purges of 1920 and 1921. To this trend, Stalin added his own emphasis in several ways.

As we have seen in [Chapter 1](#), he consolidated his position within the Party. He also changed the Party's character, converting it into a channel for his personal power. The next stage was to squeeze any form of democracy out of the Party: he was able to operate increasing influence over the Politburo through the Orgburo, which he controlled. He dominated all the overlapping committees at the centre and made regular use of the Orgburo to create a permanent bedrock of personal support. Stalin also ended any duality between the Party and state apparatus. Central decisions fell more to the Politburo, at the core of the Party, and less to Sovnarkom, or the Council of People's Commissars. Stalin clearly regarded this development as crucial, for 'With this combination we will have full unity of the soviet and Party summits that will undoubtedly double our strength.' (1)

Stalin advanced two forms of justification for these changes. One was ideological: he rewrote a basic Marxist principle. Marxism had emphasised that the fundamental entity in any society was the 'infrastructure', or 'base', which comprised the underlying economic system. The political,

social and cultural institutions formed the ‘superstructure’ which always grew out of the base. Orthodox Marxists believed that changes to the superstructure would have to be preceded by the transformation of the base; socialist institutions, for example, could be established only on a socialist economy. Stalin, however, was determined to use the new political superstructure, already set up by the Bolsheviks, to redesign the economic base. He therefore took a more pragmatic view of the underlying theory.

The basis gives rise to the superstructure, but this does not at all mean that it merely reflects the basis, that it is passive, neutral, is indifferent to the fate of its basis, that it is passive to the character of the system. On the contrary, having made its appearance in the world, it becomes the greatest active force, actively assists its basis to take shape and acquire strength, and makes every effort to help the new order to finish off and liquidate the old basis and the old classes. (2)

Stalin’s other justification for greater centralisation was that he was simultaneously extending the range of democracy. In 1936 the Soviet Union adopted a Constitution that remained the basis of the Soviet system until slight amendments were made to it in Brezhnev’s Constitution of 1977. The main improvements were universal suffrage at the age of eighteen, the introduction of the secret ballot and the end of voting weighted in favour of the urban workers and against the peasantry. The soviets were also altered: the Supreme Soviet now comprised two chambers, the Soviet of the Union, based on electoral districts, and the Soviet of the Nationalities, reflecting the regional and ethnic composition of the country as a whole. Stalin could therefore claim that he was involving the population more than the previous regime had done. Many intellectuals from the West, including George Bernard Shaw and Sidney and Beatrice Webb, believed that the Soviet system was opening up and becoming more progressive.

The reality, however, was that, in his pursuit of power, legitimacy was always a relative concept. The Constitution was in many respects a façade, designed to justify Stalin’s personalisation of power. It was also a gesture that was unimportant in practice since any increase in theoretical democracy within the Constitution was cancelled out by the reduction of democracy within the Party—which, of course, controlled the Constitution. Ultimately, there was nothing to stop the centre from pursuing any policy it considered appropriate. This was done, for example, in the economy through central planning which, from 1929, forced the pace of industrialisation and collective farming (see [Chapter 3](#)). It also made possible the terror and purges, sustained throughout Stalin’s period in power.

There is no question that all this actually happened. Stalin *did* centralise the administration, establish personal ascendancy over the Party and neutralise any concessions to democracy. But the question that needs to be asked is ‘How effective was it in practice?’ The totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century have recently undergone extensive re-examination by historians. This applies especially to Nazi Germany, but the process is now also gathering momentum with respect to the Soviet Union. The key point is that although dictatorship may well have been strengthened at the centre, this could not be fully effective unless it was implemented at local level, within both the state apparatus and the Party. Centralised dictatorship had to operate outwards through effective channels or, to use a different image, the influence of the apex had to seep down through all levels of the hierarchy.

In the Soviet Union the link between the central decision-making process and the localities proved to be a particular problem. Evidence for this has recently been produced in a variety of areas: the Party, the administration, the factories, the collective farms and the army. The process can be described as follows. In the first stage, policies were issued by the leadership—but without being sufficiently specific. These were then variously interpreted by officials at different levels within the state and Party, all of whom had their own aims and agendas. Local Party secretaries defended the interests of their particular sector and interpreted orders from the centre as they saw fit. This, in turn, came in for criticism from the centre, which soon realised that policies were not being strictly adhered to. Stalin made frequent accusations that bureaucrats were actually impeding policy; in 1930, for example, he complained that local officials had become ‘dizzy with success’ in exceeding central quotas for collectivisation. The centre therefore tried to restore discipline over the lower levels of management. Further waves of chaos followed in the localities as rank and file members now attacked their branch leaders or factory managers or collective farm chairmen. The latter retaliated by identifying troublemakers and dealing with them summarily. The whole decision-making structure was therefore riddled with conflict and dissent. In the ensuing chaos the centre sought to restore a semblance of order, by adjusting, intensifying or ending particular campaigns. In these circumstances the centre was often reacting to the local branches.

Overall, the localities had a considerable impact on the centre. According to one recent view, ‘Campaigns—including purges—could be stalled, sped up, aborted, or implemented in ways which suited local conditions and interests.’ (3) Real power lay in local hands and with local Party and government machinery. ‘Even if one assumes Stalin’s personality was the only or main factor in the initiation of policies, one must still explain the obvious disparities between central orders and local outcomes.’ (4) The situation was given further instability by the constant expansion of local

officialdom. This made it increasingly difficult for the centre to control local officials without creating more officials, and hence compounding the problem. Ironically, Stalinism, supposedly confined to the centre, in practice created the ideal conditions for ‘little Stalins’ in the localities. These were not a threat to the basis of Stalin’s power. But they did inhibit the effective enforcement of his policies.

This argument, emphasising the contrast between dictatorship at the centre and still powerful local initiatives, has two overall implications. First, Stalin was less completely in control of policy than is generally supposed. He certainly intended to direct the economy and foreign policy through periodic decisions and adjustments, just as he was determined to remove all opposition and democracy within the Party. But he frequently lost control of what he had started: the complexity of the administration defeated the attempts of the centre to monitor the changes, with the result that there was as much chaos and anarchy as there was order and direction. And second, the impetus, as opposed to the inspiration, for change came as much from below as from above. The result could be violent changes, oscillations and swings as the top tried to correct the bottom’s attempts to adapt to the direction imposed from above. Seen in this light, Stalin spent as much of his time adjusting as he did initiating.

These points have a particularly important bearing on the phenomenon with which Stalinism is most commonly associated: terror and the purges.

Questions

1. Was Stalin in control of his political system?
2. How could the same regime produce the 1936 Constitution and the purges?

ANALYSIS (2): WHAT WERE THE REASONS FOR THE STALINIST TERROR?

More than anything else, Stalin’s regime is associated with terror. This existed on a scale unparalleled, in terms of the number of casualties, in the twentieth century—which is to say, in the whole of human history. Until very recently the reasons for this terror attracted very little controversy: the driving force was considered to be, solely and uniquely, Stalin himself, who created a ruthlessly totalitarian system. Current historians are not, however, content with stereotypes, even if they are largely true. The Stalinist terror was too complex to admit a single explanation. This analysis will attempt to integrate traditional views and recent research into an overall synthesis. The argument progresses stage by stage.

All revolutions contain within them the potential for purges. They are driven by two dynamics—to preserve their power base and to transform their legacy. Both involve radical measures that may well include calculated violence against a perceived enemy within. Justification is sought in the form of ‘cleansing’ or ‘purging’; in the process, ‘terror’ is invoked as a positive force, as a means of achieving a higher goal. The Russian Revolution was particularly susceptible to this trend. It involved an ideology that recognised, as a transitional period, the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ and it had a blueprint to transform Russia’s institutions and society. The whole situation was radicalised, between 1918 and 1921, by the Civil War. Trotsky’s maxim that ‘we shall not enter the kingdom of socialism in white gloves on a polished floor’ justified the establishment, under Dzerzhynski, of the Cheka, as well as the expulsion of Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries from the soviets in 1918 and the show trials of political opponents in 1922. There were also systematic purges of the Bolshevik Party; it has been estimated that in 1921 about a quarter of the Party was deprived of its membership cards. Even though the terror was officially ended in 1922, a powerful precedent had been set for the future.

To an extent, therefore, later coercive measures can be seen as a revival of a ruthless trend within an uncompromising ideology. But a powerful personal factor was also involved. Traditionally, the intensification of terror has been attributed to Stalin’s own personality. Khrushchev, for example, later referred to Stalin’s brutality, vindictiveness, pathological distrust and ‘sickly’ suspicion. Although there may well be something to this explanation, it is oversimplistic as it stands, and it demonises the subject without properly explaining his objectives.

Assuming that Stalin was driven by personal forces, what were his *reasons* for reintroducing the terror? Clearly the most important was the consolidation of his power. The view of R. Conquest and others is that Stalin accomplished two main objectives: ‘A vast number of past or potential “hostile” elements had been destroyed or sent to labour camps, and the rest of the population reduced to the most complete silence and obedience.’ (5) R. Tucker endorses this: the Great Purges of the 1930s were an effort ‘to achieve an unrestricted personal dictatorship with a totality of power that Stalin did not yet possess in 1934.’ (6) Stalin aimed to wipe out the entire generation of Bolsheviks who had been associated with Lenin between 1917 and 1924; this alone would guarantee Stalin as the sole heir to Lenin and would secure his position for his lifetime. Some of the threats were obvious: hence Kamenev and Zinoviev were disposed of in the show trial of 1936, Piatakov and Sokolnikov in 1937 and Bukharin, Rykov and Yagoda in 1938. Many others were, however, added to the list of victims almost on a quota basis. There was, seemingly, no limit to Stalin’s fear of future opposition.

A second rationale commonly attributed to Stalin's purges was economic. The forced pace of industrialisation and the implementation of collective farming required a disciplined workforce and a compliant peasantry. Both involved the use of force. Measures had to be taken against reluctant managers in the factories in 1930 and 1931, while the NKVD operated dekulakisation squads to clear the countryside of resistance to collectivisation. As the pace of industrialisation speeded up in the second and third Five-Year Plans, additional labour was provided by the growth of the Gulag system. Convict labour built the Belomor Canal, opened in 1933, and provided the mainstay of mining in Siberia, especially in the inhospitable Kolyma region. Terror was, therefore, inseparable from Stalin's vision of modernisation.

Some historians have attributed to Stalin another motive. He was, above all, afraid that the West would destroy the Soviet Union before he had the chance to complete the process of industrialisation. Stalin's solution, according to Tucker and Conquest, was to engage in temporary co-operation with Germany. This incurred the hostility of many of the older-style Bolsheviks who saw fascism as a deadlier enemy than either Britain or France. Tucker and Conquest therefore argue that Stalin was obliged to remove the anti-Hitler element to make possible the accommodation with Germany that eventually produced the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of August 1939. A different approach to the theme of the external threat is put by I. Deutscher. Stalin was concerned that the regime would be destroyed from within —by internal revolt as a result of external invasion. Stalin therefore had to remove any alternative leaders and to make the population at large accept their removal. Hence They had to die as traitors, as perpetrators of crimes beyond the reach of reason... Only then could Stalin be sure that their execution would provoke no dangerous revulsion.' (7)

Stalin therefore ruthlessly manipulated an authoritarian system, inherited from the Bolsheviks, into a totalitarian one. He used it to cut huge swathes through the population in the pursuit of his economic and political objectives. This is where most previous analyses have stopped. But, until recently, it has never been fully explained why the purges were so complete and so all-embracing—and why so many of the population played an active part in them. The traditional analysis adopts a monolithic 'top-down' approach and assumes that Stalin remained in control and dictated the momentum of the terror. But did he? Was the Soviet administrative system that efficient? And did the apex of the bureaucracy really succeed in imposing its will on the localities? Some historians now emphasise that there were 'bottom-up' reactions to 'top-down' orders that gave the purges an additional momentum far beyond anything intended by Stalin. In other words, although Stalin introduced the policy centrally, the way in which it was carried out was determined locally.

In the countryside terror was endemic from the beginning of the process of collectivisation. This was largely because the central instructions were actually exceeded and measures had to be taken to try to control the dekulakisation squads. The All-Russian Central Executive Committee, or Council of People's Commissars, issued decrees in 1929 defining precisely who was to be classified as a kulak and warned that dekulakisation should not become an end in itself. This, however, scarcely diminished the wave of terror that followed, so that Stalin had to try to stem the tide in 1930. When the campaign was resumed later that year, and extended between 1932 and 1934, the central government attempted to exert more direct control. In each case L.Viola distinguishes between the repressive policy that the state undoubtedly pursued and the methods used by the cadres in the field to implement the policy. The latter were influenced by a 'general political culture of the early 1930s', which was based on 'a mixture of traditional Russian radical fanaticism' and the 'unleashing of years of pent-up class rage and retribution'. (8) This was intensified by shortages created by collectivisation and by the development of a siege-like mentality. We could go even further. The repression and persecution at local level were manifestations of the breakdown of central control. Peasant resistance, disobedience and defiance were others. The two extremes fed off each other—resistance to the local terror undermining official policy. Or, in the words of J.Arch Getty, 'Stalin had initiated a movement with vague instructions and ambiguous targets. As the process unfolded on the ground, though, it degenerated rapidly into chaotic and violent struggles based on local conditions.' (9)

Industry, too, became affected by endemic terror. There was widespread chaos as managers came into conflict with the Party and the workforce, all in pursuit of different interests. An additional complication was the Stakhanovite movement. R.Thurston argues that this created tension in factories as young Stakhanovites with personal and political ambitions upset the productivity balance that managers tried desperately to maintain. In turn, the latter became subject to accusations of wrecking and sabotage. 'Whatever its scope, as the terror unfolded the resentments and demands fostered by early Stakhanovism heightened tensions in industry.' (10) Much the same applies to the army. R.Reese claims that the Party organisations within the armed forces experienced upheaval that was well beyond the control of the central administration. (11)

At all levels there was a feeling of direct involvement in the purges. People everywhere had a variety of motives. Some used the opportunity of informing on others to settle old scores. Many were genuinely convinced that the economy was riddled with 'wreckers' and saboteurs who had to be brought to book. Here an important part was played by the show trials, which helped whip up suspicion of and resentment against managers. (12) Peasants provided information and they testified at district trials (local

counterparts to the show trials). A striking simile has been advanced with ‘mice burying the cat’; (13) because of the special conditions interacting with longer-term tensions, this happened all over the country. Paranoia spread through all levels of society, helping to maintain the momentum of terror at the lowest levels. G.T.Rittersporn maintains that the regime’s emphasis on the ‘subversive’ activities of ‘conspirators’ interacted with traditional prejudices to produce an ‘imagery of omnipresent subversion and conspiracy’. (14) According to R.G.Suny, ‘The requirement to find enemies, to blame and punish, worked together with self-protection and self-promotion...to expand the Purges into a political holocaust.’ (15)

Overall, it is right to move away from the limited view of Stalin as the sole driving force behind the terror. Whether he was insane or suffering from paranoia is only partly relevant. He inherited a revolution, revived the terror that had atrophied and renewed the turmoil at all social levels. But the sheer scale of the upheaval can only be understood on a national scale, as the intervention of local factors that distorted the central intention. Until further evidence becomes available, a provisional conclusion might be that, although Stalin initiated and maintained the purges, they assumed a momentum that outpaced even his expectations. This reflects the relative inefficiency of the Soviet system and a loss of control by it. The terror becomes even more terrible, since it can no longer be attributed entirely to one man’s paranoia, but also to the multiple manifestations of human nature.

Questions

1. What was the role of terror in the Stalinist system?
2. How valid is the distinction between ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ approaches to terror in Stalinist Russia?

ANALYSIS (3): WHAT WERE THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE STALINIST TERROR?

[Analysis \(2\)](#) showed that the terror was less carefully controlled and centralised than has often been thought. The corollary to this is that the effects are also less clear-cut and need partial reinterpretation.

It has been argued that the terror was the chief method by which the Party machinery of the Bolshevik state was transformed into the personalised totalitarian dictatorship of Stalin. As a result, Stalinism created a regime that was more consistently ruthless and pervasive than even that of Nazi Germany. This is partly, but only partly, true. Any capacity for debate about different strategies was certainly squeezed out of the centre of the Party with the elimination of Kamenev, Zinoviev,

Bukharin, Rykov and others. The chances of persuading Stalin to adopt a different course to what he had in mind, whether in economic or foreign policy, could never seriously arise after 1934. It could also be argued that the terror was a necessary complement to the development of the Stalinist personality cult—the obverse of the same coin. The terror also made it possible to experiment with more obvious democratic forms in the 1936 Constitution, since these were neutralised and therefore never amounted to anything in practice.

Terror did all these things. But it has traditionally been seen as working in one way only—as tightening the political system and therefore enhancing the powers of dictatorship. There is, however, another possibility—that it unleashed chaos into the system that actually limited the extent to which dictatorship could operate effectively. [Analysis \(1\)](#) provided examples of how local groups in industry and the countryside interpreted central decisions. Normally such groups would have been cautious but the terror acted as a stimulus for greatly intensified activity, for reasons given in [Analysis \(2\)](#). The result was more often a descent into chaos, with wild oscillations developing as, first, the local groups implemented the instructions of the centre in their own way, then the centre attempted to restore an approved line. Paradoxically, terror was a democratising force, although in a negative sense: it created a tyranny of the people quite as much as the traditional image of a tyranny *over* the people.

The economic impact of the terror was also paradoxical. It is normally seen as having provided the impetus for the command economy; and the debate has focused on whether such an economy was preferable to a mixed economy that would have allowed a measure of market consumerism. But it can now be argued that terror confused the command network, thereby undermining the whole Stalinist system. Two examples of this can be given. One was the approach to collectivisation and dekulakisation that, as we have seen, was conducted with excessive zeal by local Party and NKVD officials. The result was one of the greatest mass disobedience campaigns of the twentieth century, aimed not at Stalin but at those who were interpreting his orders more freely than even he wanted. The second example is the impact of the Stakhanovites in industry. Their initiative, which was intended to promote an increase in productivity, actually helped slow it down. In the climate of terror, managers were understandably hostile to anyone who distorted their own implementation of industrial plans. This, in turn, made them a target for denunciation, with the result that the very people most likely to achieve local stability were removed. Far from underpinning the command economy, therefore, terror did much to disrupt its smooth operation.

What of the impact of the Stalinist terror in terms of the amount of suffering caused? No-one doubts that Stalin was directly responsible for the deaths of millions. Accurate estimates have, however, always been open to

dispute, and the opening of the Soviet archives since the onset of glasnost has only served to accentuate this. The total number of deaths has been put by Nove and Wheatcroft at between 4 and 11 million, significantly below Conquest's estimates of 20 million and recent Russian textbook figures of 40 million. Estimates of prison populations also vary from Nove and Wheatcroft's peak of 5.5 million in 1953 to S. Rosefielde's 10 million during the late 1930s and Conquest's up to 8 million in 1938 and 12 million in 1952. The main problem is distinguishing between those who died as a direct result of a purge and those whose deaths were caused by famine or diseases associated with Stalin's agricultural policies.

There is also growing doubt about the once-held belief that Stalin was widely hated as well as feared—because he was seen as the instigator of the terror. We have seen, in [Analysis \(2\)](#), that the terror was often sustained and intensified at grass-roots level, which meant that huge numbers of people were directly implicated in actions against colleagues or neighbours. Paradoxically, this meant that Stalin, who may well have been held responsible for starting the process, was also seen as the only person who could genuinely transcend and stop it. The people who were most feared and blamed were those who carried out changes locally. The surprising and unpalatable truth is that Stalin remained popular. The real test came when the Germans invaded the Soviet Union in 1941. Those who collaborated with them had a grievance on traditional grounds, not against Stalin himself. Collaborators were highest among the minority nationalities who aspired to independence, not among repressed Russians who aspired to freedom. Despite years of terror, there was far greater unity and patriotism in the Second World War than there had been in the First.

This brings us to the impact of the terror on the security of the Soviet Union. The purging of the armed forces cannot but have had a negative effect on Soviet defences. Experience was undoubtedly affected by the wholesale deaths and expulsions outlined in [Analysis \(2\)](#). The real loss was of experience at the highest level, surely a crippling blow to any impending war effort. The result, it is generally argued, was a humiliating performance against Finland in the Northern War of 1939–40 and a disastrous collapse when the Germans invaded the Soviet Union in 1941.

Yet, again, the impact of the terror may have been exaggerated. Most of those purged in 1938 were not actually arrested but expelled from the Party. Hence the impact was more limited than once thought. It was originally estimated that the purges had accounted for between 25 per cent and 50 per cent of army officers. Recent estimates have put the figures at somewhere between 3.7 per cent and 7.7 per cent. (16) There are two main reasons for this disparity. One is a previous underestimate of the size of the officer class in the Red Army, the other the rapidity with which many were rehabilitated. Both of these points have the effect of diluting the impact of the terror on the efficiency of the armed forces. In any case, many military

expulsions from the army were not accompanied by loss of military rank. It has now been estimated that 30 per cent of army officers discharged between 1937 and 1939 were reinstated. (17) This was part of the policy of the central authorities to reduce the scale of denunciations. At the Eighteenth Party Congress in March 1939, for example, it was said that ‘Political organs and Party organizations often expel Party members far too light-heartedly. The Party Commissions of the Political Administration of the Red Army find it necessary to reinstate about 50 per cent of the expelled men because the expulsions were unjustified.’ (18) It seems, therefore, that measures were being taken to correct the severity of the purges well before the German invasion.

Overall, we may conclude that the effects of the terror were more blurred than is traditionally supposed—largely because the momentum was less centrally controlled. Effect overlaps into cause, spontaneous momentum into deliberate policy. Hence the state benefited less from the terror because it was unable to control it. Similarly, because of that lack of control, the terror was much more devastating than even Stalin intended.

Questions

1. Did the use of terror strengthen or weaken the centralisation of the Soviet political and economic structure?
2. Has the damage caused by the terror to the Soviet Union been exaggerated?

SOURCES

1.

THE REASONS FOR THE PURGES

Source A:

from R.W.Thurston: *Life and Terror in Stalin's Russia*
(published in 1996).

This book argues that Stalin was not guilty of mass first-degree murder from 1934 to 1941 and did not plan or carry out a systematic campaign to crush the nation. This view is not one of absolution, however: his policies did help to engender real plots, lies, and threats to his position. Then this fear-ridden man reacted, and over-reacted, to events. All the while, he could not control the flow of people within the country, job turnover, or illegal acts by managers and many others. He was sitting at the peak of a pyramid of lies and incomplete information, and he must have known it. His

power was constrained in fundamental ways, which contributed to his anxiety and tendency to govern by hit-and-run methods. His attitudes and deeds must be situated in the context of vast, popular suspicion generated in part by World War I and the Russian Civil War. Several conclusions follow: Stalin becomes more human than others have portrayed him. And his regime becomes less malevolent but possessed of greater public support than is usually argued.

Source B:
**from *Children of the Arbat* by A.Rybakov (this had been
 suppressed in the USSR for twenty years before being
 published in Britain in 1989).**

Stalin mused... Yes, the history of mankind was the history of class struggle, but the leader emerged as the expression of class, and therefore the history of mankind was the history of its leaders and its rulers. Idealism did not come into it. The spirit of an epoch was determined by the man who made the epoch himself...

...all opponents, past, present and future, had to be liquidated and would be liquidated. The sole socialist country in the world could survive only if it were unshakably stable, and this would also be seen as a sign of its stability by the outside world. The state must be strong in case of war; the state must be mighty if it wants peace. It must be feared.

In order to turn a peasant society into an industrialised country, countless material and human sacrifices were necessary. The people must accept this. But it would not be achieved by enthusiasm alone. The people would have to be forced to accept the sacrifices, and for this a powerful authority was needed, an authority that inspired fear...the theory of undying class war provided for all such possibilities. If a few million people had to perish in the process, history would forgive Comrade Stalin... All the great rulers had been harsh.

Source C:
**from a speech by Khrushchev to the Twentieth Congress of
 the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (February
 1956).**

It became apparent that many Party, Soviet and economic activists who were branded in 1937–1938 as ‘enemies’ were actually never enemies, spies, wreckers, etc., but were always honest Communists...

Stalin was a very distrustful man, sickly suspicious; we know this from our work with him. He could look at a man and say: ‘Why are your eyes so shifty today?’ or ‘Why are you turning so much today and avoiding to look me directly in the eyes?’ The sickly suspicion created in him a general

distrust even toward eminent Party workers whom he had known for years. Everywhere and in everything he saw ‘enemies’, ‘two-facers’ and ‘spies’.

Possessing unlimited power, he indulged in great wilfulness and choked a person morally and physically. A situation was created where one could not express one’s own will.

Source D:
from an article by Roberta T.Manning: ‘The Soviet
economic crisis of 1936–1940 and the Great Purges’
(1993).

In this way, the economic problems of 1936–41 and the Great Purges appear to be inexorably linked. The industrial slowdown, which set in at a time when the USSR could least afford it, when a two-front war without allies seemed to be the Soviets’ inevitable fate, shaped the course of the Great Purges at least as much, if not more so, as the terror in turn influenced the operation of the economy. In 1936–8, as veteran journalist William Henry Chamberlain has pointed out in regard to Soviet political persecutions of the First Five-Year Plan period, ‘When plans went awry, when deprivations, instead of disappearing, became more severe, when promised improvements in food supply did not materialize, the subconscious temptation to seek scapegoats became almost irresistible’

Questions

1. Explain the references to:
 - (i) ‘peak of a pyramid of lies and incomplete information’ (Source A); [2]
 - (ii) ‘class war’ (Source B). [2]
2. What similarities and differences are there between Sources B and C concerning Stalin’s ‘responsibility’ for the purges? How would you explain the differences? [7]
- *3. Assess the value of Source A to the historian studying the Stalinist terror. [6]
4. ‘Stalin conceived the purges and dictated every part of their course.’ Discuss this view, using Sources A to D and other information known to you. [8]

Worked answer

- *3. *[Occasionally a secondary source may be used as one of the documents. This adds an extra component to the answer—historiography. There is also a chance to consider the merits and*

defects of secondary sources, although care has to be taken to avoid low-level generalisations about these.]

The value of **Source A** is potential rather than actual. It provides a summary of an overall argument on Stalin's involvement in the purges, which alerts the reader to the highlights of the more detailed interpretation that follows; it does not, therefore, give supporting evidence at this stage. As a secondary source, it is based on a wide variety of other sources, both primary and secondary, and has the advantage of retrospective analysis which, on an issue as complex as the purges, can provide a clearer perspective than contemporary accounts and views. In this case, the emphasis is on confusion and chaos, rather than on Stalin's ruthless manipulation of power, which has characterised past interpretations. The major deficiency of an argument as strong as that in **Source A** is that it may be overstated, perhaps because it is an initial attempt to show a new perspective. On the other hand, the historian benefits in two ways from revisionist approaches that raise new issues and consider new possibilities. First, revisionism leads to further ideas that can eventually form a synthesis; it may, for example, be appropriate to accept Thurston's arguments for chaos while, at the same time, disagreeing with his view that Stalin's 'regime becomes less malevolent'. Second, revisionist arguments like this will be based to an extent on newly discovered primary sources, which can be used in other contexts.

SOURCES

2.

THE 1938 SHOW TRIAL

Source E:

**a description of the 1938 show trial by Fitzroy MacLean,
a British diplomat**

It was an impressive list of defendants: Bukharin,... Rykov,...[and] Yagoda who, until eighteen months ago, had been People's Commissar for Internal Affairs and supreme head of the all-powerful NKVD.

The prisoners were charged, collectively and individually, with every conceivable crime: high treason, murder, espionage and all kinds of sabotage, They had plotted to wreck industry and agriculture, to assassinate Stalin, to dismember the Soviet Union for the benefit of the capitalist allies. They were shown for the most part to have been criminals and traitors to the Soviet cause ever since the Revolution—before it even. The evidence accumulated filled no less than fifty large volumes. One after

the other, using the same words, they admitted their guilt: Bukharin, Rykov, Yagoda... There was no attempt to evade responsibility. They were men in full possession of their faculties; the statements they made were closely reasoned and delivered with every appearance of spontaneity. And yet what they said, the actual content of their statements, seemed to bear no relation to reality.

Source F:
from the confession of Bukharin at the 1938 show trial.

I shall now speak of myself, of the reasons for my repentance... For three months I refused to say anything. Then I began to testify. Why? Because while I was in prison I made a re-evaluation of my entire past. For when you ask yourself: 'If you must die, what are you dying for?'—an absolute black emptiness suddenly arises before you with startling vividness. There was nothing to die for, if one wanted to die unrepented. And, on the contrary, everything positive that glistens in the Soviet Union acquires new dimensions in a man's mind. This in the end disarmed me completely and led me to bend my knees before the Party and the country. And when you ask yourself: 'Very well, suppose you do not die; suppose by some miracle you remain alive, again what for? Isolated from everybody, an enemy of the people, in an inhuman position, completely isolated from everything that constitutes the essence of life...' And at once the same reply arises. And at such moments, Citizens Judges, everything personal...falls away, disappears... But here we have also the internal demolition of the forces of counter-revolution. And one must be a Trotsky not to lay down one's arms.

Source G:
from the confession of Yagoda at the 1938 show trial.

I want to correct the Procurator and make an objection on a part of the charges he has made... The Procurator is not right in considering me a member of the centre of the bloc... I am not a spy and never have been one... It is untrue to say that I was an accomplice in the murder of Kirov... I have committed heinous crimes. I realise this. It is hard to live after such crimes, it is hard to sit in prisons for tens of years. But it is terrible to die with such a stigma. Even from behind the bars I would like to see the further flourishing of the country which I have betrayed...

**Source H:
the concluding speech of Prosecutor Vyshinski at the show
trial of Bukharin and others in 1938.**

Time will pass. The graves of the hateful traitors will grow over with weeds and thistle... But over us, over our happy country, our sun will shine with its luminous rays as bright and joyous as before. Over the road cleared of the last scum and filth of the past, we, our people, with our beloved leader and teacher, the great Stalin, at our head, will march onwards and onwards, towards Communism!

Questions

1. Explain the references to Yagoda (Source E) and to Trotsky (Source F). [4]
2. How far do the arguments used in Sources F and G agree with the overall summary of the trial given in Source E? [5]
- *3. How effective are the language and tone in Source F in reinforcing the argument made in Bukharin's confession? [4]
4. What hints are given in Sources F, G and H that the Soviet concept of justice differed from that of the West? [5]
5. 'The purges in Stalin's Russia succeeded only because their victims were prepared to co-operate.' Discuss this view in the light of Sources E to H and your own knowledge. [7]

Worked answer

- *3. [*'Language' and 'tone' questions are quite common and need to be handled with explicit reference to the source. 'Language' refers to the specific wording within the passage, while 'tone' is more the general, overall impression conveyed by the words. Both need to be covered, in roughly equal proportions. It is also crucial to have a clear picture of Bukharin's overall argument: this could be dealt with first*]
- Bukharin's argument in Source F is that he discovered that his own life and death had no real meaning outside the collective context of the Soviet Union: hence he had to repent and testify. The language conveys this very effectively. The prospect of personal 'black emptiness' that contrasted with the positive 'that glistens in the Soviet Union' opened his mind to 'new dimensions' and led him to 'bend my knees'. These are powerful metaphors. The general tone of the passage is similarly striking. We are left with an impression of a deep personal crisis in which Bukharin considered and rejected first dying for, then living with, 'isolation'. The influence of this flows through the whole argument and provides a justification for his decision to

confess. Whether the words were entirely premeditated is debatable; if they were not, they acquire the extra dimension of inventiveness.

STALIN'S ECONOMIC POLICIES

BACKGROUND NARRATIVE

Immediately after the Bolshevik Revolution (October 1917), the new regime began to take steps to transform the economy. The first changes comprised the transfer of the land from the aristocracy to the peasantry and the nationalisation of key armaments factories and foreign trade. Between 1918 and 1921 the process was accelerated by War Communism, under which the grain produced by the peasantry was requisitioned for the urban workers and the army; at the same time, the remaining industrial enterprises were placed under state control. By 1921 it had become apparent that War Communism was deeply unpopular and that the regime was facing a crisis of confidence. Lenin therefore introduced the New Economic Policy, which restored an element of private enterprise to agriculture and industry. The peasantry were permitted to grow grain for the market, under licence, while most of the smaller industrial enterprises were denationalised. By the time of Lenin's death the NEP had attracted widespread support and its continuation was urged by the Rightists within the Party, including Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsky.

Some, however, considered that a more appropriate strategy would be rapid industrialisation and the introduction of collective farming. Trotsky, in particular, favoured this approach as part of his strategy of Permanent Revolution. At first, Stalin supported the continuation of the NEP, which he associated with 'Socialism in One Country. By 1928, however, he had reversed the NEP and associated Socialism in One Country with rapid industrialisation—an apparent turnabout in policy. This followed an agricultural crisis in 1926 and 1927, during which only 17 per cent of the grain produced actually reached the cities. Stalin used this as a reason—or possibly a pretext—to introduce a policy of compulsory collectivisation of peasant land in 1928. In the same year he introduced the first Five-Year Plan, which was designed to transform the industrial base of the Soviet Union. The organisation of this was the responsibility of the State Planning Bureau, or Gosplan. The emphasis was placed on heavy industry rather

than on consumer goods, and especially on coal, steel, oil, electricity and armaments. The second and third Five-Year Plans followed in 1933 and 1937, the third being interrupted by the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941.

The collectivisation of land proceeded very rapidly—indeed, ahead of Stalin's target. The resulting chaos made Stalin call for a period of consolidation, after accusing the enforcers of the programme of being 'dizzy with success'. The process was, however, started up again from 1932, only to overlap a major famine. This was exacerbated by the widespread slaughter of cattle, sheep and goats by peasants resisting the enforcement of the collectivisation decrees. The recovery of agriculture subsequently proved extremely difficult; indeed, the legacy of the 1930s proved a long-term liability for the Soviet economy. The industrialisation programme, meanwhile, involved a huge increase in the workforce, which was swelled by impoverished peasants from the rural areas. New industrial centres developed, such as Magnitogorsk, while Siberia acquired a new industrial infrastructure. The usual interpretation, therefore, is that heavy industry developed within the Soviet Union at the expense of agriculture. Is this true?

ANALYSIS (1): WHAT WERE THE REASONS FOR AND EFFECTS OF STALIN'S AGRICULTURAL POLICIES?

Reasons

Most explanations for Stalin's agricultural changes start with the procurement crisis of 1926–7. The release of only 17 per cent of the total grain harvest to the cities convinced the leadership that it was essential to reintroduce requisitioning, a measure last used during the period of War Communism between 1918 and 1921. This led inexorably to the longer-term policy of collectivisation, which was intended to reverse the whole policy of the NEP and move Russian agriculture into a collectivist phase.

Two main perspectives can be seen here. One is that Stalin used the procurement crisis in a deliberate policy to bring the whole economic system into line with his own preconceptions: in other words, he dictated the trend. The other is that Stalin was pushed by the crisis into a series of reactions over which he had no real control.

By the first argument, Stalin was the prime mover of economic change. He saw two possibilities. 'There is the capitalist way, which is to enlarge the agricultural units by introducing capitalism in agriculture,' but this would ultimately impoverish the peasantry. Alternatively, there was 'the socialist way, which is to set up collective and state farms'. This would

provide the means, both technical and organisational, for using agriculture as a means of subsidising industry and developing socialism. These views had already been put forward by Preobrazhensky, but he had not been able to resolve the problem of how to persuade an innately conservative part of society to accept the role of being in the forefront of socialist development. Stalin was able to overcome this problem through the ruthless exercise of his power.

Some historians have gone further. If Stalin had not taken the decision to act, the NEP would have led to a return to a capitalist system. Vladimir Brovkin argues that by the late 1920s Russian society had recovered its equilibrium after the appalling experience of the Civil War, and that the NEP was evolving away from communist dictatorship. The impetus was for the search for fair prices by the peasant producer, the development of free trade unions by the workers and the search for academic freedom in education. Stalin was convinced that all this needed to change. 'From the Bolshevik point of view, it was a society in crisis. Seen from this perspective, Stalin's revolution from above was a move to stop the processes unfolding in NEP Russia. Peasants had to be herded into state-controlled units.' This was all part of a tightening up of discipline from the centre, which affected workers, women, students and teachers. Hence the break with the NEP was 'a preemptive strike of the central party-state apparatus'. By this analysis, Stalin intervened to destroy a system that was working economically in order to recover the control of the centre. It was a deliberate and calculated policy that went against the natural trend that Russia was following. It was part of the conscious construction of dictatorship as 'an admission of the failure to generate voluntary social support'. (1)

An alternative perspective has, however, been suggested. Stalin was by no means in control of the changes in agriculture. Rather than imposing collectivisation as a policy decision, he stumbled into it with neither planning nor forethought. The reason was the opposite to that given by Brovkin. The NEP did *not* work. The very fact that the peasantry were retaining most of their grain indicated that industry was failing to provide the goods for the peasants to buy. The NEP had ceased to function properly because it could not satisfy consumer needs, the oxygen for private enterprise, even in a mixed system. Stalin was forced to react because there was simply no choice. According to M.Lewin, 'The market mechanism of NEP, which had worked wonders at the start simply by following its natural course, had in the end led the regime into an impasse.' Hence, when faced with the procurement, Stalin reacted instinctively by operating 'the lever whose use he best understood; he resorted to force'. It is, however, important to realise that 'When he manipulated this particular lever in January 1928, Stalin did not know where the process set in motion by his "emergency measures" would ultimately lead him.' (2)

Forced collectivisation was therefore a characteristic reaction by Stalin. But it was more of a panic measure than anything else. It did not mean that he had created a policy. Rather, in order to extract Russia from an emergency Stalin had implemented a temporary measure that he had no squeamishness about converting into something more permanent. Some historians go further still, in denying Stalin any of the credit (or blame) for the decision to introduce collectivisation. The main argument here is that Russia was moving in this direction anyway and that Stalin went with the momentum. According to J. Arch Getty, although Stalin was officially responsible for collectivisation, he was strongly influenced by ‘the social, economic and political environment that he did not create’. (3)

A possible synthesis would accept Stalin’s ruthlessness and willingness to use force while, at the same time, downgrading his understanding of the underlying economic forces. The economy was not within his expertise, whereas the consolidation of personal power was. Hence political criteria dominated the economic. By 1927 there were two examples of this. One was the prospect of political humiliation caused by the procurement crisis. Stalin was faced with the choice of making further concessions or taking a tougher line. The other was the opportunity to cut down his remaining opponents, especially Bukharin, who favoured the continuation of the NEP. Hence he took a strong political decision—which is not the same as merely drifting into it. It was, however, along the lines of a policy towards which Russia might have been moving anyway.

Effects

The impact of Stalin’s policies needs to be examined in terms of the speed with which collectivisation was carried through; the effect on productivity; the reaction of the peasantry to their new orders; and the extent of suffering caused by rural disruption. Finally, new light has been shed on the extent to which agriculture actually subsidised industrial growth.

The standard argument is that agriculture was sacrificed to the development of industry. The emphasis was on collectivisation to destroy individual consumerism. Hence, one of the criteria for success was surely the number of units actually collectivised. In this respect the process went ahead with remarkable speed. The proportion of holdings collectivised rose from 23.6 per cent in 1930 to 52.7 per cent in 1931, 61.5 per cent in 1932, 66.4 per cent in 1933, 71.4 per cent in 1934, 83.2 per cent in 1935, 89.6 per cent in 1936 and, finally, 98 per cent by 1941. The problem, however, was that this happened *too* quickly. Far from being in control of the situation, Stalin found that the centre lost the initiative to the localities—to local party officials, to local managers and to local NKVD officials. These forced Stalin to call a halt in 1930–1, accusing the local officials of being ‘dizzy with success’. He restarted the process after 1931 and intensified the

campaign of dekulakisation. Historians have tended to see this as an excuse used by Stalin to explain collectivisation's unfortunate side-effects before he then started the process up again as a deliberate strategy. But this assumes that he was fully in control. Another emphasis might be that he was struggling to retain control of a situation that was slipping beyond him. The administrative chaos was genuine—and Stalin had good reason to be concerned about excessive zeal, which needed to be checked. Having done this, the local forces again took over and this time increased the pressure on the brakes. Hence, the process needed to be started up again by the centre. These policy reversals were bound to have serious repercussions.

Production figures showed collectivisation to be a disaster. The grain harvest declined from 73.3 million tons in 1928 (itself a problem year) to 71.7 million in 1929. An increase to 83.5 in 1930 was followed by a sharp downturn to 69.5 in 1931 and 69.6 in 1932. The figures for 1934 and 1935 were 67.6 and 75.0, respectively. In the process, collectivisation created great resistance and suffering. Resistance came from all levels of the peasantry, who grew less grain and slaughtered their livestock. This resulted in catastrophic losses in numbers of animals between 1928 and 1932, cattle declining from 70 million to 34 million, sheep and goats from 146 million to 42 million and pigs from 26 million to 9 million.

What were the reasons for these losses? One possibility was that it was deliberate defiance sparked by fear: collective resistance on a massive scale, another indication that Stalin had lost control over the whole process—to the extent that his own position was endangered by the possibility of a spontaneous national revolt. An alternative view is that the whole infrastructure for production collapsed under the pressure of reorganisation and the hunt for kulaks as class enemies. In other words, local conditions were so volatile that it became impossible in some areas to fulfil the normal agricultural processes of sowing, harvesting and breeding. Defiance against the system was less in evidence than bewilderment at its incompetent application.

Either way, the result was misery—although the extent varied. There was an overall decline in food consumption between 1928 and 1932; for example, average per annum bread consumption dropped from 250 kilos per head in 1928 to 215 in 1932 and yearly consumption of potatoes from 141 kilos to 125. But these figures do not show the disproportion between the urban areas and the countryside, the latter being much the worse off. Between 1932 and 1933 large areas, especially the Ukraine, experienced a major famine. The suffering also showed itself in the unprecedented upheavals caused to Russian society. Peasants were turned against each other, layer by layer. The kulak minority was targeted by less affluent peasants everywhere. Smaller-scale producers fell victim to the hysteria and panic that affected the localities (see [Chapter 2](#)). There was also a knock-on effect on the urban areas as factories, workshops and munitions works

were overwhelmed by the influx of millions of desperate peasants seeking employment and survival. Although this can be seen as part of the larger process of industrialisation and the switch in balance between agriculture and industry, it nevertheless compounded the urban accommodation difficulties.

In one respect Stalin has been given a reprieve by historians. Perhaps he should not have been. He is usually credited with finding the means whereby agriculture was used to subsidise industrial growth, thereby avoiding dependence on loans from the West. But this approach can be challenged on two grounds. One is the sheer administrative difficulty of such a process. There was simply no means of effecting an efficient transfer of resources from one sector to the other. Far from having a beneficial effect, the role of the agricultural changes was actually to impede the rate at which industrial growth could occur. The transfer of population was too rapid for industry to employ effectively; this created huge administrative problems as well as appalling social conditions. The other is the view of some historians that capital *never* flowed from agriculture into industry. Either it stayed in agriculture or there was a reverse flow from industry into agriculture. Any agricultural recovery in the second and third Five-Year Plans depended on restoration of a degree of individual initiative on the one hand and on the growth of the institution of the machine tractor station (MTS) on the other. The former showed capital being retained by agriculture, the latter showed capital being invested in agriculture by industry. Thus, in one respect the flow of investment to industry from agriculture was cut off, in another the flow was reversed.

Overall, it remains difficult to see anything positive in Stalin's agricultural policies. The results were uniformly disastrous and views on this are unlikely to change significantly. The areas where some defence has traditionally been attempted are now also open to doubt, providing even stronger condemnation. Questions have been raised as to the extent of the control shown by the centre in making and implementing decisions, and the effectiveness of agriculture in subsidising industrial growth can no longer be taken for granted. The picture is uniformly bleak.

Questions

1. Why did Stalin reverse the New Economic Policy (NEP)?
2. Why was the enforcement of collectivisation so disruptive?
3. Did Stalin's agricultural policies benefit industry?

ANALYSIS (2): WHAT WERE THE REASONS FOR AND THE EFFECTS OF STALIN'S INDUSTRIAL POLICIES?

Reasons

As in the case of his changes to agriculture, the reasons for Stalin's industrial policies can now be seen in two different ways. Here, again, it is possible to see him in control, directing—even dictating—the process from above. Or, alternatively, he may have been influenced—even pushed—by pressures from below.

The perspective of decision-making from above starts with the consolidation of his own power base against the Left Opposition and the Rightists. This meant that he was actually in a position to make a decision on the economy. His policy of rapidly accelerating industrialisation was based on two main considerations. In the first place, he aimed to create a command economy that was specifically geared to the survival of the Soviet regime against the hostility of the Western powers. This is apparently given full credence by Stalin's uncompromising speech in 1931: 'We are fifty to a hundred years behind the advanced countries. We must make good this distance in ten years. Either we do it or we shall be crushed. That is what our obligations to the workers and peasants of the USSR dictate to us.' (4) Hence it makes sense to many historians to see Stalin moving the Soviet economy on to a war footing. This also explains the emphasis on heavy industry—iron, steel and machinery that could easily be converted to armaments production—at the expense of light or consumer industry. This is a corollary to one of the explanations of Soviet foreign policy considered in [Chapter 5](#). It has also been argued that there was a change in Soviet military strategy during the 1930s. Stalin was influenced by military theorists who believed that the Soviet Union should no longer follow the traditional Russian defensive strategy of allowing an enemy to be swallowed up by the sheer size of the country. Rather, Soviet power should take the offensive. This meant that armaments should be built up rapidly and stockpiled for a massive pre-emptive strike at a time of Stalin's choosing. The Five-Year Plans were, therefore, gearing the Soviet Union to total war. These points are dealt with in further detail in [Chapter 6](#).

The other element of the decision-making process was ideological. Industrialisation was the only fully reliable means of developing a socialist economy. If Stalin made the decision to switch from the NEP in 1928, this was bound to mean a reorientation from agriculture to industry, since the NEP had been geared to the former. Stalin now accepted that Socialism in One Country had to focus on enlarging the urban proletariat and that the socialist way of doing this was through state-controlled industrial enterprises. This meant curbing the consumer sector. Capitalism had to be

eradicated from the Soviet Union and since it was most entrenched in the peasantry, Stalin was able to justify using the peasants to subsidise industrial development and to reduce the emphasis on consumerism.

The change-from-above model is very popular but it may attribute rather too much to the decisions of one man. As well as the initiatives from above, which undoubtedly existed, there were pressures from below. Stalin's abandonment of the NEP can be seen as a tectonic decision: he went with the considerable social pressure exerted by an increasingly important part of the population. The argument goes something like this: corresponding to the ideological arguments of the left and right were the underlying influences of the growing industrialised working class and the conservative peasantry. The urban proletariat above all wanted readily available food and greater job security, both of which depended on a compliant peasantry. The peasants, however, wanted higher food prices that would enable them to buy more consumer goods. Unfortunately, consumer goods were not the way to guarantee job security for the workers or state investment in industry. Within the constraints of the Bolshevik system there was therefore a growing clash between the two sectors of agriculture and industry. This tension was bound to well upwards to influence the decisions taken in the name of the various groups. Hence, Stalin was reacting to the perceived needs of the working class in the cities, just as he had to the perceived dangers posed by the peasantry over the procurement crisis.

An overall synthesis is possible. By 1927 Stalin had moved towards taking command of an economy that, through the NEP, had been left to take its own course. In part, this change was due to Stalin's own accumulation of power, in part to problems within the economy that required attention. Stalin developed a series of priorities related to future security, which meant that the emphasis was bound to be on heavy industry and, in particular, on armaments. But the process was not a blueprint and it involved changes in the meaning of Socialism in One Country, together with borrowing elements of Trotskyism. Industrialisation meant a degree of planning—but the influence of subgroups was considerable. This tension between direction from above and influence from below was bound to affect the development of industrialisation.

Effects

How efficiently was industrialisation implemented?

The traditional view draws two distinctions. One is between industry and agriculture—the former generally well controlled, the latter badly handled. The other is between heavy and light industry, the former accelerated at the expense of the latter. This was a decision taken by

Stalin and carried out through a chain of command which enabled Stalin to build on past achievements and to develop the heavy industrial base that saved Russia from defeat by Germany after 1941. Several major achievements have been attributed to Stalin. The first three Five-Year Plans did much to develop the basic industries. This was not, of course, without precedent in Russian history. The industrial foundations had been laid during the reign of Peter the Great and were later consolidated before the 1905 Revolution, with the development of textiles in the Moscow area, heavy industrial plant around Petrograd, coalfields in the Donets region, iron and steel in the Ukraine and oil at Baku. Stalin, therefore, did not create industry from nothing. But he did enormously enhance the scale of heavy industry. 'Gigantomania' meant the construction of new industrial cities such as Magnitogorsk, with the emphasis on heavy plant and steel production.

The scale of the increase is impressive. Although it is difficult to be precise, production figures, calculated from a variety of sources by E. Zaleski, rose as follows: the first Five-Year Plan (1928–32) increased steel production from 3 million to 6 million tons, coal from 35 million to 64 million and oil from 12 million to 21 million; the second Five-Year Plan (1933–7) raised the figures to 18 million for steel, 128 million for coal and 26 million for oil. The last complete figures for the third Five-Year Plan before it was interrupted by the 1941 German invasion were 18 million, 150 million and 26 million, respectively.

This, in turn, had a positive impact on employment: far higher levels were achieved than had been anticipated at the outset of the first Five-Year Plan. Instead of the 3.9 million expected in state industry by 1932–3, the number reached 6.4 million. The pace then slowed down to 7.9 million by 1937 and 8.3 million by 1940. The bulk of these were peasants leaving the countryside. Urban populations also increased dramatically by something like 200,000 per month, or by a total of 30 million between 1926 and 1930. Unemployment ceased to be a serious factor since the magnet of industrialisation brought in ever increasing numbers from the countryside and enabled more ambitious targets to be established for projects in heavy industry.

In the process, Stalin generated the capital and labour necessary for such developments from within the Soviet Union itself. This was the purpose of subordinating agriculture to industrialisation. Stalin therefore effectively sealed off Russia from the West and enabled her to survive amid its hostility. Ultimately, Stalin's industrialisation assisted the Soviet Union's survival in the Second World War. According to R. Hutchings, 'One can hardly doubt that if there had been a slower build-up of industry, the attack would have been successful and world history would have evolved quite differently.' (5) In a more direct sense, heavy industrialisation had made it possible for the Soviet Union to rearm. The infrastructure

expanded. In 1933 defence comprised 4 per cent of the industrial budget; by 1937 it had risen to 17 per cent and by 1940 to 33 per cent. Heavy industrialisation therefore translated into ultimate survival.

Some of this argument can still be supported, but a number of reservations need to be added. It is true that Stalin tried to set an overall agenda and established the priority for accelerating heavy industry. But the effectiveness of the planning mechanism has been increasingly called into question. Indeed, recent research has shown that targets did not in themselves constitute planning. It was one thing for the central administration, including Gosplan, to draw up target figures for the different components of industry, but quite another to develop the mechanism whereby these might be achieved systematically.

Hence, although the Stalinist dictatorship was ruthless, ruthlessness did not necessarily produce efficiency—even in the area of its greatest supposed achievement, heavy industry. There was, for example, little overall consistency in the pace of the Five-Year Plans. This was due largely to the disruption caused by local influences. Local managers had to protect themselves by exaggerating their needs for investment and by hoarding materials to ensure that they had sufficient supplies. This meant shortages elsewhere and a consequent lack of overall balance. (6) In other words, the unrealistic demands from the centre forced the localities into defensive measures that could be obstructive to balanced growth.

Increasing emphasis is now being placed on the complete lack of harmony between the different sectors of the economy. It is instructive to compare Soviet industrial development with that in the United States. The latter benefited from a series of auxiliary developments that enhanced industrialisation. These were the growth of transport and services and the development of managerial and accounting expertise. (7) The American system produced in a series of parallel patterns, all interrelated and all developing their own administrative structures as a result of private enterprise. The Soviet initiative lacked these parallel structures and therefore needed a state initiative to supply them. This involved the sort of administrative complexity that could not be provided centrally and the problem was compounded by Stalin's own unwillingness to consider integrated advice, which resulted in serious distortions.

In effect, argues D.R.Shearer, there was 'a command-administrative economy' but it was 'not a planned one'.

Centralization of administrative mechanisms and the elimination of the commercial economy enabled the Party and government leaders to shift massive resources from one economic sector to another at will. In the absence of market mechanisms or at the very least proper accounting methods, however, centralizing reforms created no

systematic administrative process by which to manage those resources. (8)

The problem is that complexity within the process seemed to pass for 'planning', whereas what was actually happening was administrative chaos. This had one particularly serious long-term consequence. When the Germans invaded the Soviet Union in 1941 the whole system was taken completely by surprise. Stalin had prepared the Soviet Union for an offensive war, while the situation in 1941 required a defensive response. All the mechanisms related to the Five-Year Plans were geared to this and therefore reacted badly to the crisis. The result was that the planning mechanism had to be relaxed to achieve the levels of mobilisation required. This contradiction is examined in [Chapter 6](#).

Much less controversial than the question of whether there was a planned economy is the assertion that industrial growth was extremely unbalanced. There is no doubt that Stalin sacrificed light, consumer industries in order to press ahead with a select few heavy industries— coal, steel, oil, farm machinery and armaments. This produced a major social upheaval. The pressure on accommodation was enormous, resulting in extreme overcrowding and extensive squalor as huge dormitories were established for workers. Hence, there was an inherent contradiction in the whole process. Collectivisation and industrialisation, intended to modernise Russia, actually tore apart its social fabric. The result was the collapse of many accepted codes of behaviour and morality. This made it easier to exploit the population but more difficult to stabilise working patterns. It also meant that there was an undercurrent of fear that contributed enormously to the purges and to political instability.

Effect brings us back to cause. Starving the consumer sector to develop heavy industry can be seen either as a deliberate strategy to create an industrial superpower with a compliant population, or as an example of inefficient planning exacerbated by fluctuating local conditions. If it was the former, then the imbalance was the result of a planned policy and was outweighed by the more positive achievements of industrialisation. If the latter, however, the pattern of industrialisation was almost as badly flawed as that of agricultural change. This is bound to raise fundamental questions about Stalin's industrial, as well as his agricultural, legacy.

Questions

1. Why was Soviet industrialisation made a priority under Stalin?
2. How efficiently was the industrial development conducted under Stalin?

SOURCES

1. SOVIET AGRICULTURE 1928–35

Source A:
levels of agricultural production 1928–35 (Soviet figures).

	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935
Grain (million tons)	73.3	71.7	83.5	69.5	69.6	68.6	67.6	75.0
Cattle (million head)	70.5	67.1	52.5	47.9	40.7	38.4	42.4	49.3
Pigs (million head)	26.0	20.4	13.6	14.4	11.6	12.1	17.4	22.6
Sheep and goats (million head)	146.7	147.0	108.8	77.7	52.1	50.2	51.9	61.1

Source B:
from a report by a Reuters correspondent, 29 March 1932.

Russia today is in the grip of famine. I walked alone through villages and twelve collective farms, Everywhere was the cry, 'There is no bread; we are dying.' This cry came to me from every part of Russia. In a train a Communist denied to me that there was a famine. I flung into the spittoon a crust of bread I had been eating from my own supply. The peasant, my fellow passenger, fished it out and ravenously ate it. I threw orange peel into the spittoon. The peasant again grabbed it and devoured it. The Communist subsided...

The government's policy of collectivisation and the peasants' resistance to it have brought Russia to the worst catastrophe since the famine of 1921 swept away the population of whole districts.

Source C:
a description of parts of Russia in 1932 and 1934 by
Sidney and Beatrice Webb, prominent members of the
British Labour Party. This was published in their book
Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation (1935).

Without expecting to convince the prejudiced, we give, for what it may be deemed worth, the conclusion to which our visits in 1932 and 1934 and subsequent examination of the available evidence now lead us. That in each of the years 1931 and 1932 there was a partial failure of crops in

various parts of the huge area of the USSR is undoubtedly true. It is true, also, of British India and of the United States. It has been true, also, of the USSR and of every other country of comparable size, in each successive year of the present century. In countries of such vast extent, having every kind of climate, there is always a partial failure of crops somewhere. How extensive and how serious was this partial failure of crops in the USSR, in 1931 and 1932, it is impossible to ascertain with any assurance. On the one hand it has been asserted by people who have seldom had any opportunity of going to the suffering districts, that throughout huge provinces there ensued a total absence of foodstuffs, so that... literally several millions of people died of starvation. On the other hand, Soviet officials on the spot, in one district after another, informed the present writers that, whilst there was a shortage and hunger, there was at no time a total lack of bread, though its quality was impaired by using other ingredients than wheaten flour; and that any increase in the death-rate due to disease accompanying defective nutrition occurred in only a relatively small number of villages. What may carry more weight than this official testimony was that of various resident British and American journalists who travelled during 1933 and 1934 through the districts reputed to be the worst affected and who declared to the present writers that they had found no reason to suppose that the trouble had been more serious than was officially represented. Our own impression, after considering all the available evidence, is that the partial failure of crops certainly extended to only a fraction of the USSR; possibly to no more than one-tenth of the geographical area. We think it plain that this partial failure was not in itself sufficiently serious to cause actual starvation, except possibly in the worst districts, relatively small in extent.

Source D:

**a recollection of a conversation with a Russian peasant in
1933 by Victor Kravchenko, published in *I Chose
Freedom: The Personal and Political Life of a Soviet
Official*.**

‘I will not tell you about the dead’, she said, ‘I’m sure you know. The half-dead, the nearly dead are even worse. There are hundreds of people in Petrovo bloated with hunger. I don’t know how many die every day. Many are so weak that they no longer come out of their houses. A wagon goes round now and then to pick up the corpses. We’ve eaten everything we could lay our hands on—cats, dogs, field mice, birds. When it’s light tomorrow you will see the trees have been stripped of their bark, for that too has been eaten. And the horse manure has been eaten’ I must have looked startled and unbelieving. ‘Yes, the horse manure. We fight over it. Sometimes there are whole grains in it’

Questions

1. (i) Explain briefly the reason for the fall in livestock figures shown in [Source A](#). [2]
 (ii) What is meant by ‘the government’s policy of collectivisation’, referred to in [Source B](#)? [2]
2. What differences are there between the approaches of [Sources B](#) and [C](#) to the issue of the ‘famine’? How would you explain these differences? [7]
3. How much does [Source D](#) add to our understanding of conditions in the early 1930s? [6]
- *4. ‘The events of 1932–4 are sufficient to show that Stalin’s agricultural policies of 1928–34 were an unqualified failure.’ Comment on this view, in the light of [Sources A](#) to [D](#) and of your own knowledge. [8]

Worked answer

- *4. *[The last of all of the questions on the sources is invariably the longest. It is the closest the student is likely to get to writing an essay, although within a much shorter timescale. The recommended approach is to consider the answer in two roughly equal parts. The first deals with the instruction ‘in the light of [Sources A](#) to [D](#)’, the second, in a separate paragraph, with the scope of ‘your own knowledge’. Each should be clearly identified as such in the opening sentence of the paragraph.*

Within these paragraphs, an argument should be developed as an essay-type response to the question. Hence, the wording is important; consideration needs to be given to ‘sufficient’, to the dates ‘1932–4’ and ‘1928–34’ and to ‘unqualified failure’. The first sentence or two should, if at all possible, signal the general line of argument to be followed.]

The sources provide some strong evidence for the failure of Stalin’s policies between 1932 and 1934. There are, however, limits that prevent the use of the word ‘unqualified’ and its extension to the period 1928–34. An uncompromising view is taken by [Source B](#). Russia is seen as ‘in the grip of famine’ and as experiencing the ‘worst catastrophe since the famine of 1921’. The disaster was also widespread, affecting ‘every part of Russia’. Even more powerful is the evidence of [Source D](#), with its references to ‘the dead’, the ‘half-dead’ and the ‘nearly dead’, the ‘wagon...to pick up the corpses’ and the eating of ‘horse manure’ for the ‘grains’ within it. [Source A](#) adds statistical evidence with the rapid decline in the number of cattle, pigs, sheep and goats between 1932 and 1934. Two of the sources do, however, take a broader perspective, which dilutes the description

‘unqualified failure’. **Source A** shows that grain is less severely affected throughout the period 1928–32 than livestock and that, despite the trough of 1932–4, the years 1928–31 and 1935 were less disastrously affected. **Source C** provides a less bleak picture overall. The Webbs maintain that the ‘failure of the crops in various parts’ is ‘partial’, and that this needs to be placed within the context of the experience of other countries. They also seem willing to take the word of the ‘Soviet officials on the spot’ that the problem was less shortage than adulteration of the wheat.

The sources therefore provide a mixed view. The same applies to additional material on Stalin’s agricultural policy. If his purpose was to undermine agriculture to boost industry, then his policies did not fail over the period 1928–34. Nor did the speed with which collectivisation was accomplished; indeed, in 1931 Stalin criticised those implementing collectivisation as being ‘dizzy with success’. On the other hand, there were serious repercussions that are more appropriately considered a failure. Recent research, especially by J. Arch Getty, has shown that it was very difficult for the central administration, under Stalin himself, to keep control over the application of agricultural policies by local officials. Overall, there was a fundamental imbalance in the economic hierarchy that was bound to increase the levels of inefficiency and to open the way for the type of disaster referred to in the sources. This could be seen as ‘relative’ rather than ‘unqualified’ failure.

SOURCES

2.

PRIORITIES IN SOVIET INDUSTRIALISATION UNDER STALIN

Source E:

from Sir William Citrine: *I Search for Truth in Russia*
(1938).

As to the standard of life in Russia, whilst I have repeatedly said it is rising, it is useless for anyone to deny that it is still low, and in some respects deplorably so. So much of the national income is devoted to capital equipment that there is not enough for immediate consumption. The Russian workers evidently feel this represents a sacrifice which is worthwhile. They are buoyed up with confident hope for the future and the knowledge that their standards are progressively improving. The

psychological value of this is immense and I believe it represents one of the greatest assets that the Soviet government possesses.

The people see their country being equipped with plant and machinery, which should one day rank it amongst the most efficient in the world. They are desperately anxious to make themselves independent, economically, of the capitalist states and to furnish the means of effective defence should they be attacked.

Source F:
official Soviet statistics showing the extent to which the targets of the first and second Five-Year Plans were achieved. Figures are percentages of targets.

	<i>First Five-Year Plan (1928-32)</i>	<i>Second Five-Year Plan (1933-37)</i>
National income	91.5	96.1
Industrial production	100.7	103.0
producer goods	127.6	121.3
consumer goods	80.5	85.4
Agricultural production	57.8	62.6

Source G:
a description by Andrew Smith, an American, of a factory barracks in Moscow in 1932. His recollections were published in London in 1937 under the title *I Was a Soviet Worker*.

Kuznetsov lived with about 550 others, men and women, in a wooden structure about 800 feet long and fifteen feet wide, The room contained approximately 500 narrow beds, covered with mattresses filled with straw or dried leaves. There were no pillows, or blankets... Some of the residents had no beds and slept on the floor or in wooden boxes. In some cases beds were used by one shift during the day and by others at night. There were no screens or walls to give any privacy... There were no closets or wardrobes, because each one owned only the clothing on his back.

Source H:
**a description of life in Magnitogorsk by John Scott, an
 American communist. This was published in his book
Behind the Urals (1942).**

Magnitogorsk was...built from scratch. Within several years, half a billion cubic feet of excavation was done, forty-two million cubic feet of reinforced concrete poured, five million cubic feet of fire bricks laid, a quarter of a million tons of structured steel erected. This was done without sufficient labour, without necessary quantities of the most elementary materials. Brigades of young enthusiasts from every corner of the Soviet Union arrived in the summer of 1930 and did the groundwork of railroad and dam construction necessary. Later, groups of local peasants and herdsmen came to Magnitogorsk because of bad conditions in the villages, due to collectivisation. Many of the peasants were completely unfamiliar with industrial tools and processes. A colony of several hundred foreign engineers and specialists, some of whom made as high as one hundred dollars a day, arrived to advise and direct the work.

From 1928 until 1932 nearly a quarter of a million people came to Magnitogorsk. About three quarters of these new arrivals came of their own free will seeking work, bread cards, better conditions. The rest came under compulsion.

Source I:
**a view of Soviet industrial achievements as put forward in
 1981 by an official *History of the USSR*.**

While the economies of the capitalist countries were sinking ever deeper into recession, the Soviet economy was booming. The laying of a firm foundation for a socialist economy created favourable conditions for the further progress of the country's national economy in the second Five-Year Plan period, 1933–7,

The key economic task of the second Five-Year Plan period—technical re-equipment of the national economy—was fulfilled... During the second Five-Year Plan period, industrial output went up by 120 per cent. The USSR moved into first place in Europe and second in the world in gross industrial output.

Questions

1. Explain the references to
 - (i) producer and consumer goods ([Source F](#)); [2]
 - (ii) Magnitogorsk ([Source H](#)). [2]

- *2. What does **Source I** show of the priorities of Soviet industrialisation? [4]
3. Compare Sources **E** and **G** as comments on the conditions experienced by Soviet workers in the 1930s. [4]
4. How much reliance can the historian place on Sources **H** and **I** as a comment on Soviet industrial progress during the 1930s? [5]
5. 'The first and second Five-Year Plans largely overcame the obstacles in the way of Soviet industrial growth.' Comment on this view, in the light of Sources **E** to **I** and of information known to you. [8]

Worked answer

- *2. *[On the surface, this is a straightforward question, requiring a description of the content of the source. This is, however, an oversimplification, since certain inferences need to be drawn from the content. The answer therefore needs to go to a higher level than mere description. One possibility is to develop the inferences and support these with the specific wording.]*

Several priorities can be inferred from the wording of **Source I**. One is the need to compete aggressively with the capitalist economies, especially while the latter were 'sinking ever deeper into recession'. This would in turn enable the Soviet Union to proceed to the structural alternative to capitalism by laying a 'firm foundation for a socialist economy'. It would, of course, be necessary to work through the earlier stages of consolidation to achieve the 'technical re-equipment of the national economy' but this would then enable rapid growth that could be sustained and become self-generating ('industrial output went up by 120 per cent'). Focusing on 'gross industrial output' would enable the Soviet Union to overtake the West where it mattered most. The lack of any reference to 'consumer industry' shows that the focus is very much on heavy industry, with all the potential this provided for machinery and armaments.

4

SOCIETY AND CULTURE

BACKGROUND NARRATIVE

Stalin sought to personalise the political system and to transform the economy. This had a profound effect on society and culture in the Soviet Union. One practical result was the strengthening of the family as a vehicle for political and ideological control. Hence there were restrictions on divorce from 1935 and a ban was placed on abortion in 1936. Stalin also moved away from an earlier emphasis on social equality; instead, he reintroduced wage differentials and accentuated ranks within the army. Meanwhile, the provision of education was expanded through Narkompros (People's Commissariat for Enlightenment), while traditional forms of discipline were restored in schools—as were formal examinations. All cultural activities were brought within the overall criteria of Socialist Realism. This affected architecture, painting, music and film, and, of course, literature, which was placed under the additional constraints of the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP) and the Union of Writers. Attempts were also made to destroy the religious base of the lives of Russians and the ethnic minorities. All forms of Christianity were attacked, along with Islam and Buddhism, and atheist organisations like the League of Godless were actively encouraged.

The usual assumption is that Stalin reversed the earlier and chaotic social experiments of the Bolsheviks and replaced them with a more successful totalitarian structure. Analyses (1) and (2) examine this perspective.

ANALYSIS (1): HOW EXTENSIVELY DID STALIN TRANSFORM SOVIET SOCIETY AND CULTURE?

According to the usual scenario, the Bolsheviks under Lenin introduced radical changes. These were intended to transform all areas of society and culture and to remove bourgeois influences. But this attempted

transformation proved far more difficult than Lenin had ever anticipated, with the result that there was a serious backlash. Stalin's role was to reverse the radicalism of the Bolsheviks with a more conservative and traditional social policy.

This view is an oversimplification. The actual pace of the changes is more complex and varied. The relaxation of Bolshevik radicalism began in 1921 at the same time as the NEP. The Stalinist regime at first revived the radical impetus of the Bolsheviks. When this proved impossible to implement it retreated into a more pragmatic and cautious approach.

This pursuit of radicalism, followed by a revival of conservatism, can be explained in two contrasting ways. On the one hand, Stalin himself took the initiative, moving deliberately to the construction of a totalitarian state. This involved, as the first stage, going further than Lenin in proving his Bolshevik credentials and then, after he had achieved uncontested power, developing his personality cult through close association with Russian traditions. Throughout the whole process Stalin was in control. On the other hand, it is claimed that Stalin found the policies he pursued had a habit of recoiling on him so that he was forced to make unplanned adjustments. This does not make his system any less ruthless in its conception or its execution, but it does raise considerable questions about its effectiveness as part of a totalitarian state. His reversal of earlier social and cultural policies can be interpreted as a system out of control: Stalin was trying to dictate from the centre through the pursuit of radicalism. When the centre lost the initiative to local forces, he tried to regain the initiative by more traditional controls. This 'bottom-up' theory works as follows: Stalin found that local officials and educational bodies were overenthusiastic in their application of radical theories and policies. Their motive, as with economic change and the pursuit of purges, was to survive within an increasingly competitive and hostile environment by trying to exceed central diktats. Any attempt by the centre to restore control increasingly involved the return to more traditional—and authoritarian—influences.

What are we to make of these arguments? The case for fully effective totalitarianism does appear to have been discredited—as can be seen in the case of official attitudes to education, equality, women and the family, religion and culture.

In education, the initial trend was the intensification of the Leninist approach, followed by a more traditionalist backlash. History, in particular, was taken to Marxist extremes during the late 1920s and early 1930s in the books of Pokrovskii, which emphasised the negative heritage of the tsarist and capitalist past. At first this harmonised with the Stalinist prospects of modernisation and socialist acceleration. By 1934, however, Stalin had gone a long way to rehabilitate part of Russia's past and was creating heroic figures out of Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great. This

fitted into his revival of other forms of tradition in education, part of his attempts to wrest the initiative back from the radical dynamic that was out of control by the end of the 1920s. Other examples of revived conservatism were the restoration of school uniforms, including compulsory pigtails for girls, and of formal discipline and corporal punishment.

A similar trend can be seen with egalitarianism. One of the key components of early Bolshevik ideology had been the abolition of all forms of social distinction. This meant the end of wage differentials, to be substituted by the Marxist maxim 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his need'. The Bolsheviks also undermined military ranks and decorations within the army. Again, Stalin initially went along with, and even intensified, this trend. But the crisis caused by the extent of the early radicalism meant that Stalin revived distinctions. This was one of the crucial effects of the Stakhanovite influence, the ethic of which was profoundly against equality. The regime went on to abolish 'wage equalisation' and to devise scales which would 'take into account the difference between skilled and unskilled labour'. The Marxist principle was therefore changed to 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his work'.

Stalin also swung from one extreme to the other in his attitude to women and the family. The Bolshevik era between 1918 and 1924 based its social changes on the Marxist premise that the family was a bourgeois institution that involved the exploitation of both the proletariat as a class and women as individuals. Attempts were therefore made to change the whole system. This was done partly by making the institution of marriage obsolete, and partly by freeing women as individuals through social measures such as readily available divorce, abortion on demand, and economic equality within the labour market. Again, this process was intensified by early radical measures of collectivisation from 1928 onwards. But the social backlash was so serious that Stalin had to institute a reversal of the policy on family and seek refuge in traditionalism. In 1935, for example, divorce became more difficult and expensive for women to obtain and abortion was made illegal the following year. The trend found its way into literature as a ban was placed on any mention of extra-marital love or sex. The emphasis had moved away from Bolshevik amorality to a Stalinist revival of the strictest sexual code. Nowhere are the contradictions of Stalinism greater than with the reluctant acceptance of the family.

The law, too, underwent a change. The West has always seen the law as a means of upholding social cohesion. Individuals have the right to initiate legal proceedings against each other. At first the Bolsheviks considered that such litigation would be unnecessary in a socialist state, while all that was necessary to maintain a socialist system was a set of revolutionary courts to deal with crime—which could be expected to 'wither away' with the end of capitalism. The process was taken further in the early Stalin period.

Krylenko, who had organised the revolutionary tribunals during the Civil War period, in 1930 consolidated the legal measures in a new criminal code that incorporated criminal law into measures to deal with all 'class enemies'. Yet this proved too unstable. It was open to wide interpretation and added to the chaos of the purges at grass-roots level. Hence, from the mid-1930s onwards, the legal process became more complex, and attention was once again restored to property, whether state or individual. The motive was clearly to reintroduce social stability. At the same time, the emphasis remained on dealing with class enemies. The Procurator General from 1939, Vyshinskii, maintained that what was being introduced was 'a new, higher type of law', which was the will of the proletariat expressed through the Party.

The developments in religion followed a similar but somewhat more diverse and complex pattern. At first Stalin accelerated the campaign for atheism that had been promoted during the Leninist period. From 1928 onwards League of Godless volunteers and members of OGPU pulled down steeples and church bells; conversions were forbidden; and the purges affected the church hierarchies of the different denominations. Eventually there was a rethink. But in this case it was later and less complete than for education or for the family. It took the emergency of war and the need to appeal to patriotism to change Stalin's policy. During the struggle with Germany the Orthodox Patriarchate, abolished during the radical period, was re-established to provide a focus for Russian patriotism. It is therefore reasonable to assume that any concessions made by Stalin to religious groups were due to expediency. Where he felt that there would be little benefit to the regime the concessions were not forthcoming. Hence, there was no let up for the Jews—who, in the circumstances, were hardly likely to support the German invaders, or the Muslims, most of whom were outside the German invasion path, or the Buddhists, who were considered irrelevant to the war effort. There is also the point that Stalin considered the Islamic areas of the Soviet Union to be fundamentally more unstable than the others. This was largely because they had been nineteenth-century additions and contained largely Turkic populations. Hence, he took the important political measure of breaking the area down into the five Central Asian Soviet Republics—a division that survived the collapse of the Soviet Union itself in 1991.

In culture the Stalinist regime initially sought to continue the early radicalism of the Bolsheviks. Art and literature were mobilised specifically for the Five-Year Plans and collectivisation. 'Artistic brigades' were set up, subordinate to the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP). The problem was that works of real merit were excluded, while local judgement, on broadly interpreted political criteria, allowed mediocrity to flourish in an atmosphere of repressive confusion. Clearly something had to be done to instil a greater degree of order so in 1932 RAPP was replaced

by the Union of Writers, which redefined cultural criteria in accordance with the precepts of Socialist Realism. Stalin interpreted this as being ‘socialist in content’ and ‘nationalist in form’, arguing that writers should essentially be ‘engineers of human souls’. The whole expression of culture became caught up in the Stalinist personality cult, which meant that in the long run the criteria for quality were decided by the General Secretary himself. The results of this are discussed in [Analysis \(2\)](#).

Overall, Stalin shifted early continuity with Bolshevik radicalism to a revival of past traditions. This has usually been put down to a deliberate policy on his part. It is, however, more in keeping with the ramshackle nature of his regime to see it as a response to initial failure and as an attempt to restore central control by abandoning radicalism in favour of more tested authoritarianism. This suited the character of his rule, but his changed attitude to society and culture was at least partly due to his failure to be a successful Bolshevik.

Questions

1. How far did Stalin accept previous social and cultural policies?
2. Was there a ‘Stalinist revolution’ in society and culture?

ANALYSIS (2): DID STALIN’S SOCIAL AND CULTURAL POLICIES BENEFIT THE SOVIET PEOPLE?

We have seen in [Analysis \(1\)](#) that there was a shift from radical to conservative policies over social and cultural issues, which showed that Stalin was not completely in control and that conservatism was an attempt to reverse the chaos caused by radicalism. All this inevitably had a mixed effect on the population.

In education, for example, the ‘radical’ period, from 1927 to 1931, saw huge increases in institutions and enrolments. Narkompros (People’s Commissariat for Enlightenment) focused on creating education for the masses. The number of schools increased from 118,558 in 1927–8 to 166,275 by 1933, with the number of pupils rising from 7.9 million to 9.7 million. But during the radical phase the emphasis was on socialist construction, productive labour within the context of the collectivised farm or factory—which meant that formal teaching was all but abolished. During the same period the number of universities dropped from twenty-one to eleven, while 1,466 specialist institutes and departments came into existence between 1927 and 1934, student numbers increasing from 168,500 to 458,300. Teaching itself was radicalised as ‘bourgeois’ influences were eradicated.

This momentum did not last and the benefits of a greatly expanded base began to give way to the problems of a serious decline in quality. As in collectivisation, the leadership soon came to realise that changes had come to assume a momentum of their own and that basic educational stability was threatened. In 1931 Narkompros was criticised by the Party for falling short on educational standards, in particular in general knowledge. Between 1932 and 1935 the curriculum was extensively changed. Formal teaching methods were reintroduced, along with formal discipline, grades and examinations. History acquired a new dimension, with the emphasis on heroic figures from Russia's past, such as Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great. In higher education examinations returned and the theoretical element of the sciences was once again given full emphasis. More significantly, the social intake of students was altered so that members of the proletariat were no longer given automatic preference. Entrance requirements were based on academic success, which once again favoured the more articulate sectors of society. Overall, it seems, greater numbers in education were more obvious as a result of radical influences, improvements in standards as a result of the restoration of traditional influences.

The role of women within the context of the family is problematic in any society. Measures to protect the family may enhance the role of women in one respect while, at the same time, reducing their freedom and options in some others. This was certainly the case in Russia. Bolshevik and early Stalinist policies emphasised the importance of women making their own decisions—and the easy availability of divorce and abortion made this a practicality. In Muslim areas women were also relieved of such customs as polygamy and were able to dispense with the veil.

But the consequences could be socially damaging within a society that had always placed a high value on the family unit. By 1934, 37 per cent of marriages in Moscow ended in divorce, there were 2.7 times as many abortions as live births and there was a massive increase in juvenile crime and social disruption. Particularly worrying to the authorities was the real threat of a long-term population fall. Consequently the restoration of the family took precedence over the more progressive treatment of women, although it has to be said that, with the limitations imposed on the workforce, there was still a greater degree of gender equality in the Soviet Union than in the West.

In the case of religion it is much easier to see the negative than the positive effects of Stalin's dictatorship. On the negative side were the ruthless and relentless persecution of the minority groups. Jews were equated with capitalism and with cliquish opposition to Communist principles; there were even periodic, although not explicit, revivals of the type of anti-Semitism that had been apparent in tsarist Russia. Islam and Buddhism experienced virtually no direct benefits from a regime that was

profoundly suspicious of both. The 26,000 mosques that had existed in 1921 had been reduced to only 1,312 by 1942 and all Islamic courts had been abolished. On the other hand, Islam was never seriously weakened. The social influence of Islamic society, along with the minimal destruction caused in Central Asia by the Second World War, meant that the population growth of the Muslim republics of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kirgizia, Tadzhikistan and Turkestan was more rapid than that of the Slavic population of the Soviet Union. This had enormous implications for the future.

As in all other areas, Stalinism had a mixed impact on culture. On the one hand, Stalin placed firm controls on the experimentation of the 1920s and did whatever possible to reduce all art forms to state subservience. This had obvious implications for quality. On the other hand, the Soviet Union did, in one or two areas, experience something akin to a renaissance. Probably the most productive of the arts between 1924 and 1953 was music. Stalin's own tastes were extremely limited and therefore restricted experiment. He disliked the atonal music that was appearing in the 1920s and, like Hitler, insisted on melodic themes. Yet composers were able to work more successfully under such constraints in the Soviet Union than they were in Nazi Germany. The output of Prokofiev, Khatchaturian, Kabalevsky and, above all, Shostakovich was impressive by any standard. The Soviet Union had a greater musical output than any other dictatorship of the twentieth century. The reason might be the coincidence of four great composers or, alternatively, that Socialist Realism allowed sufficient flexibility for the expression of traditional national influences without becoming as obsessive as the clearly inferior music produced in Nazi Germany.

Artists were less renowned for work of high quality. Painting was more directly exposed to connections with political propaganda. This meant that the majority of pictures were stilted and identified with the official line on collectivisation. The most common themes were therefore contented peasants on collective farms, industrious workers with Stakhanovite aspirations, and the paternalist qualities of Stalin himself. Architecture was even more directly controlled by the state, since plans and designs could rarely be implemented without state funding. Priorities were given to prestige projects, which formed an integral part of the regime's obsession with 'gigantomania'. Also under state control and geared to propaganda purposes was the film industry. But film was used more subtly in Russia than in Germany, producing abiding masterpieces such as *Red October*, *Battleship Potemkin* and *Ivan the Terrible*. The film director Eisenstein ranks as one of the greatest of the century. Stalin was not entirely responsible for these achievements: indeed, he often interfered with Eisenstein's work. His influence was, however, less inhibiting than that of

Hitler and Mussolini in Germany and Italy, neither of which produced a single feature film of any quality.

As an overview, Stalin's later social policies were generally, although not entirely, more beneficial, or less harmful, than his earlier ones. The fracturing of society by collectivisation and enforced industrialisation was predominantly negative, while the reassertion of traditional values carried certain benefits, which also provided greater stability for cultural developments. All changes were, however, made to bolster an insecure dictatorship, which resorted to purges and controls as a means of enforcing conformity, as has already been discussed in [Chapter 2](#). The result was that the main casualty of Stalin's policies, whether radical or traditional, was individual identity.

QUESTIONS

1. Which were the most and least beneficial of Stalin's social and cultural policies?
2. Which areas of society and culture were most and least open to Stalin's influence?

SOURCES

THE EFFECTS OF SOCIALIST REALISM

Source A:

from a resolution by Lenin, 8 October 1920.

All educational work in the Soviet Republic of workers and peasants, in the field of political education in general and in the field of art In particular, should be imbued with the spirit of the class struggle being waged by the proletariat for the successful achievement of the aims of its dictatorship, i.e. the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, the abolition of classes, and the elimination of all forms of exploitation of man by man.

Source B:

from a speech of the writer A.O.Advienko to the Seventh Congress of Soviets, 1935.

Thank you Stalin because I am joyful. Thank you because I am well... Centuries will pass, and the generations still to come will regard us as the happiest of mortals, as the most fortunate of men, because we lived in the century of centuries, because we were privileged to see Stalin, our inspired

leader. Yes, and we regard ourselves as the happiest of mortals because we are the contemporaries of a man who never had an equal in world history.

The men of all ages will call on thy name, which is strong, beautiful, wise and marvellous. Thy name is engraven on every factory, every machine, every place on earth, and in the hearts of all men...

I write books. I am an author. All thanks to thee, O great educator, Stalin. I love a young woman with a renewed love and shall perpetuate myself in my children—all thanks to thee, great educator, Stalin. I shall be eternally happy and joyous, all thanks to thee, great educator, Stalin. Everything belongs to thee, chief of our great country. And when the woman I love presents me with a child the first word it shall utter will be: Stalin.

Source C:
from a poem about Stalin by the writer Osip Mandelstam,
May 1934.

We live, deaf to the land beneath us,
 Ten steps away no one hears our speeches,
 All we hear is the Kremlin mountaineer,
 The murderer and peasant-slayer.

His fingers are fat as grubs
 And the words, final as lead weights, fall from his lips,

His cockroach whiskers leer
 and his boot tops gleam.

Around him a rabble of thin-necked leaders—
 fawning half-men for him to play with...

Source D:
from *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation* by Sidney
and Beatrice Webb, prominent members of the British
Labour Party, 1935.

There is, it must be candidly admitted, in the USSR of today, little of the sort of culture that used to be recognised as such in the Oxford or Cambridge common rooms, or in the artistic coteries of Bloomsbury or Chelsea; and even less governmental influence of it, or encouragement to it...

It is not unfair to say that the British devotees of culture not only accept as inevitable the exclusion of the masses from the ‘realms of gold’ in which they themselves find so much virtuous enjoyment, but also secretly rejoice at their own exclusive possession of something in which the common lump of men cannot share... In the usage of Soviet communism there is, in the conception of culture, no such connotation of inevitable exclusiveness, of a pleasant aloofness, or of a consciousness of superiority. It is, at any rate, definitely the policy of the Soviet Government...that the possession of culture shall be made, not necessarily identical or equal, but genuinely universal... Soviet Communists actually believe that, by a sustained effort of self-sacrifice on the part of the older people, the entire generation that is growing up in the USSR can be raised to a high level of culture. There will be some who will see in that very belief, and in the strenuous efforts that it inspires, a real evidence of culture in the best sense of the word.

Questions

1. Explain the references to
 - (i) ‘proletariat’ and ‘bourgeoisie’ (Source A); [2]
 - (ii) ‘Congress of Soviets’ (Source B). [2]
2. * Comment on the two approaches to Stalin’s leadership shown in Sources B and C. [6]
3. Comment on the view of Soviet culture in the 1930s contained in Source D. [6]
4. ‘Socialist Realism was essentially a sham.’ Discuss this view in the light of Sources A to D and of your own knowledge. [8]

Worked answer

- *2. [*‘Comment on’ is a general instruction that leaves the criteria for the answer much more to the student. This can be an advantage if clear criteria can be found quickly. Otherwise it might lead to an answer without a proper focus. The criteria are suggested in the answer that follows.*]

Both sources are examples of cultural responses to Stalin’s leadership. But, although produced within a year of each other, they differ widely in several ways. Source B is an example of a public oration, in which the writer Advienko uses a semi-poetic style in the form of a eulogy. By contrast, Source C uses verse as a more private medium to convey biting satire. The image of Stalin’s leadership could not be more differently presented. Source B projects him as an ‘inspired leader’ without ‘an equal in world history’, directly responsible for everything of value. Source C, on the other hand, emphasises the negative and deadening effect of Stalin’s power. These conceptions

are reinforced by the imagery used which, in each case, is extravagant and extreme. [Source B](#) considers Stalin's very name to be 'strong, beautiful, wise and marvellous' while, in [Source C](#), there are references to the 'murderer and peasant-slayer' with fingers as 'fat as grubs'. The two sources also have different expectations about the response to Stalin's leadership. In [Source B](#) praise is seen to be the natural response for all the benefits received from Stalin. [Source C](#), however, considers that Stalin is surrounded by 'fawning half-men'. Overall, Advienko and Mandelstam are typical of the two extreme responses that are likely to exist within any totalitarian system, the former encouraged and the latter in great peril.

STALIN'S FOREIGN POLICY, 1929-41

BACKGROUND NARRATIVE

As a result of the Bolshevik Revolution, Soviet Russia found itself isolated in international diplomacy and excluded from the Paris Peace Conference. Then, in 1922, while Lenin was still, in name at least, in charge of Soviet affairs, Russia and Germany stunned the other powers by drawing up an agreement at Rapallo that conferred mutual diplomatic representation and provided trade and investment links. This was tightened in 1926 by the Treaty of Berlin, which was, in effect, a neutrality pact. Relations between the Soviet Union and other capitalist powers were more problematic. Diplomatic relations were established with Britain in 1924, broken by Britain in 1927 and re-established in 1929. It seemed, therefore, that the most consistent connection before 1931 would be with Germany.

The rise of Hitler threw Soviet policy into the melting pot. Between 1931 and 1933 Stalin was convinced that Hitler in power would be the best option for the Soviet Union, for reasons that are examined below. He certainly saw no immediate reason to seek to replace the Treaty of Berlin. By the mid-1930s, however, Stalin appeared to have made a substantial switch. In 1935 he drew up the Franco-Soviet Pact and, with France, guaranteed the existence of Czechoslovakia by the Treaty of Mutual Assistance. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union had also joined the League of Nations and Foreign Minister Litvinov seemed a keen supporter of the policy of collective security that was designed originally to contain Germany. Stalin's attitude to the Spanish Civil War also indicated strong ideological moves against fascism. The Soviet Union was the only power to give direct assistance to the Republic in its struggle against the Nationalist forces of Franco, which received arms and equipment from Mussolini and Hitler. Stalin also urged the adoption of 'popular front' alignments of all centrist and leftist groups against the fascist right.

The period between September 1938 and August 1939 proved to be another turning point in Stalin's foreign policy. The Soviet Union played no part in the Anglo-French policy over Czechoslovakia and became

increasingly concerned about the concessions being given to Germany. Early in 1939 the Soviet Union sought more specific commitments from France and Britain against Germany, but these were not forthcoming. Meanwhile, Litvinov's successor, Molotov, was engaged in secret discussions with his German counterpart, von Ribbentrop. In August 1939 these produced the Nazi—Soviet Pact. On the surface this was a non-aggression agreement but a 'Secret Additional Protocol' made possible the partition of Poland between Germany and Russia. Both Hitler and Stalin proceeded to claim their share in September.

Stalin appeared to have gained the security he had sought, particularly since Hitler now focused the attention of Germany on the West in 1940. Stalin used this period to wrest territory from Finland but the Winter War that followed showed the vulnerability of the Soviet armed forces. Stalin also put increased pressure on Hitler to concede territory to the Soviet Union in the Baltic States and Romania. At the same time, however, he refused to heed warnings from Western countries and his own intelligence services that Hitler was now planning to attack the Soviet Union. Hitler proceeded to do this in June 1941, taking Stalin completely by surprise.

ANALYSIS (1): WHAT WERE THE MOTIVES OF STALIN'S FOREIGN POLICY UP TO AUGUST 1939?

The motivation behind Stalin's foreign policy should be analysed at two levels. First, and fundamentally, what was the underlying objective for the regime of Soviet relations with other powers? Second, and arising from this, why were specific policies pursued at particular stages between 1924 and 1939?

Stalin did appear to have an underlying motive: to provide external security for the internal construction of communism. If successful, this would, in the long term, enable the Soviet Union to turn its power outwards—at a time of its own choosing. In Stalin's own words, 'Our banner remains, as before, the banner of peace. But if war breaks out, we shall not be able to sit with folded hands—we shall have to make a move, but the move will come last. And we shall act so as to throw the decisive weight onto the scales, the weight that should be preponderant.' (1) According to T.Uldricks, Stalin assumed 'hostility from all imperialist powers and, therefore, the need to keep them divided'. (2)

These underlying assumptions resulted logically in three developments. The first was the creation of an industrial superpower as the only means of providing the military base necessary for survival. In justifying his policy of Socialism in One Country and the introduction of the planning system Stalin constantly harped on the theme of Soviet insecurity. (3) The second development was the policy adopted to safeguard the Soviet position while

this reconstruction was under way. Stalin had already opted for Socialism in One Country rather than Permanent Revolution, which might well have upset the external situation to Russia's internal disadvantage. The third development was the utilisation of military involvement to ensure Soviet security and to foster Soviet expansion. The period between 1939 and 1941 was to prove that Stalin had an irredentist attitude to the boundaries of tsarist Russia: he intended to reclaim as much as possible of what had been lost in the treaties of Brest Litovsk (1918) and Riga (1921). In this sense war, not revolution, would be the means.

Stalin's overall approach to foreign policy seems therefore to have encompassed rapid internal growth regulated by a planning mechanism, short- or medium-term external security, and long-term military intervention. But how could this best be achieved? Historians have tended to follow one of two lines of argument.

One is the Rapallo approach. The argument here is that Stalin aimed to continue the special relationship established with Germany by the Treaty of Rapallo in 1922. This made sense for a number of reasons. Rapallo and its successor, the Treaty of Berlin (1926), conferred upon the Soviet Union benefits from German investment and a degree of military co-operation. It also had the advantage of putting pressure upon the new Polish state, which had, after all, won the Russo-Polish War of 1920–1. In addition, it might neutralise the Anglo-French combination. This was an important consideration since Britain and France were likely to be as hostile to the Soviet Union as they were to Germany; they had, of course, played the leading roles in supporting the counter-revolutionary White forces during the Civil War between 1918 and 1921. Sooner or later, the Soviet Union's special relationship with Germany would pay off, especially if Germany could be induced into a conflict with the other capitalist powers, independently of initial Soviet involvement.

The alternative interpretation of Stalin's foreign policy is that he adopted a collective security approach. This involved seeking a more important role in Europe than a mere bilateral relationship with a single power would permit. The Soviet Union would play a pivotal rather than a peripheral part. Since Germany was perceived as the most likely threat to Soviet security, Stalin's foreign policy would have to be directed towards maintaining contacts with Germany's most likely opponents and constraints. This meant increasing Soviet contacts with France, especially during the period between 1933 and 1938.

The Rapallo and collective security approaches may be seen as mutually exclusive of each other. By one analysis, the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of August 1939 was a logical and direct consequence of a long-term strategy. The pact represented 'the fruition of Stalin's whole complex conception of the means of Soviet survival in a hostile world and the emergence into a commanding international position'. (4) There is a certain

logic to Tucker's view. The Soviet position would be greatly enhanced as Germany, apparently secure in the guarantee of Soviet neutrality, would be free to turn on the West. The result would be general exhaustion, as had occurred in the First World War, only this time Russia would avoid joining the initial hostilities. Instead, intervention would be at a time of Stalin's choosing, calculated to regain Russia's former frontiers, which would, in turn, provide a base for further territorial expansion.

Why did the emphasis in Stalin's policy change during the 1930s—from supporting the rise of Hitler to power before 1933, to moving towards an agreement with France by 1935, before returning to collaboration with Germany by 1939? The argument is that Hitler was at first seen by Stalin as a temporary phenomenon; while if he survived, he would provide the best prospect of provoking a war between Germany and the West. Between 1933 and 1938, however, Hitler was moving ahead, with his repudiation of the Versailles settlement, more confidently than anyone had expected. Stalin therefore considered it necessary to put pressure on Germany by temporary and outflanking diplomacy involving France and Czechoslovakia. By 1939 Stalin was able to return to his preferred Russo-German co-operation, knowing, from March, that there was a strong prospect of a war between the West and Germany over Poland. The Nazi-Soviet Pact was therefore the pinnacle of Stalin's foreign affairs strategy throughout the 1930s.

There are, however, several problems with this approach. First, it attributes to Stalin the sort of long-term objectives that amount almost to a blueprint. Changes in Stalin's policy are seen as mere tactical deviations in pursuit of a long-term strategy. Might they not actually have been a change of long-term strategy as a result of short-term indecision and uncertainty? After all, this was a common reaction in the 1930s to rapidly changing circumstances. Stalin would have had to transcend not only Chamberlain and Daladier—admittedly not too difficult—but even Hitler, whose forward planning has now been called into question by a battery of historians. Stalin should, perhaps, be seen within this context. In any case, his commitment to foreign policy has been disputed. According to J.Haslam, Stalin 'took only a sporadic interest' in this area; indeed, 'on the whole, Stalin abstained from direct intervention and contented himself with merely reviewing and approving... Even the process of review was occasionally delegated to others.' (5) We could go further down the road travelled by Haslam. The swings in policy were attempts to correct previous errors of his own and to re-establish control over those who had not fulfilled the tasks delegated to them. For example, his policy of assisting Hitler into power had clearly backfired by 1934. The Nazi regime was strengthening its position at home and abroad, so that Stalin was obliged to seek, through collective security, to control the monster he had helped create. This explains the Franco-Soviet Pact of 1935 as well as his

policy of encouraging broad anti-fascist fronts all over Europe, especially in Spain. He was provided with an apparently rational approach at this stage by Foreign Minister Litvinov, who sought to improve Soviet relations with the West through involvement in the League of Nations. When, by 1938, it had become apparent that collective security had not worked, Stalin switched to another tack. He blamed Litvinov for moving the Soviet Union too closely to France and replaced him with Molotov, who pursued a more pro-German line. In each case Stalin was influenced by his advisers quite as much as he directed them—until things went wrong and he needed a scapegoat.

The violent oscillations in foreign policy were, by this analysis, similar to what happened in domestic policy: far from being in overall control, Stalin had to pull back after an earlier policy had gone *out of* control. He was fundamentally pragmatic, adjusting his policies according to immediate needs rather than to long-term plans. He had the power and authority to make sudden changes and explain away previous errors of judgement in a way that would have been much more difficult in a democracy. This gives the illusion, rather than the substance, of control.

Questions

1. Was Stalin in control of Soviet foreign policy?
2. Was Stalin's foreign policy consistent?

ANALYSIS (2):

WAS THE NAZI-SOVIET NON-AGGRESSION PACT EVIDENCE OF THE SUCCESS OF STALIN'S FOREIGN POLICY?

By far the most important development in Stalin's foreign policy to 1941 was the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, which puts into perspective every other initiative taken after Stalin's assumption of full control in 1929. Not surprisingly, two very different interpretations can be advanced about whether it was a success. These depend on whether the Nazi-Soviet Pact was the outcome of a long-term plan or whether it was put together at the last minute to compensate for all the frustrations and difficulties that had occurred during the 1930s.

If it was always Stalin's long-term intention to come to terms with Germany, then the pact can be seen as the fulfilment of a difficult and, at times, frustrating policy. It was undoubtedly the best means of achieving the objective of promoting discord between Germany and the Western powers. Stalin would have known that Hitler could feel confident in invading Poland, which, in itself, was the most direct way of provoking France and Britain into declaring war on Germany. The Secret Protocol also enabled

the Soviet Union to regain the areas lost to Poland in 1921 by the Treaty of Riga. Since these were beyond the original frontier of Poland, set by the Allies at the Curzon Line, it was unlikely that Britain and France would declare war on Russia as well; after all, Stalin could be seen as reoccupying former Soviet territory, while Hitler was clearly violating the Polish state itself. In addition, the pact ensured that the Soviet Union would maintain the economic link with Germany that had been started at Rapallo and then resumed, after interruptions, in 1939. Overall, the agreement was a stunning coup. It ensured that Germany would weaken itself in a war with the West while, at the same time, Russia could strengthen itself by the recovery of lost territory and continue to benefit from German industrial credits. Stalin even retained the option of intervening decisively in the now inevitable European conflict. It was the culmination of everything he had planned.

The alternative perspective is much more negative. If the whole process was not planned, then there must have been a violent swing of the pendulum that Stalin was unable to control. As we have already seen in [Analysis \(1\)](#), the 1930s saw a series of disasters in Soviet policy. This started with Stalin's blunder in helping put Hitler into power. He then had to compensate for this by trying to reactivate collective security in conjunction with France, and by seeking to promote popular fronts throughout Europe against fascism. These were clearly desperate measures, merely reactions to offset an original policy that had gone badly wrong. The trouble was that the attitudes of Britain and France were beyond his control and he found himself buffeted back towards Germany by his disappointment with the Anglo-French policy of appeasement. In this perspective, the Nazi-Soviet Pact was a measure that originated from desperation, not from planning. As in domestic policy, Stalin was rarely in control of the situation and was well aware of the threat of impending chaos. The Non-Aggression Pact was, for him, a possible lifeline that he seized without realising its full implications. Even the Polish dimension has been misinterpreted. The pact did not contain a specific agreement to partition Poland between Germany and Russia. Rather, the Secret Protocol focused more generally on spheres of influence in Eastern Europe. According to G.Roberts, therefore, 'The partition of Poland in September 1939 was the direct result not of the Nazi-Soviet pact but of the unforeseen rapidity of the Polish military collapse.' (6) There is an element of desperation here too: Stalin was forced to occupy eastern Poland to limit the extent of the German advance, the speed of which took him completely by surprise. Hence, any territorial advantages of the pact to Russia were entirely unplanned and were the result of a reaction to events as they occurred.

So far we have assessed the Nazi-Soviet Pact in relation to what Stalin intended. There is, of course, another criterion for success. Irrespective of

whether it was the logical outcome of Stalin's earlier policies, was the pact the best course for the Soviet Union in the circumstances? Again, there are two possible approaches.

The first would emphasise the positive effects of the pact in delaying Stalin's involvement in the war, thereby enabling the USSR eventually to crush Germany. Soviet historians, in particular, argued that 'subsequent events revealed that this step was the only correct one under the circumstances. By taking it, the USSR was able to continue peaceful construction for nearly two years and to strengthen its defences.' (7) During the period 1939 to 1941 Stalin was also able to build up a buffer zone in Eastern Europe; Soviet occupation started with eastern Poland in September 1939, followed by the Baltic States in the autumn (sanctioned by a further pact with Germany, the Border and Friendship Treaty) and the extension of a more secure frontier against Finland between 1939 and 1940. The initial impact of the German invasion in 1941, devastating though it was, was to some extent absorbed by this buffer area.

This view is, however, somewhat simplistic. The alternative is that the pact was not actually necessary for Russia. Indeed, W. Laqueur maintains that it gave Stalin a false security and was to the disadvantage of the Soviet Union in two ways. First, Stalin was binding himself to a commitment the Soviet Union did not need. Hitler was far too preoccupied with Britain and France to launch an invasion on the USSR in 1939. But, second, if he had done, the Soviet Union would have been better off than it was in 1941. Between 1939 and 1941 Germany's armaments production increased proportionately more rapidly than that of the Soviet Union, meaning that Hitler could launch the sort of invasion in 1941 that would have been out of the question in 1939. (8) In addition, it could be argued that Russia lost any strategic advantage with the fall of France to Germany in June 1940 and the inability of Britain to launch an attack on the continent. It is true that over the same period Stalin began the process of extending Soviet security by taking over the Baltic States, Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina but this can be seen merely as a means of compensating for the expansion that the pact had made possible for Germany.

If a respite was provided by the Nazi-Soviet Pact (and this is by no means certain), it could further be argued that Stalin failed to make proper use of it. At the end of 1939, for example, he launched an attack on Finland in an attempt to push back the Soviet frontiers near Leningrad and in Karelia. By the time this objective had been achieved in February 1940, the Winter War had produced some humiliating reverses at the hands of the Finnish army, showing up Russia's military deficiencies and bankrupting her diplomatic reputation to the extent that she was thrown out of the League of Nations for aggression. In all probability these failings convinced Hitler that he could afford to attack the Soviet Union sooner

rather than later. The way in which Stalin used the respite in effect seriously shortened it.

But the most serious blunder committed between 1939 and 1941 was Stalin's complete failure to anticipate Hitler's intentions. He assumed that Russia was safe from Germany at least for the foreseeable future and that it was safe to pursue his own agenda. He therefore conducted diplomacy that was based on a fundamental misconception: the assumption that Germany would become increasingly pliable in proportion to the pressure applied by Russia. But, as Roberts points out, 'Moscow's pursuit of this objective resulted not in the further development of the Nazi-Soviet alliance but the beginning of a fateful crisis in Soviet-German relations which was to end in war.' (9) Stalin did not realise that Soviet pressure depended on Germany's tolerance: it was not likely to increase that tolerance. All Stalin was doing in his insistence on further concessions in the Balkans was to increase Hitler's determination to settle the Russian issue once and for all. And, of course, the problems encountered by the Red Army in Finland contracted the timescale envisaged by Hitler to do this.

Worse was to follow. Even when it became clear that Soviet relations with Germany were deteriorating rapidly, Stalin showed little awareness of any imminent threat. Indeed, it could be argued that he lost control over the whole situation. This can be shown in three ways. First, he failed to make any use of possible contacts with Britain. He considered that this might run the risk of diverting the Nazi war machine eastwards, which would play into Churchill's hands by releasing the pressure on Britain. This subsequently proved to be a mistake, since Hitler was planning to throw the weight of the German armies against Russia. Through his inaction here Stalin therefore lost the initiative. Instead—in a second error—Stalin assumed that any war with Germany would be preceded automatically by warning signals from Germany as part of a clearly visible deterioration in relations; Stalin was confident that, in such circumstances, Hitler would issue an ultimatum before hostilities ensued. In that event Russia would have time to respond by making the diplomatic adjustments necessary to prevent the outbreak of war. This meant that Stalin committed a third blunder by ignoring all the warnings he did receive about an impending German invasion. These came from intelligence reports from Soviet agents as well as details about German troop movements provided by the British government. These will be dealt with in detail in [Chapter 6](#). Consequently, according to Churchill, Stalin and his advisers proved at this stage to be 'the most completely outwitted bunglers of the Second World War'.

There is, of course, an alternative explanation to Stalin's strange behaviour in 1941: he was preparing a pre-emptive strike against Germany. This is a strong argument, based on the proposition that the development of heavy industry in the Five-Year Plans had been geared towards equipping the Soviet Union with the military potential for a

massive offensive blow. This view, which is also examined in detail in [Chapter 6](#), might appear to restore the initiative to Stalin by enabling him to attack Germany at a time of his own choosing. But that time was not in the summer of 1941. Indeed, there was every reason for avoiding the possibility of a Soviet attack until 1942, when Soviet armaments production was expected to peak. If Stalin was thinking in this way, then he made a fourth mistake: he became all the more anxious to avoid a conflict in 1941. As a result, Soviet defences might actually have been undermined in the immediate term by the feeling of security given by the knowledge of an offensive in the longer term. At all events, the German armed forces achieved a stunning series of victories against Russia in the opening months of their Blitzkrieg.

We might conclude, as in [Analysis \(1\)](#), that Stalin was not in control of developments in Eastern Europe. The Nazi-Soviet Pact was more a response to the specific situation in 1939 than a long-term target and, as it turned out, was less beneficial than has been traditionally argued. This was largely because Stalin misinterpreted Hitler's intentions. It was fortunate for Stalin that Hitler's subsequent errors were even more serious than his own.

Questions

1. What were the advantages and disadvantages of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact for the Soviet Union?
2. On balance, were the advantages greater than the disadvantages?

SOURCES

SOVIET RELATIONS WITH GERMANY, BRITAIN AND FRANCE, 1938–9

Source A:

from a speech by Molotov, November 1938.

The Soviet Union did not, and could not, take part in the bargaining of the imperialists, of the fascists and so-called democratic governments at the expense of Czechoslovakia. The Soviet Union did not, and could not, take part in the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia to satisfy the appetites of German fascism and its allies. No doubt can remain about Soviet policy on this point. While the French government renounced its treaty with Czechoslovakia, at the moment of its decisive test, and came to an agreement with England and German fascism, whatever the cost to democratic Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union showed that its attitude to

international agreements is entirely different. It demonstrated to the entire world its fidelity to the treaties it has concluded for fighting the aggressor is unshakeable... The French and British governments sacrificed not only Czechoslovakia but their own interests as well, for the sake of an agreement with the aggressors... But one thing is clear: the Soviet Union was not intimidated by threats from fascist countries...

This fact is of great international importance, not only for the present moment, but for the entire future international struggle against fascism and fascist aggression. Only the Soviet Union, the land of socialism, stood and stands steadily on the basis of struggle against fascist aggression, for the defence of peace and of the freedom and independence of states from fascist attack.

Source B:
**official Soviet reply to British proposals for an agreement
with the Soviet Union, 15 May 1939.**

The Soviet Government have given careful consideration to the latest proposals of the British Government, which were communicated to them on May 8, and they have come to the conclusion that these proposals cannot serve as a basis for the organisation of a front of resistance against a further extension of aggression in Europe.

This conclusion is based on the following considerations:

- (1) The English proposals do not contain principles of reciprocity with regard to the USSR and place the latter in a position of inequality, inasmuch as they do not contemplate an obligation by Britain and France to guarantee the USSR in the event of a direct attack on the latter by aggressors, whereas England and France, as well as Poland, enjoy such a guarantee as a result of reciprocity which exists between them.
- (2) The English proposals only extend a guarantee to Eastern European states bordering on the USSR, to Poland and to Romania, as a consequence of which the North Western frontier of the USSR towards Finland, Estonia and Latvia remains uncovered.
- (3) On the one hand, the absence of a guarantee to the USSR on the part of England and France, in the event of a direct attack by an aggressor, and, on the other hand, the fact that the North Western frontier of the USSR remains uncovered, may serve to provoke aggression in the direction of the Soviet Union.

Source C:
extracts from the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact,
August 1939.

The Government of the German Reich and the Government of the USSR, desirous of strengthening the cause of peace between Germany and the USSR, have reached the following agreement.

- Article I. Both High Contracting Parties obligate themselves to desist from any act of violence, any aggressive action, and any attack on each other, either individually or jointly with other powers.
- Article II. Should one of the High Contracting Parties become the object of belligerent action by a third power, the other High Contracting Party shall in no manner lend its support to this third party.
- Article III. The Governments of the two High Contracting Parties shall in the future maintain continual contact with one another for the purpose of consultation in order to exchange information of problems affecting their common interest...
- Article V. Should disputes or conflicts arise between the High Contracting Parties, both Parties shall settle these disputes exclusively through friendly exchange of opinion, or, if necessary, through the establishment of arbitration commissions.

Secret Additional Protocol

1. In the event of a territorial and political arrangement in the areas belonging to the Baltic States, the northern boundary of Lithuania shall represent the boundary of the spheres of influence of Germany and the USSR...
2. The question of whether the interest of both parties makes desirable the maintenance of an independent Polish state and how such a state should be bounded can only be definitely determined in the course of further developments.

Source D:
an agreement between Germany and the Soviet Union
partitioning Poland, 28 September 1939.

The Government of the German Reich and the Government of the USSR consider it as exclusively their task, after the collapse of the former Polish

state, to re-establish peace and order in these territories. To this end they have agreed upon the following:

The Government of the German Reich and the Government of the USSR shall determine the boundary of their respective national interests in the territory of the former Polish state... The territory of the Lithuanian state falls into the sphere of the influence of the USSR, while the province of Lublin, and parts of the province of Warsaw fall to the influence of Germany... Both Parties will tolerate in their territories no Polish agitation which affects the territories of the other Party. They will suppress in their territories all beginnings of such agitation and inform each other concerning suitable measures.

Questions

1. Explain the references to
 - (i) the French government's 'treaty with Czechoslovakia' ([Source A](#)). [2]
 - (ii) the 'guarantees' to 'Poland and Romania' ([Source B](#)). [2]
2. Compare the Soviet attitude shown to Britain and France shown in Sources [A](#) and [B](#). How would you explain any differences? [7]
- *3. To what extent are the terms in [Source D](#) in conformity with those in [Source C](#)? [6]
4. 'The Soviet pact with Germany in August 1939 was the result of desperation, not of any long-term policy.' Discuss this view in the light of [Sources A](#) to [D](#) and of your own knowledge. [8]

Worked answer

- *3. [*'To what extent?' is a phrase that must be dealt with explicitly. The possibilities for the answer are 'completely', 'partially' or 'not at all'. The overall answer is most likely to be 'partially', although within this there may be elements of the other two. Examples need to be precisely located within the two sources.*]

[Source D](#) seems to be partially in line with [Source C](#), although there are also certain differences between them. In general terms, [Source D](#) shows evidence of the fulfilment of the intention in [Source C](#) to 'maintain continual contact with one another for the purpose of consultation'. However, since circumstances had changed by the time that [Source D](#) was drawn up, the specific agreements were bound to vary. For example, [Source C](#) provides for a future decision on whether 'the interest of both parties makes desirable the maintenance of an independent Polish state', whereas [Source D](#) acknowledges 'the collapse of the former Polish state'. This affects the questions of boundaries. [Source C](#) leaves it open as to 'how such a state should be

bounded', whereas [Source D](#) refers to the determination of the boundary between Nazi and Soviet 'respective national interests in the territory of the former Polish state'. [Source D](#) goes beyond [Source C](#) in another way. The former makes no provision for internal controls by Russia and Germany over internal order in Poland, while the latter provides for a mutual agreement between the two countries not to 'tolerate in their territories' any 'Polish agitation which affects the territories of the other Party'. In one respect one of the terms in [Source C](#) is revised in [Source D](#). In the former the northern boundary of Lithuania represented 'the boundary of the spheres of influence of Germany and the USSR', whereas in [Source D](#) Lithuania fell 'into the sphere of the influence of the USSR'. This was, however, after mutual consultation between the parties.

6

THE SOVIET UNION AT WAR, 1941–5

BACKGROUND NARRATIVE

Stalin had agreed to the Non-Aggression Pact with Germany in August 1939 to prevent—or postpone—the outbreak of war between Germany and Russia. Yet, on 22 June 1941, Hitler invaded the Soviet Union. The result was military collapse of astonishing rapidity with most of the losses of Soviet troops and equipment throughout the Second World War occurring during the first year of Soviet involvement. Stalin had ordered the withdrawal of the Soviet border troops in Soviet-occupied Poland, which meant that the German panzer divisions, now well-drilled in their Blitzkrieg (lightning war) strategy, could slice through the Ukraine to establish, by 1942, a front extending from Leningrad in the north to Moscow in the centre and Stalingrad in the south. Stalin himself withdrew for a while from public life and Hitler confidently predicted the end of the campaign and of the Soviet state.

Yet, from the end of 1942, a remarkable recovery occurred. The first major success of the Soviet forces was the Battle for Moscow, which prevented the capture of the Soviet capital. The Soviet leadership then decided to concentrate the defensive action on the city of Stalingrad, in which the Germans were eventually forced to surrender in 1943. This was followed by the Soviet victory in the tank battle at Kursk. From this stage onwards the Soviet counterattack gathered momentum. Kiev was recaptured by November 1943 and Leningrad early in 1944. The Red Army then went on to force German troops out of Soviet territory and advanced into the states of Eastern Europe: Poland, followed by Romania and Bulgaria. By February 1945 the Red Army under Zhukov was advancing into Germany itself and, in April, succeeded in capturing Berlin. Total war seemed to have resulted in total victory.

The extents of both the initial catastrophe and the eventual recovery have inevitably invited very diverse historical explanations.

ANALYSIS (1): WHY WAS THE SOVIET UNION INITIALLY DEFEATED BY NAZI GERMANY?

The extent of the initial Soviet collapse was stunning, even to the Nazi invaders, who had been led by Hitler's propaganda to expect another successful Blitzkrieg. Soviet historians have explained this by the numerical superiority of German armaments in 1941. This simply will not suffice as an explanation, as the Soviet forces outnumbered the Germans; by June 1941 the Soviet Union possessed most of the world's tanks—close on 24,000 altogether. Western historians have tended to focus on the element of surprise and Stalin's deficient leadership in the opening months of the invasion. This is nearer the mark, but now needs to be considered within the context of recent research into the specific way in which the Soviet Union had prepared for the war.

The basic argument to be followed here is in four stages. First, during the 1930s the Soviet infrastructure had been prepared for one type of war but, second, because of his inappropriate diplomatic and other decisions between 1939 and 1941, Stalin blundered into an altogether different one. Third, in these circumstances the infrastructure came close to collapse, which meant, fourth, that there was little to stop the already efficient German strategy of Blitzkrieg.

The main aim of the first three Five-Year Plans had been to mobilise the Soviet Union for total war. Stalin's preoccupation with the Western threat has already been analysed in [Chapter 3](#). In this he was partly influenced by a new overall strategy of warfare developed by military theoreticians such as Varfolomeev and Triandafilov. They turned away from the traditional Russian response of protracted defensive war that had, after all, gone badly between 1914 and 1917. Instead, they argued that the Soviet Union should prepare to deliver a swift and crushing blow through 'the conduct of operations of annihilation'. (1) Furthermore, the Soviet Union would need to be able to deploy all its forces as soon as war broke out to deliver a sudden and decisive blow. Hence, the main focus of the Five-Year Plans was heavy industry; the priority was rearmament; and the motive was an offensive war. Tanks, artillery pieces, aircraft and small weapons were produced and stockpiled on a massive scale throughout the 1930s. Mobilisation was no longer geared for defence and, to be fully effective, would need a pre-emptive strike.

This, of course, did not happen. Traditionally, the initial collapse of the Soviet Union has been put down to Stalin's inappropriate response to Hitler. This is quite true, but it should be seen within the context of a military-economic system that was disastrously affected by this response. Stalin's diplomatic errors delivered the war for which the country was not prepared. The timing of the hostilities was chosen by Hitler, not Stalin,

although the latter could well have been building up for a pre-emptive strike at a later date. To prevent a conflict that he clearly regarded as premature, Stalin did what he could to appease Hitler.

In the process, Stalin more than misjudged the situation. He committed blunders of colossal proportions. The most basic was a misinterpretation of Hitler's intentions. Stalin had initially assumed that Hitler and Nazism comprised an unstable form of radicalism, which would soon give way to communism. When this failed to happen he attributed to Hitler a large measure of pragmatism. He assumed that Hitler was basically logical in his objectives and that he would not consider the possibility of fighting a war on two fronts. He believed, as we have seen in [Chapter 5](#), that there would be plenty of warning of any impending attack on the Soviet Union. This made Stalin unreceptive to warnings, from British intelligence in April 1941, of German troop concentrations near the Soviet border. Stalin's reasoning—logically—was that Churchill's intention was to try to provoke a conflict between Germany and Russia that would open up a war on two fronts, to the benefit of Britain. But Stalin also ignored intelligence reports from his own agents. For example, both General Golikov and Admiral Kuznetsov quoted Soviet agents to the effect that the concentration of German troops meant that war was imminent. Soviet agents in Japan and Berlin even gave the precise date of the German attack: 22 June 1941. Stalin chose to ignore these because they did not fit into the way in which he had rationalised Hitler's intentions. In trying to keep his diplomatic options open he had therefore closed off his military options and laid his country wide open to a devastating assault of the type that Hitler had already demonstrated in Western Europe in 1940. When German armies moved up to and across the frontier, Stalin even ordered the withdrawal of Soviet units to avoid border provocations and conflict, in the belief that there could still be a negotiated settlement between Germany and Russia. Soviet defences were further hamstrung by orders from Stalin against the mobilisation of reserves or the conduct of normal military manoeuvres in case these should provoke Hitler. Hence the current view is still that 'The causes of this disastrous behaviour lay in Moscow, with Stalin.' (2) No doubt aware of the extent of his errors, Stalin underwent a collapse, akin to a nervous breakdown. There were even plans to take power from him and to confer it on Molotov instead. Generals Konev and Zhukov both reported that Stalin seemed totally depressed and that he was ready to make peace with Germany and to give up huge areas. All this is clear evidence that he had completely lost control over the situation.

Because of these blunders, Stalin forced upon the Soviet Union a situation in which a defensive war was the only option. As we have already seen, this was precisely the course for which the leadership had not prepared. But could the overall strategy not be adjusted from offensive to defensive? The problem was that any such change would have to be

orchestrated rapidly. In the circumstances this could not be done in time to stop the German advance. Long-term preparations for offensive war prevented short-term orderly retreat. The result was a rout on all fronts. The main fault was the failure of the leadership to adjust its strategic thinking. Even when the Germans were in sight of Moscow and Leningrad, propaganda maintained the fiction that there had been no reverses—and that any reference to them was blatant ‘defeatism’. This delayed the possibility of tactical retreat until it was too late: Budenny was dismissed for recommending this. There were also longer-term reasons for the military paralysis in 1941, going beyond immediate decisions and back into the layers of confusion that had accumulated in the 1930s. The purges had decapitated the leadership, and thereby reduced the amount of practical experience within the Red Army. Even more important was the growth of massive political interference. According to Konstantin Simonov, any ‘military illiterate felt free to meddle with the business of the military’. (3) All this was symptomatic of the chaos that had existed within Stalin’s dictatorship throughout the 1930s. Stalin had adopted a strategy, which he had implemented in the planning system. But others, usually as ‘political illiterates’ spawned by the purges, had interpreted this in their own ways and interfered with the military decisions of the army. Beneath Stalin’s blunders there was therefore a vast number of lesser incompetents, suddenly exposed by the emergency of the German invasion.

Under such circumstances, the Soviet Union was vulnerable to physical disintegration. In addition to the military and administrative crisis, there was the potential for the eruption of mass discontent. This might occur for two reasons. One was economic and social, the accumulated resentment of millions of peasants subjected to the rigours of enforced collectivisation. Even more serious was the nationalist resistance to Soviet control. The Germans were initially welcomed as liberators by millions of Belarussians, Ukrainians and Georgians, as well as by peoples of the Baltic States. According to G.Fischer, up to 2 million Soviets defected to and fought for the German armies. (4) How could the Soviet state possibly hope to survive such centrifugal forces?

In this situation Hitler held the military initiative and could take full advantage of the negative response of Stalin’s leadership and the lethargy created by the Stalinist system. The German strategy of Blitzkrieg was able to make full use of Soviet military indecision. The Wehrmacht attacked in strength at specific points across a broad front. Fully armoured panzer divisions advanced at great speed, as they had already done against Poland in 1939 and against the Low Countries and France in 1940. Hitler’s forces, which comprised 5.5 million troops, 4,950 aircraft, 47,260 pieces of artillery and 2,800 tanks, were sufficient to cut through the Soviet forces and to sustain the momentum of the advance in three prongs—against Leningrad in the north, Moscow in the centre and Kiev in the south, and to

extend conquests further to the Volga and Stalingrad in 1942. Blitzkrieg made possible the capture of an area that extended 600 kilometres eastwards and 1,500 kilometres from north to south. The element of surprise explains the shattering impact: 56.7 per cent of all Soviet losses in the war were incurred in the initial campaign of 1941–2, and 17,500 of its 24,000 tanks were destroyed. Because of the enormous area occupied by the Germans, the workforce fell from 66 million to 35 million. The German conquests also threatened to wipe out all the major centres of industrial production that had been developed by the Five-Year Plans.

To summarise, although Stalin had been mobilising the Soviet Union for total war to be followed by swift victory, what the country suffered was swift defeat followed by total war. The German invasion came as a profound shock to the whole Soviet military strategy as the diplomacy of Stalin destroyed any initiative that the Soviet Union might have had. The Red Army was forced back into the more traditional expedient of defensive warfare—for which it had not prepared. The situation appeared desperate.

Questions

1. Was the Soviet Union prepared for war in 1941 ?
2. Was the rapidity of Soviet defeat in 1941 due entirely to errors of judgement made by Stalin?

ANALYSIS (2): WHY WAS THE SOVIET UNION ULTIMATELY VICTORIOUS OVER NAZI GERMANY?

Given the extent of the initial collapse, the outcome of the war with Germany was remarkable. Most explanations have focused on the reversal between 1943 and 1945 of the negative factors that had contributed to the defeat of the Soviet Union in 1941–2. Credit is given to the recovery of Stalin, who was able to co-ordinate a military revival and make full use of the climate and size of Russia. Despite its earlier loss of territory, the Soviet Union also managed to outproduce Germany in war *matériel*, the direct result of the Five-Year Plans of the 1930s. Finally, the Soviet war effort was greatly assisted by the errors made by Hitler during this period.

These explanations are broadly correct but they require some refining in their emphasis; this applies especially to those theories that are related to Soviet productivity. Overall, a combination of factors existed in delicate balance and it would be a mistake to see Soviet recovery as in any sense inevitable.

The recovery of the leadership was, of course, crucial to the implementation of a more appropriate strategy. Stalin probably reached the peak of his administrative efficiency during the war years, before

succumbing to deterioration after 1945 (see [Chapter 7](#)). This was sufficient to bring about the necessary structural changes that could enable the Soviet Union to take full advantage of other factors. It meant not so much pulling the components of Stalinism back together after the initial impact of Nazism but rather dismantling some of the components in order to meet the emergency. Two new institutions were established specifically for this situation. One was Stavka, the general headquarters, the other the State Defence Committee, or GOKO. The latter, which was given powers to conduct all aspects of the war, comprised Molotov, Voroshilov, Malenkov and Beria. Under the ultimate authority of Stalin as People's Commissar for Defence, it replaced the usual Party channels of communication. The emergency of war therefore did much to reduce the administrative confusion that had been seen at all levels during the 1930s (see [Chapter 2](#)) and made possible a more rational approach to economic and military planning as well.

This promoted recovery through a more effective adjustment and mobilisation of resources. The usual argument is that the Five-Year Plans of the 1930s had produced an economy geared to total war and which could massively outproduce the more limited German economy in terms of armaments; meanwhile, there had also been a long-term shift of resources into Siberia, meaning that the Soviet Union had a greatly increased industrial capacity to the east of the European centres. By the middle of 1941 some 20 per cent of Soviet heavy-industrial productive capacity was sited in the Volga, the Urals and Siberia. This meant that the Soviet Union could recover from initial defeat by producing more weapons than Germany, even during the bleakest period—the second half of 1941. The transfer of factories eastwards to escape the German invasion completed the process.

All this is perfectly sound. But the usual corollary is not. It has been assumed that the recovery after initial defeat was due to the full implementation of Stalin's command economy: more armaments were produced after 1942 because the planning system was stepped up a gear. Recently, historians have shown that the reverse happened. It is true that the Five-Year Plans had developed a mobilised economy. But, as we have seen in [Chapter 3](#), it was an inefficient one, with considerable tension between central and local decision-making. The emergency of war necessitated a much more efficient approach. This meant reducing the levels of mutual interference between the centre and the local bodies and allowing for more local initiative in meeting central armaments orders. From 1943 onwards, local production was therefore based on individual decisions about supply of raw materials and on the most effective methods of using the labour force. Market forces became more significant than central administrative constraints. This was, of course, highly paradoxical; as Sapir has argued, the earlier "mobilisation economy" had to be at least

partially “demobilised” to achieve war mobilisation’. (5) The result was a considerable increase in efficiency. This was assisted by keeping the weapons and components deliberately unsophisticated; these had the triple advantage of being quick to build, easy to maintain and inexpensive to replace. This was a contrast to the German emphasis on quality and sophisticated parts. The planning system was therefore geared to compensating for the heavy losses incurred in the first year of the war and providing the *matériel* needed to turn defeat into a series of offensives against the Germans.

The extent of the military recovery was remarkable. Several closely related factors were involved here. The first, as we have seen, was the partial demobilisation of the command economy. This delivered overwhelming numbers of tanks, aircraft, artillery pieces and small weapons to wherever on the front they were required. This, in turn, made possible a new strategy that departed from the unqualified emphasis on ‘offensive’ warfare developed during the 1930s. Instead, it was now considered more appropriate to combine the more traditional defensive approach with a devastating counter-attack whenever this became possible. Zhukov’s advice to Stalin in April 1943 showed this line of thought: ‘I consider it inadvisable for our forces to go over to the offensive in the very first days of the campaign... It would be better to make the enemy first exhaust himself against our defences, and knock out his tanks and then, bringing up fresh reserves, to go over to a general offensive which would finally finish off his main force.’ (6)

The result was a close co-ordination between partisan warfare and the massive thrusts of the Soviet forces at Kursk in 1943, followed by the invasion of Poland and the Balkans in 1944. The turning point of the war was the Battle for Stalingrad, which was finally won in 1943. This represented the end of Blitzkrieg for the Germans and the beginning of the type of Soviet offensive that had been anticipated in the 1930s. Clearly, the army had to be given more initiative to implement these military changes. This was another example of the partial reversal of an inter-war policy—in this instance the earlier politicisation of the army was abandoned. After the catastrophe of 1941 and 1942 Stalin allowed a much greater degree of military initiative. He sanctioned the promotion of the most able officers to supreme command: examples included Zhukov, Tolbukhin, Konev, Malinovsky, Vatutin and Rossakovsky. With this came a greater willingness to permit military decisions to be taken by those *in situ*—in contrast to Hitler who allowed the destruction of the German army at Stalingrad because he ignored the request of von Paulus to withdraw.

In both the economic and military instances, assistance was given from outside. This was considered by Stalin and by subsequent Soviet historians as peripheral to the Soviet effort, providing the slightest of contributions to Soviet victory. More recently, external help has come to be seen as crucial,

perhaps even tipping the balance or acting as a catalyst for Soviet recovery. The economy, for example, was served by US and British aid under the Lend-Lease programme. This was chiefly in the form of back-up equipment and transport facilities—such as trucks, jeeps and heavy rolling stock—and enabled the Soviet factories and munitions plants to concentrate on producing armaments. By filling gaps in the Soviet infrastructure, the Allies made it possible for the Soviet Union to move more quickly than it could otherwise have done from the defensive to the offensive.

Much the same applies to military developments. Stalin frequently complained that Britain and the United States were using up Russian lives by not opening up a second front in France. In fact the process of diverting Hitler had already started with the British campaigns against Rommel in 1942 and 1943. These drew off Wehrmacht divisions that were essential for the Russian offensive. It is no coincidence that the victory of the Soviet resistance at Stalingrad occurred at the same time as the German defeat at El Alamein. The interaction between events on different fronts is now increasingly recognised by post-Soviet historiography, which has been prepared to place the ‘Great Patriotic War’ within the broader context of the ‘Second World War’. (7)

None of this undermines the importance of the patriotic response. Indeed, this has recently been upgraded as a factor by historians. Increasingly, however, the connection between the ‘people’s war’ and Stalin’s policies is being reassessed. To some extent, patriotism was manufactured by the regime as a response to the threat to external invasion. Somehow, Stalin’s propaganda had to penetrate all levels of the population and reverse some of the previous inertia. He had to remove pockets of latent opposition that remained after the purges. He had to overcome the centrifugal ethnic forces that might welcome the break up of the Soviet Union. And he had to deal with the local forces that had interrupted the attempted economic and political centralisation of the 1930s. The initial priority was therefore to prevent disintegration. Hence the measures taken by Stavka and GOKO were designed to keep together a population that had been stirred up and confused, first by the traumas of the 1930s, then by the experience of rapid military defeat. They aimed to eliminate as many collaborators as possible through the forcible exile and resettlement of Balkars, Chechens, Karachais, Meskhetians, Crimean Tartars, Balts, Ukrainians and Cossacks. Although huge numbers of non-Russian civilians defected to the Germans, the core that might have organised mass rebellions was removed. In this sense the Germans inherited a population in turmoil. Soviet citizens were also targeted by propaganda that stressed connections with the Russian past—especially the defeat of the French in 1812. The ‘Great Patriotic War’ against Hitler was characterised as a replica of the ‘Great Fatherland War’ against Napoleon.

On the other hand, the degree of patriotic support far transcended Stalin's measures. To claim that Stalin's coercion and propaganda—in other words the outward manifestations of his leadership—were mainly responsible for the resurgence of Soviet patriotism would do less than justice to some of the most remarkable instances of mass heroism of the whole of the Second World War. The self-sacrifice of the citizens of Leningrad in the face of the German siege, or of the Soviet troops at Stalingrad and in the Battle of Kursk, or in the resistance of the partisans behind enemy lines—all were unprecedented in their scale, even in Russian history. The extent to which it was spontaneous will no doubt be the subject of future research.

Soviet recovery from defeat occurred in direct proportion to the German collapse from victory. The Nazis contributed greatly to their own demise. Despite its initial success, Hitler's military strategy was actually inappropriate. The impetus of the German attack was sustainable only in the short term on so wide a front. Once the surprise had worn off, the German numerical inferiority began to count, especially in crucial areas such as Moscow in the autumn of 1941 and Stalingrad from the summer of 1942. Hitler was unable to learn from military errors, the worst of which were committed in Russia. He was also unwilling to accept advice from experienced commanders such as Guderian.

Meanwhile, the atrocities committed against the civilian populations of the captured territories undermined any goodwill that the Germans might originally have encountered. Considered to be *Untermenschen*, or subhumans, the Slavs were targeted for slave labour. Other groups, such as the Balts (Latvians, Estonians and Lithuanians), were considered suitable for Germanisation, but policies were still harsh. Indeed, Hitler's measures acted as a catalyst for a Soviet patriotic revival. The form of administration imposed on the conquered territories allowed no possibility for regional autonomy: Hitler therefore missed the opportunity of enlisting a massive wave of anti-Soviet ethnic support. This was the consequence of appalling misrule, born of extreme racial arrogance, that put Stalin's policies and blunders into perspective. Although brutal, Stalinist measures had no equivalent of the deliberate extermination policies of Hitler's SS units and *Einsatzkommandos*. The Germans failed to develop any clear policy about the form to be taken by the Soviet Union in the future. There were schemes—some put forward by Rosenberg in 1941—for an independent Ukraine, a Baltic protectorate, a Caucasian Federation, a reduced Muscovy and an independent Siberia. But such schemes were soon squashed by the other members of the Nazi establishment who had simpler and more drastic controls for a defeated population.

Above all, the German economy had not been fully attuned to the realities of such a major undertaking as the destruction of Russia. Whereas the Soviet economy had been mobilised for total war in the 1930s, the

Nazi economy had been mobilised only for partial war. Hitler's solution was a series of rapid victories followed by the absorption of the vanquished countries' infrastructure. The German Blitzkrieg was as much an economic as a military policy. The problem was that it was difficult to extend it to make it function more completely. By contrast, the Soviet economy could be made more effective through relaxing some of its constraints. Germany moved to a total war economy only in 1943; the Soviet Union, on the other hand, was already there.

Hitler had expected that kicking in the Soviet Union's front door would 'cause the whole rotten structure to collapse'. He was wrong— not because he misjudged the rottenness of the structure but as a result of underestimating its sheer size and its capacity to recover in a dire emergency.

Questions

1. Was the Soviet recovery after 1942 'inevitable'?
2. To what extent was the Soviet military victory by 1945 due to Stalin?

SOURCES

1.

STALIN AND THE BACKGROUND TO THE GERMAN INVASION OF THE SOVIET UNION, 1939– 41

Source A:

'Rendezvous', a cartoon on the invasion of Poland by
Hitler and Stalin in September 1939 by the British
cartoonist David Low.

See [Figure 1](#) on page 90.

Source B:

Stalin's private view of the danger from Germany,
October 1939.

The Germans might attack. For six years German fascists and the communists cursed each other. Now in spite of history there has been an unexpected turn, but one cannot rely upon it. We must be prepared in time. Others, who were not prepared, paid for it.



Figure 1

Source C:

Molotov's speech to the Supreme Soviet, October 1939.

In the past few months such concepts as 'aggression' and 'aggressor' have acquired new concrete connotation, new meaning. It is not hard to understand that we can no longer employ these concepts in the sense we did, say, three or four months ago. Today, as far as the European powers are concerned, Germany is in the position of a state which is striving for the earliest termination of war and for peace, while Britain and France... are in favour of continuing the war and are opposed to the conclusion of peace...

Since the conclusion of the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact on 23 August an end has been put to the abnormal relations that have existed between the Soviet Union and Germany for a number of years. Instead of the enmity which was fostered in every way by certain European powers, we now have a rapprochement and the establishment of friendly relations... This radical change in relations between the Soviet Union and Germany, the two biggest states in Europe, was bound to have its effect on the entire international situation...we have consistently striven to improve relations with Germany and have wholeheartedly welcomed similar strivings in Germany herself. Today our relations with the German State are based on friendship, on our readiness to support Germany's efforts for peace, and at the same time the desire to contribute in every way to the development of Soviet-German economic relations to the mutual benefit of both States.

Source D:
the conclusions of a secret Soviet intelligence report,
submitted to Stalin by Golikov on 20 March 1941.

1. On the basis of the aforesaid... I consider that the most probable time operations will begin against the USSR is after the victory over England or the conclusion with her of an honourable peace treaty.
2. Rumours and documents to the effect that war against the USSR is inevitable this spring should be regarded as misinformation coming from the English or perhaps even the German intelligence service.

Source E:
Stalin's radio speech to the people of the Soviet Union, 3
July 1941.

Comrades, citizens, brothers and sisters, men of our Army and Navy! It is to you I am speaking dear friends!

The perfidious attack by Hitlerite Germany on our Motherland, begun on 22 June, is continuing. In spite of the heroic resistance of the Red Army, and although the enemy's finest divisions and finest air force units have already been smashed and have found their graves on the field of battle, the enemy continues to push forward, hurling fresh forces to the front... The fascist aircraft are extending the range of their operations... Grave danger overhangs our country.

The Red Army, Red Navy and all citizens of the Soviet Union must defend every inch of Soviet soil, must fight to the last drop of blood for our towns and villages, must display the daring, initiative and mental alertness characteristic of our people...

Questions

1. (i) Who were Molotov ([Source C](#)) and Golikov ([Source D](#))? [2]
(ii) Explain the reference to the 'Soviet-German Non Aggression Pact' ([Source C](#)). [2]
2. Comment on the view shown in [Source A](#). How useful is this source to the historian? [5]
3. Contrast the opinions shown by Stalin in [Source B](#) and Molotov in [Source C](#). How would you explain this contrast? [5]
- *4. What evidence is there of 'propaganda' in [Source E](#)? [4]
5. 'Stalin's blunder was not that he failed to see that Germany would attack Russia, but that he could not appreciate that this attack was imminent in 1941.' Comment on this view in the light of [Sources A](#) to [E](#) and of your own knowledge. [7]

Worked answer

- *3. *[The answer to this question needs an initial definition of ‘propaganda’, followed by specific examples—including brief quotations—from the text. The length of the answer should be in line with the mark allocation.]*

‘Propaganda’ involves the active dissemination of ideas and news to achieve an intended response. In [Source E](#) it consists of three main elements. First, as is normal in wartime, strong terms are used to describe the enemy and home efforts; hence the ‘perfidious attack by Hitlerite Germany’ is contrasted with the ‘heroic resistance of the Red Army’. This is not so much distortion as interpretation. But, second, the facts are twisted to reduce the severity of the Soviet defeat. Thus the ‘enemy’s finest divisions’ had been ‘smashed’ and had ‘found their graves on the field of battle’. This was patently untrue and was intended to divert responsibility for early defeat from the government itself. Finally, the propaganda involved an exhortation to the public to ‘defend every inch of Soviet soil’ and to ‘fight to the last drop of blood’. The earlier statements were clearly made as a preface to this appeal.

SOURCES

2.

SOVIET VICTORY IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Source F:

Stalin’s Order of the Day, 23 February 1943.

In the name of the liberation of our country from the hated enemy, in the name of final victory over the German fascist invaders—I order:

- (1) Indefatigably to perfect military training and to strengthen discipline, order and organisation throughout the Red Army and Navy.
- (2) To deal stronger blows against the enemy troops, to pursue the enemy indefatigably and persistently, without allowing him to consolidate himself on defence lines. To give him no respite by day or night, to cut his communications, to surround his troops and annihilate them, if they refuse to lay down their arms.
- (3) To fan brighter the flames of guerrilla warfare in the rear of the enemy, to destroy the enemy’s communications, to blow up railway bridges, to frustrate the transport of enemy troops and the supply of arms and ammunition, to blow up and set fire to army stores, to attack



Caption: Napoleon suffered defeat and so will the conceited Hitler!

enemy garrisons, to prevent the retreating enemy from burning down our villages, to help the advancing Red Army, heart and soul, and by all possible means.

In this lies the guarantee of our victory.

Source G:

a Soviet cartoon showing the impending defeat of Hitler.

Source H:

a report by a Western observer on Soviet victory in 1945.

The war's climax came in 1943, with the successful defence of Stalingrad. The Germans had, by this time, been dealt a crippling blow to their airforce in the great battles with the British in North Africa. Russians point out scornfully that this African campaign involved few men; however, it required masses of highly complicated transport and machines.

Furthermore, the RAF and the Eighth Air Force in England were by then pounding German industry, and the Germans had to strip the Russian front of fighters, to defend their home factories, so that for the first time the Russians had superiority in the air. Lend-lease, including thousands of trucks, was now pouring in, the German lines of communication were perilously extended and, for the first time, it was possible for a Russian

army to move quickly out to envelop and cut off a German army, as theirs had been enveloped so many times before.

After that, Germany's superiority in weapons was slowly reduced by Allied air poundings, while Russia's supply increased. Her own factories behind the Urals were working; new ones were equipped with American machine tools. By the summer of 1944 at least half the Red Army's total transportation was being supplied by 210,000 American military trucks, 40,000 jeeps and 30,000 other military motor vehicles. She also had 5,600 American tanks and tank destroyers, At last, Russia's crushing superiority in manpower could become effective.

Source I:
the views of a German army commander who served in
Russia, from his book *Panzer Leader*, published in 1952.

Hitler's unusually vivid powers of imagination led him to underestimate the known strength of the Soviet Union. He maintained that mechanisation on land and in the air offered fresh chances of success, so that comparisons with the campaigns of Charles XII of Sweden [in 1709], or Napoleon [in 1812], were no longer relevant. He maintained that he could rely, with certainty, on the collapse of the Soviet system, as soon as the first blows reached their mark. He believed the Russian populace would embrace his National Socialist ideology. But as soon as the campaign began, almost everything was done to prevent any such thing from taking place. By ill-treating the native populations in the occupied Russian territories that were administered by high Party functionaries, and by reason of his decision to dissolve the Russian state and to incorporate considerable areas into Germany, Hitler succeeded in uniting all Russians under the banner of Stalin. They were now fighting for Holy Mother Russia and against a foreign invader.

Questions

1. (i) Explain the significance of the point that 'Her own factories behind the Urals were working' (Source H). [2]
(ii) Explain the reference to 'high Party functionaries' (Source I). [2]
2. How effectively are language and tone used in Source F to raise Soviet morale? [4]
- *3. How far does Source I reinforce the view expressed in Source G? [4]
4. Consider the possible motives behind the production of Sources H and I. [5]
5. 'Soviet victory over Germany by 1945 was due predominantly to Stalin's policies and leadership.' Do Sources F to I, and your own knowledge, support this view? [8]

Worked answer

- *3. [*‘How far?’ needs to be addressed immediately, since it will provide the shape for the whole argument*]

Source I partially reinforces the view in **Source G** but, in some ways, goes beyond it by offering explanations for Hitler’s defeat that **Source G** does not contain. Guderian’s views overlap the Soviet cartoon by referring to the collapse of the ‘campaigns of Charles XII of Sweden’ and ‘Napoleon’. The common theme of both sources is that history was now repeating itself and that the population was ‘fighting for Holy Mother Russia and against a foreign invader’. On the other hand, Guderian offers a more complex assessment that would be impossible to illustrate in any cartoon. This includes references to Hitler’s military miscalculations, his dependence on ‘the collapse of the Soviet system’ and his ill-treatment of ‘native populations in the occupied Russian territories’. Even so, none of these explanations invalidate the simpler proposition of the cartoon; they offer a multi-causal basis of support.

STALIN'S POST-WAR REGIME, 1945–53

BACKGROUND NARRATIVE

The Soviet Union emerged from the Second World War victorious but badly damaged. Over 23 million Soviet civilians and troops had been killed in the struggle, while the Germans had destroyed 1,710 towns, 70,000 villages, 31,850 industrial enterprises and 98,000 collective farms. Stalin decided from the outset that the Soviet economy should once again be insulated from the West. He therefore re-established the planning controls of the 1930s. The fourth Five-Year Plan ran from 1946 to 1950 and the fifth from 1950 to 1955; the latter was interrupted by his death in 1953 but completed by his successors, Malenkov and Khrushchev. The Plans again placed the emphasis on collective farming and the development of heavy industry at the expense of consumer goods. To ensure Soviet self-sufficiency, Stalin refused the offer of economic aid from the Marshall Plan.

Stalin also reactivated the political and cultural controls of the pre-war period. He abolished the wartime State Defence Committee (GOKO) and sought to re-establish his ascendancy within the Party. He rarely summoned the Central Committee and Politburo and completely ignored the Party Congress. He decided to restore the full force of Socialist Realism under the agency of Zhdanov, while the NKVD, now under Beria, once again operated a policy of terror. Purges accounted for a new wave of Party officials, and even affected officers within the victorious Red Army. Stalin seemed in complete control, but was he? [Analysis \(1\)](#) investigates this.

In foreign affairs the period 1945–53 was dominated by the Cold War. The Soviet Union and the West had already experienced differences at the wartime conferences of Yalta and Potsdam (both in 1945) over the question of the future status of Germany and Poland. Stalin insisted on having a major hand in the formation of postwar governments in Eastern Europe, for which he was accused by the Western Allies of breaking the Declaration on Liberated Europe, which had allowed for free elections.

Stalin increasingly saw the area of Europe that comprised eastern Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania as a glacis, or buffer zone. He therefore proceeded to formalise Soviet controls from 1948 and to establish economic and ideological links in the form of Comecon and Cominform. The West regarded such developments as sinister evidence of the fall of an 'Iron Curtain'. To maintain Soviet ascendancy in the area, Stalin increased the already huge Soviet military presence and, by 1949, was able to add the atomic bomb to his arsenal. The Soviet Union seemed to have achieved a position of strength through its isolation, but had it? This is considered in [Analysis \(2\)](#).

**ANALYSIS (1):
DID STALIN REACH THE PEAK OF HIS POWER AND
INFLUENCE AFTER 1945?**

There has always been a tendency to consider 1945–53 as the culmination of the Stalinist dictatorship, the period in which Stalinism reached full maturity. Victory over Nazi Germany in the Second World War greatly strengthened his position at home and abroad, and he was able to introduce further measures to make it unassailable. The war was therefore the means whereby the totalitarian measures of the 1930s reached their logical fulfilment in the late 1940s.

This view is still very widely held. There is, however, a different perspective. The period 1945–53 is not one of fulfilled or refined dictatorship. All the problems that had previously confronted Stalin now returned so that, far from being secure in 'mature dictatorship', he was as insecure as ever. It was therefore a period of attempted renewal—of retrospection rather than fulfilment. Ruthlessness was as much a theme as in the earlier years, but efficiency was no more apparent than before.

Despite its recent experience of military victory and territorial expansion, Stalinist Russia was much more ramshackle than was previously thought. Indeed, victory had accentuated Stalin's difficulties. For one thing, his personal ascendancy—usually considered to have reached its peak after 1945—was more seriously challenged than at any time since 1929. The paradox, pointed out by Ward, was that 'whilst the Russo-German conflict strengthened the regime and legitimized the Generalissimo as a symbol of the will to victory, Stalin's personal power was threatened.' (1) The success of the Red Army raised the spectre that Stalin had always feared—that the regime would be militarised. It was for this reason that he had considered Trotsky, the organiser of Bolshevik military victory in the Civil War, a powerful opponent who had to be destroyed. After 1945 he had to neutralise the military again, this time by demoting Zhukov. This was a particularly delicate operation since Soviet security remained a constant priority with the onset of the Cold War. But

in a way this made the re-establishment of political control essential, since Stalin was now increasingly vulnerable to the possibility of an internal coup generated by an external crisis. This explains why he wound up the State Defence Committee (GOKO), which had played such a vital administrative role during the war. He also reverted to the inter-war policy of rarely consulting the core of the Party, the Politburo and the Central Committee—again from fear that a rival might emerge from within its ranks to challenge his supremacy.

Neutralising the army and the Party in this way might well upset the balance of tensions upon which Stalin relied to maintain his personal power. Hence he was forced into a new round of purges. But these were for defensive reasons—initiated from a position of weakness rather than strength—to recover rather than to sublimate his power. His targets showed the extent of his insecurity. He sought to re-establish his control over the Party in the ‘Leningrad Affair’; this resulted in the trial and execution for treason of Party leaders and war heroes, such as Voznesensky, who had done what they could to organise resistance to the German siege. In a wider sense, Stalin tried to restore his grip on society at large through the 1946 Zhdanov decrees that redefined and tightened up working practices and reimposed the full force of Socialist Realism upon the arts. These had been temporarily relaxed during the war. Underlying the whole system was the revival of the terror. The NKVD continued to take its toll, under the direction of Beria. It is also probable that another purge was about to break in 1953 and was prevented only by Stalin’s death. In many respects, therefore, Stalin was having to manoeuvre for power and control, as he had done during the 1930s but he experienced even greater difficulty than in the 1930s in retaining the initiative. Certain individuals grew relatively more powerful after the war than before it—especially Beria, who became a candidate for the succession.

Stalin’s economic measures are often explained as an intensification of the command economy in order to deal with the most appalling levels of destruction. What is often ignored, however, is that many of Stalin’s measures after 1945 were retrograde steps. The inefficiencies of the 1930s were all revived in the formal planning system. The fourth and fifth Five-Year Plans (1946–50 and 1950–5) intensified the policy of collectivisation in agriculture by increasing the size of the *kolkhozy*, or collective farms, and reducing their number from 252,000 to 76,000; they also maintained the emphasis on heavy industry, especially for defence. After the partial demobilisation of the economy during the war, explained in [Chapter 6](#), this was undoubtedly a negative action. In effect, Stalin missed the opportunity to continue the more progressive wartime policies and thereby abandon the more blatant failures of formal central planning. The result was that, although recovery did occur, it was much slower than that accomplished by the West or Japan. In a real sense the infrastructural damage inflicted by

the Second World War was permanent because it was dealt with by the inappropriate measures from the 1930s rather than new measures anticipating the 1950s. The emphasis was very much on restoration rather than renewal.

What of the man behind the system? Stalin had always been arbitrary and despotic. The usual picture is that this arbitrariness increased as a direct result of mature dictatorship: Stalin's power was so secure that he could literally do whatever he wanted. This can now be challenged. His increasingly irrational behaviour was the response to threats to his system and a real fear that it might break up. Age and the war had also taken their toll and it was clear that he was now deteriorating physically and mentally. Hence, in Ward's view, 'This was no self-confident tyrant in charge of a smoothly functioning totalitarian machine, but a sickly old man; unpredictable, dangerous, lied to by terrified subordinates, presiding over a ramshackle bureaucracy and raging, like Lear, against failure and mortality.'

(2)

By 1953, therefore, Stalinism was crumbling, not thriving. A new perspective might also be given on Stalin by what happened from the time of his death in 1953. The facts are that, after a brief interim of collective leadership, Khrushchev assumed undisputed power by 1955. In the Party Conference of 1956, and again in 1961, Khrushchev openly attacked Stalin for his brutality, his methods of terror, and for his personal defects—especially his psychosis and 'sickly suspicion'. Meanwhile, under Khrushchev and his successor Brezhnev (1964–82) the official *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* literally wrote Stalin out of the period 1924–53. Although he continued to be mentioned in lists of Party officials, Stalin ceased to have any historical validity as an influence on events. The traditional Western perspective is quite clear on this. It maintains that Khrushchev launched his destalinisation campaign to establish his own power base and to try to weaken that of Stalin, who had to be discredited and debunked; and the Soviet achievements during his period in power had to be depersonalised. Khrushchev, who had grown to political maturity in the Stalin era, therefore turned against his political mentor for the sake of developing his own power.

This is certainly credible; any head of state who can write his predecessor out of history must himself have had more than a streak of ruthlessness and opportunism. Yet the presumption here is that Stalin was a posthumous threat because of his strength. An alternative perspective would be that Stalinism's threat to Khrushchev was his weakness. And that weakness was the way in which Stalin had personally distorted the communist system, which had somehow survived in spite of him. Khrushchev removed Stalin from history for two reasons. First, he genuinely believed that Stalin had corrupted rather than strengthened Soviet communism. It was easier to attribute this to Stalin's personal

shortcomings than to the deficiencies of the system itself: this explains Khrushchev's emphasis on Stalin's paranoia rather than on any Janus-type qualities of the bureaucracy. Second, Khrushchev identified several major faults that needed to be reformed —especially agriculture. It would be easier for him to take the initiative if he could blame defective leadership rather than attack an entire system; reformers often allow themselves a loophole by attacking their predecessors.

Destalinisation was therefore launched not to destroy an entrenched system but to clear away its wreckage. Perhaps Khrushchev was the first to realise that the Soviet Union had survived in spite of Stalinism, not because of it. As events turned out, the negative legacy of Stalinism proved stronger than the positive. Khrushchev fell in 1964 at least partly because of the failure of his experiments to revitalise agriculture, a problem that also affected Kosygin in the 1970s. Stalinism therefore persisted after 1953 less as a force than as an inertia. But, to end on a controversial note, one could say that that was what it had always been.

Questions

1. Was the period 1945–53 one of 'mature Stalinism'?
2. Why did post-war Stalinism attempt to return to the policies of the 1930s?

ANALYSIS (2): WHAT EXPLANATIONS CAN BE ADVANCED FOR STALIN'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE COLD WAR— AND HOW SUCCESSFUL WAS HE?

Traditionally, the Cold War is seen as the result of Stalin's interaction with two main developments.

In the longer perspective, the rivalry between Russia and the West goes back to 1917. Trotsky, for example, maintained that Lenin and President Wilson were 'the apocalyptic antipodes of our time'. (3) Stalin therefore inherited the confrontation. What he added to it in the 1930s is open to debate. Tucker argues that Stalin went on to develop a long-term strategy to foment conflict between the Western powers so that the Soviet Union could enter such a war at a critical stage to pick up the pieces. (4) An alternative view is that Stalin found himself at the mercy of Anglo-French diplomacy that generated intense Soviet suspicion. Litvinov, for example, believed that the British and French made 'endless concessions' to fascism and Nazism. (5) Whatever the explanation given for Soviet foreign policy, the seeds of the Cold War were already germinating in the 1920s and 1930s.

In the shorter perspective, the conflict between Russia and the West was intensified as a result of the situation developing out of the Second World War. Stalin was deeply suspicious of the West on several counts. One was the Allies' unwillingness to open up a second front against Nazi Germany. 'All is clear,' Stalin said in August 1942. 'They want to bleed us white in order to dictate to us their terms later on.' (6) When Roosevelt announced that the invasion of France could not take place until 1944, Stalin maintained, 'Your decision...leaves the Soviet army, which is fighting not only for its own country, but also for its allies, to do the job alone.' In addition to this, specific areas of lasting mistrust had arisen during the course of the war. These surfaced at the wartime conferences, especially those in 1945 at Yalta and Potsdam concerning the redefinition of the Polish frontiers and the future of Germany. Stalin placed particular emphasis on Poland, which Molotov had considered to be the source of so much anti-Soviet activity: 'Poland has become a convenient ground for all sorts of fortuitous and unexpected eventualities that might create a threat to the USSR.' (7) This explains Stalin's insistence on reclaiming all areas to the east of the Curzon Line for the Soviet Union and rolling the Polish state westwards, at the expense of Germany, up to the Oder-Neisse Line. The future of Germany was also problematic. Stalin naturally preferred to keep Soviet control over the eastern zone and in 1948 reacted to British and US proposals to unite the currencies of the four zones by imposing a blockade on West Berlin. The Polish and German problems were reinforced by ideological differences. The Western powers acted in accordance with the principles of freely elected governments, enshrined within the Declaration on Liberated Europe, which had been agreed at Yalta in 1945 and subsequently reinforced in the 1948 Truman Doctrine. Stalin, however, regarded these as means of undermining Soviet influence and destroying Soviet security. Hence, he acted swiftly to convert the early coalition governments of the Eastern European states into communist regimes under direct Soviet control. This gave permanent effect to the Iron Curtain, the existence of which had been announced by Churchill at Fulton in 1946.

Hence the longer-term rivalry between Russia and the West had been brought more sharply into focus as a direct result of the Second World War. This created future battle lines in Europe. But, in the process, Stalin miscalculated the divisions within the West. The Allied powers had emerged greatly strengthened by the defeat of Nazi Germany, The removal of fascism also sharpened the division between capitalism and communism, as did the new territorial proximity brought about by the military process.

This line of argument still holds as a general explanation of the origins of the Cold War. But there is one important omission. The traditional focus is very much on the *external* pressures on the Soviet Union. Of equal importance, however, are the *internal* pressures and the way in which they helped shape Stalin's responses to the West.

Stalin found the Soviet Union affected in two contrasting ways by the Second World War. In one way the war had exerted a centripetal effect. It had pulled the country together, partly through the massive patriotic response to the emergency of the German invasion, and partly because the military success had prevented it from disintegrating again once the emergency was over. On the other hand, there were also centrifugal influences. Military victory had, as we have seen in [Analysis \(1\)](#), threatened Stalin's personal power and created alternative role models that threatened a weakening of central power. Meanwhile, as the impact of the wartime emergency gradually wore off, there was a revived threat of ethnic disintegration.

To maintain the centripetal effect—and offset the centrifugal—Stalin had to restore the full panoply of coercion and the command economy of the 1930s. Fortunately for him, his measures were given a new justification—the perceived menace of the West that was now in a greatly enhanced form. A direct comparison can be made with Stalin's measures in the 1930s. As in 1929 and 1931, he used the threat of the West to justify forced collectivisation and rapid industrialisation. The Cold War situation between 1945 and 1947 could be used to justify the renewal of such measures. He could also reject any assistance from the West, as he did in his response to Marshall Aid, in very much the same terms. The Soviet Union would continue to go its own way, as it had done in the early 1930s.

The obverse of this coin is that Stalin depended on the Cold War to maintain his system internally. This explains why domestic crises were so often related to the external threat and given the language of the Cold War. He could also use the newly conquered glaxis of Eastern Europe as an additional form of security. In tightening Soviet control over the satellite states, he could put additional pressure on ethnic groups within the Soviet Union itself. Hence his subjection of Poles, Czechs and Hungarians was an added guarantee of his control over Ukrainians, Belorussians and Tartars.

To what extent did Stalin succeed in his foreign policy and his attempted manipulation of the Cold War? On the positive side, the Soviet Union seemed to have achieved the security that both Lenin and Stalin had sought. After 1945 it was a superpower with the world's largest standing army. It had achieved direct control over East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania, thereby increasing the security of Soviet territorial gains in the Baltic and the Ukraine. The Cold War had also been the means whereby defeating an enemy had been converted into the spread of ideology. Stalin had proved Trotsky wrong: communism was spread not by Soviet-inspired revolution but by direct Soviet conquest. In this respect Stalin's Cold War policies were the logical means of maintaining and extending the fruits of victory of the Great Patriotic War. From 1949 and 1951, with the respective development of

the atomic and hydrogen bombs, the extension of Soviet influence was set more permanently by the protection of nuclear weapons. Thus, compared with Soviet insecurity in 1931, huge steps had been taken by the year of Stalin's death in 1953.

Or had they? Stalin's use of the Cold War to increase internal security generated its own problems, which made the Soviet Union more vulnerable to pressures from outside. For example, the spread of Soviet influence in Eastern Europe provoked a Western response that was far more concerted than anything that had happened in the interwar period. This included the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan and the establishment of NATO in 1949. In addition, Stalin was obliged to back down over the Berlin blockade in 1948–9. As C.Kennedy-Pipe maintains, 'The Cold War was not a competition of equals: rather, it was an unequal struggle between one strong regime, the United States, and one fragile regime, the Soviet Union.' (8) In addition, having to maintain the high levels of defence expenditure necessitated by the Cold War meant that there was never any real possibility of lightening the burden on the Soviet consumer. The contrast in living standards between the Soviet Bloc and the West became even greater than it had been during the 1930s—and would be a huge problem in the future. Finally, the creation of the glacis was to provide a constant concern about the possible impact of protest movements within Eastern Europe upon the Soviet Union itself.

These problems became particularly apparent after Stalin's death. Despite attempted economic reforms, Khrushchev found it virtually impossible to improve the facilities of the long-suffering consumer. Part of the reason was continued expenditure on the Cold War, which experienced its most dangerous phase under Khrushchev. The situation was exacerbated by the Cuban Missile Crisis: Soviet humiliation brought about the fall of Khrushchev and made his successor, Brezhnev, determined to equal and overtake US armaments production. Meanwhile, both Khrushchev and Brezhnev found themselves forced to take active measures to prevent any liberalisation within the Soviet satellites, in case this should affect the Soviet Union itself. Khrushchev therefore mobilised the Warsaw Pact to invade Hungary in 1956, while Brezhnev did the same to Czechoslovakia in 1968.

The two trends came together during the 1980s to produce impossible pressures for the Soviet Union. Under Gorbachev the policy of *perestroika* released consumer demands that could not be met by a command economy, even by one that was in the process of being liberalised. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union relaxed its grip on Eastern Europe, which promptly experienced a series of 'people's revolutions' in 1989. The combination proved too great for the Soviet Union, which died—unwanted—at the end of 1991.

Stalin's ultimate Cold War legacy was, therefore, to enlarge and externally strengthen the Soviet system. At the same time, he made it more vulnerable to internal collapse. This explains the irony that the Soviet Union, which had triumphed in war, eventually succumbed to the peace that followed.

Questions

1. To what extent was Soviet involvement in the Cold War due to domestic influences?
2. How far did Stalin shape the development of the Cold War?
3. Had the Soviet Union 'lost' the Cold War by 1953?

SOURCES

1.

RECONSTRUCTING THE SOVIET ECONOMY?

Source A:
an extract from an official Soviet history, published in 1948.

The Soviet people is reconstructing the national economy of the USSR with its heroic efforts, and will surpass the prewar level of production and overtake economically the main capitalist countries.

Source B:
extracts from a speech to the Soviet public by Stalin in 1946.

What material potential did the country dispose of before the Second World War?

[Gives production figures]...

What policy enabled the Communist Party to ensure this material potential in such a short time?

First of all the Soviet policy of industrialization of the country...

Secondly, the policy of collectivization of agriculture...

Now a few words about the work plans of our Communist Party...

So far as plans for a longer term are concerned, the party intends to organize a new upsurge of the economy, which will make it possible for us to something like treble the level of our industry compared with the pre-war period... Only on this condition can we consider that our Motherland will be guaranteed against all accidents. This

will require, say, three more Five-Year Plans, if not more. But this thing can be done, and we must do it.

Source C:
official Soviet figures for the fourth Five-Year Plan (1945–50). These are based on a 1940 index of 100.

	<i>1940</i>	<i>1945</i>	<i>1950 (Plan)</i>	<i>1950 (Actual)</i>
National income	100	83	138	164
Gross industrial production	100	92	148	173
Producers' goods	100	112	–	205
Consumers' goods	100	59	–	123
Gross agricultural production	100	60	127	99

Source D:
Khrushchev's criticism of the fourth Five-Year Plan.

I could already see that our output plan wouldn't be fulfilled. I assigned a group of agricultural experts and economists...to make a realistic calculation of how much grain we really could produce. They came up with a figure of somewhere between 100 and 200 million pood. This was very little. Before the war the Ukraine had produced as much as 500 million pood, and the State had already assigned us an output plan of 400 million pood for 1946. I felt it was best to approach the problem honestly. I hoped that if I reported the situation to Stalin candidly and supported my report with facts and figures, he would believe me. I wanted to do everything in my power to make Stalin understand our position.

I hoped I could prove I was right this time too, and that Stalin would understand that my request was not 'sabotage'. This term was always on hand as a justification for the repression and the extortion of products from the collective farms. In this case I would be trying to convince Stalin that we couldn't supply the agricultural products we wanted and needed. Our own country needed them, and Stalin also wanted to send food to the other Socialist countries, especially Poland and Germany, who couldn't survive without our help. Stalin was already building up an alliance and fitting himself with the toga of the leader of future military campaigns. He would be very unhappy to hear that the Ukraine not only couldn't fulfil its

assigned quota for delivery to the State, but in fact needed food from the State to feed its own people.

Questions

- *1. (i) Explain the difference between ‘producers’ goods’ and ‘consumers’ goods’ (Source C). [2]
(ii) Explain the reference to ‘Germany’ (Source D). [2]
2. To what extent does Source C show that the objectives stated in Sources A and B were genuinely under way by 1950? [7]
3. What can be deduced from Source D about the problems in designing and implementing the agricultural component of the fourth Five-Year Plan? How reliable is this source? [6]
4. ‘More of the same.’ ‘A new approach.’ In the light of Sources A to D, plus further information known to you, which of these is the more accurate description of Stalin’s economic policies after 1945? [8]

Worked answer

- *1. *[Two marks indicate that an explanation needs to be more than merely a word or phrase. On the other hand, too much time should not be spent on this question at the expense of the others.]*
(i) ‘Producers’ goods are those that relate to industry, especially to plant, armaments and farming equipment. Consumers’ goods are those intended for everyday use by the population, particularly household items and textiles.
(ii) Khrushchev was referring to the Soviet zone of Germany. Even after it had become the German Federal Republic, it was initially heavily dependent on the USSR for its economic validity.

SOURCES

2.

ARGUMENTS BEHIND THE COLD WAR

Source E: from the Truman Doctrine, 1948.

One of the primary objectives of the foreign policy of the United States is the creation of conditions in which we and other nations will be able to work out a way of life free from coercion...

To ensure the peaceful development of nations, free from coercion, the United States has taken a leading part in establishing the United Nations.

The United Nations is designed to make possible lasting freedom and independence for all its members. We shall not realise our objectives, however, unless we are willing to help free peoples to maintain their free institutions and their national integrity against aggressive movements that seek to impose on them totalitarian regimes. This is no more than a frank recognition that totalitarian regimes imposed on free people, by direct or indirect aggression, undermine the foundations of international peace and hence the security of the United States.

The peoples of a number of countries of the world have recently had totalitarian regimes forced upon them against their will. The government of the United States has made frequent protests against coercion and intimidation, in violation of the Yalta Agreements, in Poland, Romania and Bulgaria. I must also state that in a number of other countries there have been similar developments.

At the present moment in world history nearly every nation must choose between alternative ways of life. The choice is too often not a free one.

One way of life is built upon the will of the majority, and is distinguished by free institutions, representative government, free elections, guarantees of individual liberty, freedom of speech and religion, and freedom from political oppression.

The second way of life is based upon the will of the minority forcibly imposed upon the majority. It relies upon terror and oppression, a controlled press and radio, fixed elections, and the suppression of personal freedoms.

I believe that we must assist free peoples to work out their own destinies in their own way.

I believe our help should be primarily through economic and financial aid which is essential to economic stability and orderly political progress.

Source F:
an extract from the official *History of Soviet Foreign*
***Policy 1945–70* (Moscow 1973).**

In an address containing venomous slander against the socialist countries, Truman in effect raised the question of the USA undertaking the role of world policeman in order to interfere in the affairs of other countries on the side of reaction and counter-revolution, help strangle the liberation movement in all parts of the world and openly oppose revolution and socialist development...

The Soviet Government and press graphically exposed the imperialist character of the Truman Doctrine. *Pravda* wrote that the doctrine signified further interference in the affairs of other countries. The USA's claims to international leadership were growing together with the appetites of the interested American circles. The newspaper pointed out that in the new

historical situation the American politicians were ignoring the fact that the old methods of the colonialists and die-hard statesmen were outworn and doomed.

The USSR sharply denounced the Truman Doctrine also in the UN, stressing that the USA's attempts to dictate its will to other independent countries were incompatible with the principles proclaimed by the General Assembly in 1946, one of which was that aid to other countries should not be used as a political weapon.

The USA's aggressive policies in the regions adjoining the Soviet Union and the People's Democracies led to the further unity of these countries, which were vitally interested in safeguarding peace and the sovereign rights of nations against encroachment by imperialists.

Questions

1. Explain the references to
 - (i) 'the Yalta Agreements' (Source E); [2]
 - (ii) 'People's Democracies' (Source F). [2]
2. What can be inferred from Source E about Stalin's objectives in Europe from 1945? [6]
- *3. What similarities can be detected between Sources E and F over their criticism of each other's policies? [4]
4. How would you explain the similarities referred to in Question 3? [3]
5. 'The grounds for Stalin's hostility towards the West were primarily ideological.' Do Sources E and F, and your own knowledge, support this view? [8]

Worked answer

- *3. *[This question is best handled by finding several points on which to establish similarities—and then illustrating with precise quotations from the sources.]*

There are several similarities. Sources E and F both refer to the need to defend 'democracy' against the aggression of the other side in the Cold War. The Truman Doctrine points out the threat to 'free peoples' from 'aggressive movements' seeking to impose 'totalitarian regimes'. The official Soviet history, for its part, condemns the 'aggressive policies' of the United States 'in the regions adjoining the Soviet Union'. Second, both sources argue that such interference is dangerous to 'the foundations of international peace' (Source E), or to 'safeguarding peace and the sovereign rights of nations' (Source F). Third, both aim to justify their case by reference to the United Nations. According to Source E, 'the United States has taken a leading part in establishing the United Nations', while Source F

asserts that US actions were 'incompatible with the principles proclaimed by the General Assembly'. Each source aims, therefore, to produce the most convincing condemnation possible of an ideological enemy.

8

AN OVERALL SUMMARY

This book has attempted to establish an alternative to the way in which Stalin and Stalinism are usually presented to students. It might be helpful to review the overall perspectives.

THE TRADITIONAL OVERALL INTERPRETATION

Stalin's regime was ruthless and efficient, creating an effective totalitarian state during the 1930s, although with enormous suffering. The result was a form of totalitarianism that was more complete than that of Nazi Germany. Stalin was in control of internal developments and pursued a foreign policy which, with occasional changes in tactics, had a strategy of dividing the Western powers.

Because of these developments, and despite the suffering of its own population, the Soviet Union was able to inflict defeat on Nazi Germany. This followed a disastrous initial response, in which Stalin completely misinterpreted Hitler's intentions. But Stalin's subsequent recovery interacted with long-term economic and military preparation, along with the established centralisation, to overcome the much more limited military and economic base of Nazi Germany.

As a result of eventual victory, Stalin's position was greatly strengthened after 1945. He was therefore able to reimpose the type of constraints that had existed during the 1930s in a new set of purges. He also spread Soviet influence across Eastern Europe and set the pace in the development of the Cold War. In all respects, this was the period of 'mature dictatorship'.

After his death in 1953, Stalin's monolith threatened to leave his successors in its shade. Khrushchev therefore took measures to discredit Stalin's name by focusing on the man's brutality and many personal deficiencies. Even so, the influence of Stalin remained powerful and his system continued to dominate the Soviet body politic until the Gorbachev era.

A REVISED INTERPRETATION

Stalin's regime was ruthless but not consequentially efficient. Totalitarianism was as flawed in Stalinist Russia as it was in Nazi Germany. During the 1930s this was strongly apparent in domestic policy. Stalin sought to centralise a political and economic system that frequently fell to local initiatives. As a result, central correctives had to be applied, which meant that Stalin's policies were as much reactive as they were proactive. Similarly, his foreign policy had to be steered on to corrected courses, partly because of earlier errors of judgement and partly because of circumstances beyond his control.

The war with Germany initially paralysed the whole system. The economic planning of the 1930s had been geared to mobilising Russia for an offensive campaign, whereas Stalin's inappropriate diplomacy necessitated a defensive response that could not immediately be delivered. Major changes were, however, introduced to transform the situation. Soviet production was made more efficient, paradoxically, by partially demobilising the planning structure to enhance military mobilisation. The Soviet Union defeated Germany because it was able to transcend the limits imposed by Stalinism since the 1930s.

After 1945 Stalin's position was vulnerable, not least to the very forces that had been responsible for military victory. He therefore had to reinstitute the sort of controls that had existed during the 1930s but that had been relaxed during the war. But these were an expression of insecurity rather than of 'mature dictatorship'. Expansion in Europe was less controlled and calculated than has been thought. In part, it was a response to circumstances, in part a means of justifying internal policies, a rerun of the interaction between foreign and domestic policy during the early 1930s.

Stalin's system was already in decline when it was taken over by Khrushchev, who did what he could to reform its most depleted part, agriculture. Khrushchev's replacement by Brezhnev led to an attempt to revive Stalinist centralisation but the infrastructure had long since withered to create an excessive vulnerability to Western competition. The result was the decline and collapse of the Soviet state.

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NEW INTERPRETATIONS

Although not yet on the same scale as publications on Nazi Germany, there has been an impressive array of recent material on the Soviet Union during the 1990s, with some extensive reinterpretations that I have tried to reflect in this book. Invaluable among the general works are: C.Ward: *Stalin's Russia* (London 1993); A.Nove (ed.): *The Stalin Phenomenon* (London 1993); C.Ward (ed.): *The Stalinist Dictatorship* (London 1998); and I.Kershaw and M.Lewin (eds): *Stalinism and Nazism: Dictatorships in Comparison* (Cambridge 1997).

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These new approaches will doubtless be added to rapidly in the next few years. The reader can therefore expect—and welcome—further reinterpretations on Stalin and Stalinism.

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