

Soviet Russia and the USSR, 1917–1941

🚩 Government and Party 🚩 State Security 🚩 Military Command Structure 🚩



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Contents

1 About this Guidebook.....	3	14.D Stalin and Hitler Divide Eastern Europe....	373
2 Terms and Conventions in this Guidebook.....	7	14.E Soviet Aggression 1939–1940.....	378
2.A Regions of the USSR.....	19	14.F Hitler Decides to Invade the USSR.....	391
2.B Numbers and Measures.....	20	14.G Soviet Preparations for War.....	393
2.C Soviet Considerations.....	22	15 Concluding Remarks.....	411
2.D Sources and Speculation.....	23	16 Appendices.....	416
2.E And More!.....	25	16.A Map History of Rus and Russia to 1895....	416
3 The Russian Empire in Turmoil.....	26	16.B Russian and Soviet Central Asia.....	425
4 Early 20th Century Russia: Revolt and Reform....	35	16.C Estonia in the Russian Civil War.....	440
5 War, Revolution, War, and Revolution Again.....	52	16.D Overview: Germany, 1918–1936.....	456
6 Soviet Russia, 1917 to early 1918.....	90	16.E Reichstag Elections, 1919–1933.....	536
7 Civil War: Rise of the Whites, 1918.....	141	16.F The USSR in the Late 1940s.....	540
8 Civil War: Allied Intervention Fails, 1919.....	183	16.G Military and Naval Forces.....	545
9 Civil War: Soviet and Polish Victories, 1920.....	213	16.H Names of the Soviet Communist Party.....	550
10 Civil War: Mopping Up, 1921–1922.....	232	16.I Names of the Soviet State.....	553
11 New Policies, Famine, and Recovery, 1920s.....	241	16.J Emblems of the Soviet State.....	554
12 The Leadership Struggle.....	290	16.K Flags of the Soviet State.....	558
13 Stalin in Charge.....	299	16.L Names of the Soviet Secret Police.....	562
14 Approach of War with Germany.....	348	16.M Political Control of the Military.....	564
14.A The Nazis Take Power in Germany.....	348	16.N The Red Army Oath, 1918.....	566
14.B The Spanish Civil War.....	362	16.O Revolutionary Military Council (Decree)...	567
14.C Germany Aggression 1938–1939.....	369	16.P Russian.....	569

1 About this Guidebook

This guidebook covers the history of the USSR to 22 June 1941, when Germany invaded and began what the Soviets called the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945. I was a child in the 1950s and 1960s, when the events of World War II were fresh in many people’s minds. Adults around me would often ask, “Why did Hitler do those horrible things? Was he mad?” This kindled my interest in the war and a quest to answer this question. No, Hitler wasn’t mad, certainly not in the sense of being criminally insane. He believed in truly evil things and tried to accomplish his twisted goals. By the time I had answered this question to my satisfaction, I had found another question about the war that was even more puzzling. How could the USSR, the largest country in the world, with a huge army and air force, a large population, vast natural resources, and a robust defense industry, do so badly in the war?

The USSR by itself outnumbered Nazi Germany in almost all major respects: population, natural resources, tanks, aircraft, artillery. The large military and the resources of the Soviet state seems like the Red Army should have defeated the German invasion after only a few weeks or months of fighting and then marched victoriously into the enemy homeland. I later discovered this was, in broad outline, the actual Soviet defense plan for 1941. Instead, the German invasion in 1941 thrust the USSR into an existential crisis, with repeated immense losses of soldiers, weapons, territory, and population. German strategic blunders in 1942 finally turned the tide against Germany late that year. The USSR then pushed the invaders back during the next two and half years, ending the war victoriously in Berlin in May 1945.

My Soviet question turned into a quest to understand the USSR of the 1930s and 1940s. As one result of that effort, I occasionally create *Classic Europa* guidebooks about some aspects of the Soviet Union. This guidebook covers the Soviet state from its creation in 1917 through to the eve of invasion in June 1941. It overviews all major aspect of the Soviets: their Marxist-Leninist ideology, their Communist Party control of the country, their government, their military, and their historical development from a violent group of radical revolutionaries under Lenin in 1917 to a stifling dictatorship under Stalin.

This guidebook is an overview, not an encyclopedic work. It deliberately makes no attempt to name all the myriad Soviet officials who were important to some issues but peripheral to the greater story. It simplifies some petty details, such as calling the main Soviet state security force the “secret police” when its actual name at a given time is not important: Cheka, NKVD/GPU, OGPU, NKVD/GUGB, NKGB. Some examples are:

- G.I. Petrovskiy is ignored. Petrovskiy was a Ukrainian Communist who rose to membership in the Politburo, helped negotiate the 1918 peace treaty with the Central Powers, and signed the 1922 treaty that created the Soviet Union on behalf of the Ukrainian SSR. He was one of many top officials who implement Stalin's program of collective agriculture, which resulted in a horrific famine. When in 1926 the Soviets for political reasons decide to get rid of the imperial-religious name for the city of Ekaterinoslav, Petrovskiy's name was incorporated into the city's new name: Dnepropetrovsk. (The city is now Dnipro in Ukraine). Despite all this, Petrovskiy is not important to the larger picture of this guidebook and won't be mentioned again.
- The Soviets frequently reorganized and renamed many government bodies and institutions in the 1920s–1940s, besides the secret police. Only the highlights are mentioned. For the others, I use descriptive terms rather than the confusing array of often-changing names. For example, "Soviet industry" is clear in what it means, without having to mention the Supreme Board of the People's Economy, the People's Commissariat of Heavy Industry, the People's Commissariat of Defense Industry, the People's Commissariat of Fuel Industry, the People's Commissariat of Chemical Industry, the People's Commissariat of Ferrous Metallurgy, and so on.
- Spotlight text covers the various main structures of the Communist Party and Soviet government, but many of these organizations often mattered little, especially after the initial years of the Soviet state. Important decisions were usually made by an inner circle of top Party leaders who almost always were also the top government officials. Once Stalin achieved dictatorial power, even key Party and government bodies only had the appearance of power and just existed to endorse and implement Stalin's decisions, which he often made in informal gatherings with his inner circle of advisors, assistants, and cronies. Some seemingly-important bodies like the Soviet legislature rarely if ever had any real power, even before Stalin, but were rubber-stamp bodies.

I try to cover all important aspects of the Soviet state in 1917–1941, including politics, the government, the military, the economy, and social aspects. They were interwoven in ways that is not clear in the many works on the 1917–1941 Soviets which often concentrate on just the political-social aspects or just the military history. For example, the Russian Empire until its final years badly neglected public mass education, so much so that the majority of adults in the country were illiterate, especially the farmers. Once the Soviets took over, they worked hard to improve education, but this was a problem that by its nature took decades to fix. The low education levels of adults contributed to many Soviet problems, like poor industrial

quality. (Soviet industrial expansion depended upon millions of illiterate and semi-literate people being sent from the farms to the factories.) It also explains some of the Red Army's problems, as poorly-educated citizens with little experience of motorized equipment did not make the most accomplished soldiers in a world rapidly embracing mechanized warfare.

Many general works on the Soviets quickly skip over the Russian Civil War of 1918–1922, since it was complex and over fairly quickly, making it seem peripheral. I cover the war in more detail, as it was one of the most challenging and defining events for the Soviets. I believe their experiences in the civil war directly helped them respond to and overcome the challenges of the Great Patriotic War, the war with Germany in 1941–1945. (See [The Russian Civil War and the Great Patriotic War](#) below if you want details). I do simplify and condense the history of the civil war, since otherwise it could easily become a book in itself. Many battles are skipped and some campaigns glossed over. Political maneuverings like those over some of the Soviet's puppet states are simplified or ignored. For example, the Litbel is not mentioned in the civil war section.

I have various “spotlight” sections that cover selected topics in some detail as well as “sidetrip” sections that illuminate some topics of lesser importance. Too often, books might mention these topics without explaining them, causing me to ask questions like “What did this mean?” and “Why did it happen like this?”. Often, the answers to these questions show something interesting or important about the Soviets. Here's an example:

Sidetrip: The Litbel

Litbel meant the Lithuanian-Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic (Litbel from the Russian, *Litovsko-Belorussskaya Sovetskaya Sotsialisticheskaya Respublika*). In late 1918 and early 1919, the Soviets (the Russian SFSR) had created separate puppet states for Lithuania and Belorussia [modern Belarus], the Lithuanian Socialist Soviet Republic and the Socialist Soviet Republic of Belorussia. The Soviets preferred to create puppet states to create the illusion that the local ethnic groups were fighting to create their own independent socialist states. In reality, the Soviets controlled the puppet states and the Soviet Red Army supplied most of the troops fighting for them.

Later in 1919, the Soviets decided to merge the two puppets as the Litbel. The Soviets never controlled all of the territory of the Litbel and over the course of 1919 were driven out of this puppet state. They finally dissolved the Litbel in 1920.


Countries, leaders, and people often try to hide the real situation through a thicket of technical terms, propaganda, and outright lies. I make clear what really happened: For example, I state that Germany in November 1918 and France in June 1940 surrendered to their enemies. Technically, each sought an armistice to halt the fighting (and later signed a peace treaty). In each case, the armistice terms imposed conditions that made it virtually impossible for the surrendering country to resume the wars with any chance of winning or even holding off the enemy. In contrast, Finland did not surrender to the USSR in September 1944. Finland had just halted a Soviet offensive but the country was facing defeat if the Soviets mustered more military resources to launch a new offensive. However, the Soviet Union did not want to divert further military resources against the Finns when they were needed to go to fight the Germans. The two sides agreed to armistice (and later signed a peace treaty) that imposed relatively mild terms on Finland.

My guidebooks are not scholarly works and do not use scholarly citations or have bibliographies. I do use footnotes to call attention to supplemental information you might be interested or to note non-English sources containing information that English-language works on the USSR usually lack. I use my own scheme for footnotes that I find useful rather than following an academic style. I also do not use any of the arcane scholarly panoply of *cf.*, *ff.*, *ibid.*, *loc. cit.*, *op. cit.*, or *passim*, which obscure more than they help if you don't encounter them frequently.

— John M. Astell, 9 August 2023

2 Terms and Conventions in this Guidebook

This section covers introductory concepts and material. You can [skip to the main story](#), glance over it, or read it as your wish.

Socialist, Socialism	<p>The Communists often called their system socialism and their states socialist because per Marxist-Leninist ideology they had advanced beyond capitalism but had not yet achieved true communism.</p> <p>The Communists practiced a particularly brutal and authoritarian form of socialism. There were (and are) many other forms of socialism, some of which are covered in this guidebook. Some of these socialists did want to impose socialism by force; others were social democrats who wanted socialism to be voluntarily chosen by the majority of the people. Some social democrats did (and do) not seek to replace capitalism but to ameliorate it with democratically-enacted social programs.</p>
Soviet	 <p style="text-align: center;">“All Power to Soviets”</p> <p>In Russian, a <i>sovet</i> or soviet is a council. The word “soviet” acquired a special political meaning in Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917, when revolutionary socialists and other radical-left groups organized councils in opposition to the government, such as the Petrograd Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies. The Bolsheviks (see next entry) in</p>

1917 came to dominate many of these soviets and adopted their slogan, “all power to the Soviets”. This was meant to undermine the existing Russian Provisional Government in favor of the soviets and thus the Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks retained this association of soviets with themselves, even after their revolution to seize power and their victory in the ensuing Russian Civil War. They always kept “Soviet” in the names of their states (see the Russian SFSR and USSR entries below) and thus became known as the Soviets.

In general, Soviet governments were organized as a hierarchy of soviets (councils), roughly from local level to regional level to union-republic level (such as the Belorussian SSR) to all-union level (the entire USSR). Enfranchised citizens in theory elected representatives (“deputies”) to the local soviets, and each level of soviets in turn elected deputies to the next higher level. While the system seemed democratic, the Soviets in reality quickly subverted this system so that it functioned only how they wanted it to, which was with them in complete control.

The Bolsheviks
 Bolshevik Party
 Communist Party
 The Party
 The Communists
 The Soviets
 Old Bolsheviks



Lenin speaking in Petrograd, 1917

The Bolsheviks derived from a faction in the Russian Social-Democratic Workers Party. This party was riven by factions, two of which were the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, firm opponents of one another. The party effectively split in 1912 into two Russian Social-Democratic Workers Parties both claiming the same name but later known as the Russian Social-Democratic Workers Party (Menshevik) or the Mensheviks and the **Russian Social-Democratic Workers Party (Bolshevik)** or the Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks power in Russia in November 1917 and renamed themselves the **All-Russian Communist**

Party (Bolsheviks) in March 1918. The “Russian” in the Party’s name was geographic, not ethnic. It meant it was the communist party of the Russian SFSR, the Soviet state and was open to all ethnic groups of the state.

After the Soviet Union was formed, the Russian SFSR was now just one part of this country, and the Party renamed itself the **All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)**. This name would last until 1952, when they renamed themselves the **Communist Party of the Soviet Union**.

When I use “the Party”, I mean the Bolsheviks’ party, whatever its official name might be at the time. I use “the Bolsheviks” and “the Communists” interchangeably, although I try to use “the Bolsheviks” when referring to the Party or the people running the Party up to March 1918 when they changed the official name of their Party from the Russian Social-Democratic Workers Party (Bolsheviks) to the All-Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks). Thereafter, I try to use “the Communists”, but I use whatever term makes the most sense in the context of the text. For example, I avoid switching terms in text that covers a time span in which the name changed.

Old Bolsheviks in the 1920s became a way to refer to people who were in the Bolshevik Party before the Bolshevik Revolution of November 1917. After the Bolsheviks seized power, many people joined the Party. While many joined for ideological reasons, there was always a suspicion that some joined to advance themselves and had no real interest in Marxism, Communism, or the Revolution. Thus, “Old Bolsheviks” in part meant party members who were almost certainly the committed ideological revolutionaries. In the 1930s, Stalin would have many top Old Bolsheviks to be demoted, imprisoned, or even executed, to remove any possible rivals to his rule.

Russia
Tsardom of Russia
Russian Empire
Russian Republic
Russian SFSR



“RSFSR”, Flag of the Russian SFSR, 1918

The word “Russia” has several associations, such as the land of the Russians and the multi-ethnic country controlled by the Russians. The

Tsardom of Russia, later the **Russian Empire**, was the multi-ethnic state ruled by the tsars and dominated mostly by ethnic Russians together mostly with other Slavic groups (such as Belarusians and Ukrainians). In March 1917, a revolution caused the Tsar to abdicate, and the resulting Provisional Government eventually declared the country the **Russian Republic**.

In November 1917, another revolution put the Bolsheviks in charge. They did not immediately create a new name their state, and it was sometimes by default continued to be called the Russian Republic. The Bolsheviks rarely used this term, instead informally referring to their state in terms like the Soviet Republic, the Republic of Soviets, or just the Republic, even after they adopted an official name. Many other informal names were used in Russia and throughout the world.

In January 1918 the Bolsheviks adopted **Russian Soviet Republic** as the country's name but in July renamed it the **Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic** (**Russian SFSR**, **RSFSR**). Finally, in 1922 the **Unions of Soviet Socialist Republics** was created with the Russian SFSR just one part of the larger country (see next entry).

When I use "the Soviet state" in 1917–1922, I mean the country run by the Bolsheviks/Communists whatever its official name might be at the time. I use "the Soviets" when referring to government matters as opposed to Party matters. Keep in mind that the leadership of the Soviet state always came from the Communist Party. Except for a few minor exceptions early on, all commissariats and other major executive government institutions were also Party members.

The "Federative" name in the Russian SFSR meant the state was supposed to be a federation of multiple ethnic groups and not just a Russian-dominated state. (This was partly a propaganda move to win non-Slavic ethnic support, since many in the enemy Whites of the civil war were ethnic Russian nationalists seeking to restore the empire and the primacy of the Russians.)

Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
USSR
Soviet Union



USSR Flag, 1936–1955

	<p>The Soviet state lost its western territories in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918, and several ethnic groups separately managed to gain various degrees of independence. These regions were technically not part of the Russian SFSR. However, the Communists continued to operate in many of these regions, setting up puppet socialist soviet republics there. The pretense was that local socialists were in control of these republics, but in actuality, the Communists of the Russian SFSR controlled all important issues in these republics themselves, with their Red Army being the dominating military power.</p> <p>When the civil war ended, there were four nominally independent republics: the Belorussian Socialist Soviet Republic, the Russian SFSR, the Transcaucasian SFSR (of three federated SSRs), and the Ukrainian SSR. In December 1922, the Bolsheviks officially merged these four as “union republics” of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (the USSR), aka the Soviet Union). This was done by treaty, and the terms of the treaty governed the organization of the state until a constitution was adopted in January 1924.</p> <p>The phrase “Union of Soviet Socialist Republic” reversed the then-usual word order of “socialist soviet republic” and “socialist federative soviet republic” the Soviets had used for their various republics. In the 1936, the Soviets standardized the terminology of the union republics and internal autonomous republics to match the sequence used in the USSR name. Thus, for example, “Socialist Soviet Republic” became “Soviet Socialist Republic”.</p>
Republic	<p>From September 1917, Russia/the USSR has officially been a republic. However, in actuality the Russians and Soviets rarely have had a true republic. The Provisional Government declared Russia to be a republic in 1917, but this was a political move, since no part of the Provisional Government during its existence was elected along republican lines. It was at best aspirational, as a constitutional assembly was supposed to meet and determined Russia’s governmental organization.</p> <p>The Soviets took over and got rid of the assembly before it adopted a constitution. The Soviets seemingly loved republics, since they had soviet republics, soviet socialist republics, and autonomous soviet socialist republics at various levels in their governmental organization. However, except for brief periods at the start of the end of the Soviet state, none of these entities truly operated as republics. Instead, the Bolsheviks/Communists rigged the system to keep themselves in control. After the fall of the USSR, the new Russian state, the Russian</p>

Federation was officially republic and actually was one at first, until it was subverted into an authoritarian dictatorship.

All-union
country-wide
all-Russian
country/*strana*
homeland/*rodina*
Mother Russia/ *Matushka*
Rossiya
motherland/*rodina-mat*
~~national~~



For Motherland!

The Soviets used “**all-union**” to refer to institutions and organizations that applied across the entire USSR. For example, the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik) was the country-wide party of the USSR. I accordingly use “all-union” or “country-wide” to keep the same sense. Some works in English instead use “national”, but this is poor usage for the USSR, as covered below.

Before the USSR was formed, the Soviet state was the Russian SFSR, and “all-Russian” was used in the same way that “all-union” would be later.

Strana means country, and I use it accordingly. Again, some works in English use “national” for *strana*, but this is poor usage. So, *PVO Strany* is PVO of the Country (Anti-Air Defense of the Country) but not ~~National Air Defense~~.

Rodina means homeland. It is sometimes translated as motherland, because of the commonly used *Rodina-mat*, which means “Motherland” (literally, “Mother Homeland”; “Mother Motherland” is another

	<p>common translation). <i>Rodina-mat</i> was frequently used by the Soviets, especially during the Great Patriotic War. “Mother Russia” (<i>Matushka Rossiya</i>) was also used.</p> <p>So, why is “national” poor usage when referring to the overall Soviet Union? The USSR was a multi-ethnic state, not a nation state in the sense of a country with a large majoritarian ethnic group like France or Italy. The Soviets had a word for “national” (<i>natsionalnyy</i>), but they did not use it to refer to the country as a whole like they did with “all-union”. Instead, it was used in connection with Soviet ethnic groups or “nationalities” (<i>natsionalnosti</i>). So, a “national district” (<i>natsionalnyy okrug</i>) was an autonomous district for a small ethnic group, one not large enough to get its own autonomous region or autonomous soviet socialist republic.</p>
Party Organizations and State Bodies	<p>The Communist Party entwined itself throughout the Soviet state, ensuring Party control of the government. However, it kept Party organizations and state bodies separate. For example, the Soviet secret police, from the original Cheka, to the NKVD’s GUGB, and to the final KGB, were always government bodies. Similarly, the Red Army and the NKVD’s internal forces were government armed forces. This is in contrast to other extremist left-wing and right-wing states, which often had their own secret police or military forces. For example, the People’s Liberation Army of China is officially under the Chinese Communist Party. The Waffen-SS of Nazi Germany and the Blackshirts of Fascist Italy were party-controlled armed forces separate from (but often enmeshed with) the regular military forces. Nazi Germany had both state and Nazi Party security forces, which ended up working together closely under the command of Heinrich Himmler the head of the SS and the German police.</p>
People’s Commissariats Main Directorate vs. Directorate	<p>The top level of a Soviet governmental administrative body was usually a “people’s commissariat” (<i>narodnyy komissariat</i>). The preceding Russian Republic and Russian Empire had called them “ministries” (which were like British governmental ministries and American governmental departments), but the Soviets wanted a break with the past and a term that sounded revolutionary: people’s commissariats.</p> <p>The people’s commissariats (and the earlier Russian ministries) were each organized into several subordinate organizations and agencies, such as main directorates, directorates, departments, and sections. Any of these could be right under the people’s commissariat headquarters</p>

	<p>itself. The difference between a main directorate and a directorate was that a main directorate was more important and could itself have subordinate directorates. The Soviets were somewhat found of reorganizing their people’s commissariats, particularly with directorates sometimes being promoted into main directorates.</p> <p>In Russian, “main directorate” is <i>glavnoe upravlenie</i> while “directorate” is <i>upravlenie</i>. Some works in English translate <i>glavnoe upravlenie</i> as “chief directorate”, so if you read about Soviet history keep in mind that “main directorates” and “chief directorates” are the same thing.</p> <p>After World War II, the USSR began discarding some of its revolutionary terminology. In 1946, the people’s commissariats were redesignated as ministries.</p>
Class Enemies	<p>Marxism–Leninism held that various classes of people were by their very nature enemies of the proletariat and of any socialist or communist state. These included the royalty, the aristocracy, the bourgeoisie, the clergy, the kulaks (well-off peasants), and others. Groups who had been instrumental in maintaining the power of the class enemies, like the Tsarist regular police, the Tsarist secret police, and, at times, the Cossacks (due the their reputation for loyalty to the Tsar) were included with the class enemies.</p> <p>The Soviets began railing against enemies of the people in 1917, soon after they seized power, and for decades would persecute them, deny them the right to vote, and imprison them. Class enemy status was also at least partially inheritable, with people whose parents were class enemies often be counted as class enemies themselves. Especially during Stalin’s purges, people having class enemy origins made them especially vulnerable.</p> <p>The Soviets used several terms along these lines: enemy of the people (<i>vrag naroda</i>), enemy of the proletariat (<i>vrag proletariata</i>), enemy of the workers (<i>vrag trudyashchikhsya</i>), and class enemy (<i>klassovyi vrag</i>).</p>
Saboteurs, Wreckers, and Spies	<p>The leadership of the Communist Party and Soviet state often had an almost-paranoid view that they there were surrounded by external and internal enemies intent on discrediting and destroying the Party and state. While they did have many enemies, this belief in enemies also conveniently allowed them to dismiss their actual mistakes and failings as the efforts of these enemies.</p> <p>The leadership institutionalized this view in the Soviet security services, court system, and media. They launched numerous campaigns against saboteurs, people believed to be actively damaging</p>

the state or economy; **wreckers**, people believed to be damaging their work places, government or Party institutions, cultural organizers, and so on; and domestic **spies**, people believed to be people helping foreign powers gather secret information about the USSR and to sow disinformation in the Soviet public. Most people arrested and punished for these crimes were innocent, especially after Stalin came to power. Stalin's rule combined the institutionalized paranoia of the state with Stalin's own personal paranoia. For example, Stalin's own policies resulted in famine in many parts of the USSR, with many of the peasants (farmers) there starving. Instead of admitting a mistake, Stalin blamed the peasants, claiming they hated Communism so much that they were deliberately starving themselves to discredit the Party.

Stalin would launch massive purges of the USSR in which millions of people would be arrested and imprisoned in the GULag, with hundreds of thousands being tortured and executed. The vast majority of these people were innocent. The purges hurt the USSR economically and militarily. As we will see in this guidebook, both the rocket artillery and mortar development projects would be adversely affected by the purges, with weapon designers and technicians being imprisoned on false charges.

World War II
Great Patriotic War



Great Patriotic War poster

Behind the Red Army troops are the "heroic shadows", representing Aleksandr Nevskiy, who defeated the Teutonic Knights, M.I. Kutuzov, who defeated Napoleon in 1812, and

an anonymous machinegunner from the Russian Revolution.

World War II started in September 1939 when Germany invaded Poland, prompting Britain and France to declare war on Germany. Over roughly the next two years, to the end of 1941, the war expanded, eventually involving countries on all six inhabited continents, with active military operations going on in Europe, Asia, Africa, the Atlantic Ocean, the Pacific Ocean, and the Indian Ocean. Officially, the USSR was not part of this war.

Germany and its Axis allies invaded the USSR in June 1941, opening what was to most of the world the Eastern Front of WW2, by far the largest land campaign of the war. To the USSR, this was the **Great Patriotic War**. The Soviet Union deliberately adopted that term in hopes of stroking Russian patriotism. They believed this was a better way to encourage the Slavic populations of the USSR to fight the invaders, rather than appeals to defend socialism or communism. The war's name evoked the Patriotic War of 1812, the Russian name for the conflict in which Russia defeated the French Empire and Napoleon¹.

The Great Patriotic War officially ended on a different date than what other countries considered to be the end of World War II in Europe. On 7 May 1945 German senior military officers met in France with Allied senior officers (including a Soviet representative) and signed a document of Germany's unconditionally surrender, to take effect on 8 May. This became the end of the war and "VE Day" for most Allies including the USA and Britain. Stalin, however, insisted that Germany surrender to a Soviet general in Berlin. This occurred very early on 9 May, which accordingly became the end of the war and "Victory Day" for the Soviet Union (and in the modern-day Russian Federation).

Confusing this issue a bit more, fighting between the Soviets and the Germans did not end on 9 May in all places. The Soviets had launched their Prague Strategic Offensive Operation on 6 May 1945 to overrun German forces in western Czechoslovakia, and military operations there only officially ended on 11 May. Some Soviet-based sources thus count 11 May as the actual end of military operations in Europe.

All this casts a little doubt on exactly what day it meant with when Soviet-based and Russian-language sources talk about the "end of the war". They usually mean 9 May, sometimes 11 May, but almost never 8 May.

¹ The Russian Empire in World War I also sometimes called their portion of the war against the Central Powers the "Second Patriotic War" for similar reasons.

World War II era	I use this for the period of the rise and fall of German Nazism, Italian Fascism, and Japanese militarism. It spans from 1931 (the Japanese invasion of Manchuria) through 1945 (the defeat of Germany and Japan).
Officer, Commander, Political Officer, Military Commissar	<p>For simplicity, I just use “officer” and “commander” interchangeably when referring to Soviet military leaders. The Soviet military in its early years officially only had commanders but not officers, which had a class-enemy connotation for the early Soviets.</p> <p>The Soviets also had a separate organization of military commissars and political officers watching over the Soviet military. These people were in charge of Communist Party political indoctrination and watched the soldiers, sailors, and especially the commanders for signs of disloyalty. Military commissars also held dual command with the Red Army commanders and could override the commanders’ orders. The USSR abolished dual command in 1942, which made the military commissars just political officers.</p> <p>The Soviets had several militarized or paramilitary organizations, particularly the NKVD’s various armed forces and the NKVD/NKGB secret police. These organizations also used a form of the military’s ranks.</p>
Allied aid “Lend-Lease”	I use “ Allied aid ” to the USSR to cover the aid Allied countries sent to the USSR in 1941–1945 to help them fight the Axis. Some works instead use “ Lend-Lease ” to mean the same things, but this is technically inaccurate. Only the USA sent Lend-Lease aid (at the US president’s discretion via the Lend-Lease Act). Also, before Lend-Lease to the USSR began in October 1941, the USSR purchased some American military equipment under the US “cash and carry” policy. This equipment sometime is included in the Lend-Lease figures. However, cash-and-carry purchases were somewhat small, as the US government discouraged private American companies from selling the Soviets some military equipment and some technologies after the USSR attacked Finland in November 1939. This opposition to such sales remained in force until Germany invaded the USSR in June 1941. American companies could ignore the US government on this. Very few did, however, partly out of the belief that the US would not purchase equipment from them if they ignored the government’s wishes about sales to the Soviets.
Timber vs. Lumber	In various English speaking countries, “timber” and “lumber” have different meanings. In some places, timber is processed wood products

	<p>liked milled boards while lumber is unprocessed wood. In other places, the meanings are reversed or sometimes partly conflated. For simplicity, I do not distinguish between these terms but typically just use “lumber”.</p>
<p>Kyrgyz, Kirghiz, Kirgiz Tajik, Tadzhik</p>	<p>The Russian spelling for “Kyrgyz” is “Киргиз”, which <i>transliterates</i> as “Kirgiz”. Back in Soviet days, to help with English pronunciation, it was often modified to “Kirghiz”. However, “Киргиз” <i>translates</i> as “Kyrgyz” (the modern name for the people and the language), so I use this form unless transliteration is necessary.</p> <p>The Russian spelling for “Tajik” is “Таджик”, which <i>transliterates</i> as “Tadzhik”. However, “Таджик” <i>translates</i> as “Tajik”, so I use this form unless transliteration is necessary.</p>
<p>Kazakhstan and the Other “-Stans”</p>	<p>In the 1920s and 1930s the Soviets divided up Soviet Central Asia into ethnic-based union republics: the Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik, Turkmen, and Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republics. The process was complete in 1936, and it seems this is when the names Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan became increasingly popular, unofficial names for these union republics. (For example, https://www.etymonline.com/word/kazakhstan shows that “Kazakhstan” was little used before the mid 1930s but increasingly used thereafter.)</p> <p>I occasionally use the “-stan” versions like Kazakhstan instead of the official versions like Kazakh SSR when the meaning is clear and it is appropriate for the text.</p>

2.A Regions of the USSR



The USSR was internally divided into a number of “socialists republics”, but often the traditional regions of Russia mattered more. This maps shows the regions and subregions mentioned in the various Soviet guidebooks.

In the western world, Siberia is usually defined as all Russian/Soviet territory east of the Urals and Central Asia. In this view, the Russian Far East and Sakhalin Island are parts of Siberia. The Soviets, however, considered their “Far East” to be a separate region from Siberia. Things were not always neat and tidy, however, as the borders between Siberia and the Soviet Far East often were redefined. (The Russian Far East of the modern-day Russian Federation is far larger than the Soviet Far East.) The Transbaykal was sometimes considered

part of the Soviet Far East, sometimes as part of Siberia, and sometimes as an important region in its own right.

Spotlight: The “Baltic Region”

Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are known as the Baltic states. For convenience, I refer to them as the “Baltic region”, since at times they were part of the USSR and were not independent states. If I need to refer to the Baltic Sea lands in a wide context, I use “greater Baltic region”.

Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were all part of the Russian Empire in 1914. The empire itself used the term “Baltic region” but meant only what is now Estonia and Latvia. This was due partially to the historical development of Russia: in the 18th Century Lithuania had been part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth before this state was partitioned out of existence by Austria-Hungary, Prussia, Russia. To Russia, this placed Lithuania, like Poland, as part the empire’s western expansion into Europe than its expansion in the Baltic region. This is also shown by the empire’s internal organization. Estonia and Latvia were split up among three Russian Baltic provinces: the Courland Governorate (southern Latvia), the Livonian Governorate (northern Latvia and southern Estonia), and the Estonian Governorate (northern Estonia). Lithuania was split up in the various provinces of the Russian Western Borderlands (the Western Kray). Most of what is now Lithuania was in the Kovno Governorate of this kray.

Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania all achieved their independence from Soviet Russia in 1920. The Soviets soon included Lithuania and sometimes Finland in what they called the “Baltic region”. After World War II, the Soviet Union annexed the northern half of East Prussia from Germany as the Kaliningrad Province (Kaliningrad Oblast) into the Russian SFSR, and their “Baltic region” (*Pribaltika*) now meant Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Kaliningrad. The modern Russian Federation also uses “Baltic region” in this sense.

2.B Numbers and Measures

I use both metric units (km-kg-Celsius, etc.) and US customary units (miles-pounds-Fahrenheit, etc.). I often give both measures, such as “about 40 km (about 20 miles)”. In a paragraph that repeatedly uses a unit, like thousands of kilometers, I often only give the

conversion the first time, as subsequent mentions can be easily approximated from the first mention. However, the text for artillery-class weapons uses many measures. Since the Soviets used the metric system, I skip US customary units when that makes the text too cluttered. For approximate conversions:

- To convert **millimeters to inches**, multiply by 0.039.
- To convert **kilometers to miles**, multiply by 0.62.
- To convert **meters to feet**, multiply by 3.28.
- To convert **kilograms to pounds**, multiply by 2.2.

These conversion factors are approximate but are fine for the level of accuracy in this work.

I scale or approximate numbers as appropriate. For example, while 1,000 kilometers is about 621.37 miles, this is overly precise while “about 620 miles” conveys the right sense.

Sometimes, just “about 600 miles” is better, in instances when the base measure is obviously imprecise like “about 1,000 km”. I also use “ \approx ” to mean “about” or “approximately equal to”, e.g. 1,000 kilometers (\approx 620 miles). I use “ \sim ” to mean “roughly approximately to”. For example, 1,100 yards is 1005.84 meters. However, the range was not exactly 1,100.00 yards, so 1005.84 meters is far too precise, and \approx 1,006 meters normally would be better. However, the maximum range of the 4-inch Stokes mortar is given as at most 1,100 yards, but this is very like just a rounded off value, so in this case \sim 1,010 meters is best.

2.C Soviet Considerations

2.C.1 Russian

The Soviet Union, with well over 100 ethnic groups and languages, used Russian as its *lingua franca*. Since written Russian uses Cyrillic, some Russian words are transliterated into English. Where possible, I translate common words rather than transliterate them. For examples, the Soviet Union was named *Союз Советских Социалистических Республик*, which translates to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Transliterated, it is *Soyuz Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik*, but this less useful for English speakers than translation. Some terms, however, cannot be easily translated and are transliterated instead.

I follow the *Classic Europa* scheme of using the actual names of cities as spelled by their owning power, (transliterated if necessary). Thus, it's Moskva (*Москва*), not Moscow (its common name in English), *Moscou* (French), *Moskau* (German), *Mosca* (Italian), or *Moskwa* (Polish), for some examples.

For names of persons, I transliterate the name. *Михаил Николаевич Тухачевский* is Mikhail Nikolaevich Tukhachevskiy. Tukhachevskiy sometimes in other works is transliterated as Tukhachevsky or Tukhachevski, but I transliterate all the letters. I do not substitute common English personal names for personal Russian ones, so it is *Mikhail* (not Michael).

I use the translated names of Russian and Soviet entities but their transliterated (not translated) abbreviations. Thus the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (*Narodnyy Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del*) is abbreviated NKVD per Soviet usage and Russian abbreviation, not PCIA.

See the [Appendix on Russian](#) if you are interested in more details on this topic.

2.C.2 Dates

I use the Gregorian or "New Style" calendar for all dates, though the Russian Empire and the early Soviet state used the Julian or "Old Style" calendar. The Julian calendar did not track the year as accurately as the Gregorian and so by 1917 was 12–13 days ahead of the Gregorian. The Gregorian calendar was in widespread use in many parts of Europe and the Americas and thus in 1917 was the calendar of most of the world's major powers and advanced economies including Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and the USA. It thus made sense for a modernizing country to adopt it, and the Soviet government

adopted the Gregorian calendar in January 1918². If a Julian date is important, I mention it in parentheses after the Gregorian date.

In this work, the difference in calendars is mostly only evident in the names of the 1917 revolutions. The first revolution that toppled the Tsar started in March 1917, but this was late February in the Julian calendar and thus was called the February Revolution in Russia. The same thing happened again in November 1917, when the Bolsheviks took over. Their revolution started in late October in the Julian calendar and thus was called the October Revolution (eventually glorified as the “Great October Socialist Revolution”). Since the Soviets liked to name things after the revolution, “October Revolution” will crop up here and there. Just keep in mind it’s the November 1917 revolution.

2.D Sources and Speculation

For much of the existence of the USSR, its leadership was secretive, immensely distrustful of most foreign countries, and eager to propagandize about real and imagined accomplishments of their socialist system. They were determined to hide and deny many failures, and, under Stalin, how brutally they treated their own people, including executing innocent people, torturing them, and imprisoning them in the GULag.

All this means Soviet-era histories of the Great Patriotic War were incomplete and heavily censored to hide military failures as much as possible and to exaggerate their accomplishments. For example, in the autumn of 1942, the Soviets planned two major offensives, Operation Mars to defeat the German forces in front of Moskva and Operation Uranus to defeat the Axis forces in the Stalingrad area. Operation Mars was probably the main offensive, as it was launched with more forces and resources than Operation Uranus. Mars, however, failed in its objectives, while Uranus succeeded beyond expectation. For decades after the war, Soviet histories downplayed or ignored Mars and implied Uranus was their main if not sole offensive. Hints of the actual situation sometimes appeared in the works. In this guidebook, we will encounter a bland Soviet-based statement that the rocket artillery had not been correctly deployed for the strategic situation in November 1942. What this actually means is that more rocket artillery units were allocated to Mars than to Uranus, and some were transferred south once Mars was failing and Uranus succeeding.

² The anti-religion Soviets called the calendar the “Western European” calendar, rather than the “Gregorian” calendar, since the Gregorian name refers to Roman Catholic Pope Gregorius (“Gregory”) XIII.

Another aspect is that Soviet historical works are often ambiguous about what actually occurred. In this guidebook, we will encounter many examples of the Soviet high command (the State Defense Committee, with Stalin at its head) ordering various things to be done by certain dates. (This in particular crops up with the formation of rocket artillery units.) The works will then not cover what actually happened, leaving the impression that the orders were met in full on the specified dates. However, it is possible that the orders were changed or were not met in full. For example, in 1944 13 brigades of BM-31-12 launch vehicles were ordered to be created by the end of 1944. But, were they? The work covering this order does not specifically say so. Other sources strongly suggest that the Soviets were still forming some of these brigades in early 1945.

For another example, on 28 January 1943 the State Defense Committee issued Decree № 2791ss, ordering the formation of 10 tank armies, each with two tank corps and one mechanized corps. The rocket artillery was ordered to form 10 rocket artillery regiments (one for each army) and 30 rocket artillery battalions (one for each corps). However, the Soviets never formed 10 tank armies during the war; the most they had was six. Were all the rocket artillery regiments and battalions actually formed, with the excess used for other purposes? Were some canceled? My source covering this decree simply does not cover what actually happened.

There are number of topics that are simply uncertain. If the information exists, I've found no trustworthy source on it. Many works on the wartime USSR tell a story of seeming facts that actually are not certain. I try hard to avoid this. If something is uncertain, I use phrases like "may have" or "might have" to indicate uncertainty, not "did" or "was". Often, different sources will have contradictory accounts. For example, sources on the Soviet "spade-mortar" (the 37-mm Mortar M1939 or VM-37), which could be configured as an entrenching tool and as an infantry-support mortar, fall into two completely contradictory camps about when the mortar was designed and produced. Neither camp even acknowledges the existence of the other or that there is any controversy about their telling of the spade-mortar story!

I've found it inevitable to speculation on topics that are uncertain, ambiguous, or contradictory. I've tried to clearly indicate this as speculation or with "perhaps". Over time, more and more information about the wartime USSR has become available. For topics I had earlier speculated on, I've found that some were correct but that some were completely wrong. Keep this in mind for my remaining speculations!

2.E And More!

This guidebook occasionally mentions military units like divisions and regiments or naval warships like cruisers and destroyers. Which was more powerful, a cruiser or destroyer, a battalion or a brigade? See the [appendix](#) for quick guide.

I use a mix of American, British, and other writing styles. You probably won't notice most, except maybe the fact that I don't tuck punctuation inside quotes unless the actual quotation contains that punctuation.

3 The Russian Empire in Turmoil

See the appendix for a [brief map history of Kievan Rus and Russia to 1895](#).

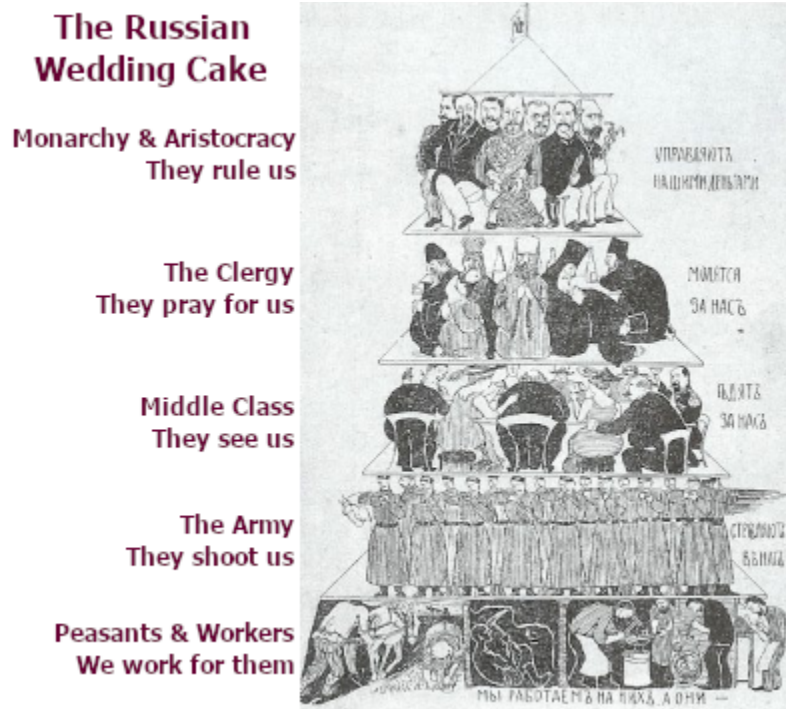
The Soviet Union was born in war and violence out of the ruins of the Russian Empire, the realm ruled by the Tsars for centuries.



The southern half of Sakhalin Island was lost to Japan as a result of Russian defeat in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905). Bukhara and Khiva officially were protectorates of Russia, supposedly independent states with Russia in charge of foreign affairs and defense. In reality, the protectorates

were essentially puppet states with the local Muslim rulers left in place as long as they did not cause trouble. **Tuva** was also a protectorate³.

The Soviet Union was made possible by the mistakes of the Russian Empire. Russia had become the world's large country and one of the worlds' strongest military powers after the defeat of Napoleon's French Empire in 1812–1815. However, the empire was an absolute monarchy under its tsars⁴ with no constitution, no guaranteed civil rights, and no elected legislature. The Russian Empire had no legislature, and the Tsar could simply decree into law anything he wanted⁵. Some tsars were somewhat progressive, such as Aleksandr II, who freed the Russian serfs in the 1860s, but many were extremely conservative and were opposed to almost any change or reform.



A Russian satire on the injustice of Russian social organization

Most of the common people in Russia were poor and lived in wretched circumstances. The vast majority were farmers (called peasants), and many were in generational debt due to

- 3 Tuva had been part of the Chinese province of Outer Mongolia but had a Russian minority, from settlers moving there in the 19th Century. China had a revolution in 1911, causing most of Outer Mongolia to become independent. In 1912, Russian troops entered Tuva on the pretext of protecting Russian settlers. Tuva supposedly was then an independent republic until April 1914 when the region officially became a protectorate of Russia.
- 4 Since the reign of Pyotr I ("Peter the Great") in the 1700s, the ruler of Russia was officially the Emperor (*Imperator*) or Empress (*Imperatritsa*). However, the traditional Russian words Tsar and Tsarina, also meaning emperor and empress, were commonly used instead of *imperator* and *imperatritsa*, both in Russia and elsewhere.
- 5 In the 19th Century, the Russian Empire had a Committee of Ministers, consisting of the principal government officers, but this body was completely advisory with no power to check the Tsar.

how the serfs were liberated. Later in the 19th Century, there was a small but growing industrial sector, with poorly-paid laborers (called the proletariat by Marxists) who worked and lived in Dickensian squalor. Until 1906, all political parties and labor unions were banned in the Russian Empire, so there was no way for the common people to organize and seek better treatment.

Sidetrip: Generational Debt of the Peasants

The freeing of the serfs who farmed landowners' estates in the 1860s came with a heavy burden for these peasants: a heavy debt. Landowners, not serfs, owned the land the serfs farmed, and the freed serfs needed to purchase land from their former masters. Since these peasants were impoverished, a system was devised whereby the Russian state in effect loaned most of the purchase money to the peasants, who then paid the state back for 49 years. The terms were structured so that the peasants would end up paying 294% of the loan amount over the 49 years⁶). This foisted an intergenerational debt of **redemption payments** on peasant families. (Peasants could buy out their loans and receive their land early, becoming "peasant-owners", but few peasants could afford to do this. Peasants who refused to enter the system received a free, tiny plot of land called the "pauper's allotment".)

The land allocation for the peasants deliberately favored the landowners, who retained a considerable portion of their estates. The landowners often kept the best farmland for themselves. They also kept almost all of the other land of the estate, like forests, even when that had been part of the common land available to everyone on the estate. Most freed serfs were left without access to forests and thus had to pay fees to obtain firewood, the fuel the peasants used by far the most for heating, cooking, and agriculture use⁷.

Perhaps worse of all, the peasants did not gain ownership of the land until the debt was repaid. Instead, the land was held collectively by the **mir**, the peasant village. A peasant family in a mir had the right to farm a share of the land but

6 The peasant each year had to pay 6% of the original loan amount, so over 49 years this amounted to 294% of the loan amount. In modern terms, this was the equivalent of a long-term loan at a 5.6% interest rate. This sort of rate was not an excessive rate for long-term loans of that time, but it was unfair since most peasants had little choice but to accept it, as the other options were worse, such as receiving a tiny plot of land for free. Had the Russian government been more concerned about the welfare of the peasants, loans at no or minimal interest would have been far more helpful and would have helped the state itself by reducing peasant unrest. Indeed, earlier proposals on freeing the serfs had been much more beneficial to them, but the landowners successfully opposed these proposals.

7 Peat was also used as a fuel, but the landowners kept the peatlands, too.

did not even have the right to farm the same piece of land from year to year. The serfs thus escaped legal bondage to the landowner only to become economically bound to the mir.

The mir was part of a larger rural system that was run for the benefit of the landowners and Russian government (which collected in-kind agricultural taxes), at the expense of the peasants. This was part of the reason Russian peasants were often restive. After the abortive revolution of 1905, agricultural reforms finally halved redemption payments in 1906 and abolished them in 1907, just a few years before they would have ended anyway.

It should be noted that not all peasants in 19th Century Russia had formerly been serfs. Unlike in western and central Europe, where the serfs were bound to the land but not owned by the landowners, serfs in Russia were more like slaves and were owned by the landowners. Russia also had very many “state peasants”, who were more like European serfs in that they were bound to the land, with the land (not the state peasants) being owned by the Russian state. State peasants were freed in a different emancipation in the 1860s and gained the right to own the land they farmed, although they were in a different system of redemption payments. This was supposed to last 49.5 years but also was abolished in 1907.

Finally, 19th Century Russia had a relatively small number of free peasants, mostly in places like the far north where agriculture was quite difficult. They were not bound to the land or owned by any landowners, and they did not have to make redemption payments.

Suppression of political expression led to many illegal parties advocating change. Some wanted the tsars to institute substantive reform, others advocated the peaceful replacement of the monarchy with a republic, and yet others sought violent revolution. Populists, republicans, anarchists, all sorts of socialists, and other groups were all active. Some movements resorted to terrorism, often coupled with common criminal activity to fund themselves. Conspiracies and attempts to assassinate the Tsar were frequent, although only one attempt in the 19th Century actually succeeded. Almost ironically, it was the partially-reformist Aleksandr II who was killed by members of the People’s Will (*Narodnaya Volya*). As political violence and domestic terrorism increased, the Tsarist government responded with increasingly repressive measures, including creating the Okhrana, a secret police that tried to destroy these movements.

In this matrix of repression and occasional violence, the **Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party** (**RSDRP**, for **Rossiyskaya Sotsial-Demokraticheskaya Rabochaya Partiya**), was born in 1898. It was an attempt to unite the various Marxist movements throughout the Russian Empire. They were believers in Marx's view of history as the progression of society through various stages.

Spotlight: Marxist Stages of Historical Development

Marxism was a political, social, and economic theory developed in the 19th Century by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, first made famous as **communism** by their 1848 pamphlet, *The Communist Manifesto*. Human societies, according to Marxism, progress through a series of stages, with each stage characterized by its **primary mode of production** and its **division of labor**. The following descriptions cover orthodox Marxist thought of the 19th Century and early 20th Century, which influenced the RSDRP.

Each stage of development saw greater production than the previous stage. This was a good feature, but for the earlier stages, the resulting abundance was captured by an elite, not shared among the people at large. **Property** in Marxism meant the "tools of production" and included land as well as buildings and machines. (Property in Marxism was not about petty personal property like clothing and items needed for everyday existence.) Marxists branded private ownership of property as a form of theft, as the oppressing or ruling classes had wrongly taken control of property and were benefiting from it by unfairly exploiting the labor of the oppressed classes.

- 1 **Tribalism** ("Savagery" in Marx's writings, also called **Primitive Communism**) Society depends on tribes and kinship, with **no social classes**. Things are in a state of primitive communism, with no property, money, or formal government. The mode of production is hunting (by men) and gathering (by women). People live in a subsistence economy where there was no agricultural surplus able to be exploited by one group at the expense of another.
- 2 **Slave Societies** ("**Ancient Mode of Production**") The rise of pastoralism and agriculture creates a surplus that allowed states to form, giving rise to property and money. The people are divided into classes, with **citizens** (sometimes called slave owners) and **slaves**. The citizens exploit the slaves, who are forced to produce the

- 3 **Feudalism** agricultural surplus for the benefit of the citizens. Society organizes itself into an **aristocracy**, who own the land, and **serfs**, who are peasants bound to the land. The aristocracy exploits the serfs, who are forced to produce the agricultural surplus for the benefit of the aristocracy. Towns and cities also exist, with merchants and artisans, who make simple commodities. Artisans and merchants are the **bourgeoisie**, a social class between the aristocracy and the peasants. Religion exists to reinforce the social order, justifying the existence of the aristocracy on top and pacifying the serfs to be content with their lot.
- 4 **Capitalism** As the bourgeoisie grows in wealth and size, feudalism gives way to capitalism. Craft production gives way to manufacturing. The peasants are freed from serfdom and progressively became wage laborers working in manufacturing: the **proletariat**. The **bourgeoisie owns the means production property** and seeks profits from manufacturing. They exploit the proletariat, who do not earn a fair return for their labor. At this stage, there was also the **petty bourgeoisie** (or “petite bourgeoisie” based on French influence), between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Petty bourgeoisie could be shopkeepers, some self-employed artisans, and others of the like. The Bolsheviks considered the Russian kulaks, more-prosperous peasants who often owned their own land and hired other peasants as workers, as petty bourgeois (or rural bourgeois, an equivalent term). However, they also would at times denounce as kulaks any peasants who had “too much” land or livestock. This particularly applied to the “middle peasants” who were not impoverished like most peasants (the “poor peasants” in early Soviet terminology) but were not exploiters of other peasants’ labor. Problem with the middle peasants

for the Soviets is that many were opposed to having their land socialized. According to Lenin, “the middle peasant cannot immediately accept socialism, because he clings firmly to what he is accustomed to”⁸.

Religion (“the opiate of the masses”) continues to reinforce the social order, pacifying the proletariat. Class struggle (also called class conflict and **class warfare**) exists between the exploited classes and the exploiter classes. Class struggle could mean labor strikes, lockouts by management, or even violence, but it could also mean non-violent low-level resistance by the workers to authority or even their support of socialist political parties. (The Bolsheviks often promoted violent class warfare and once in power would often incite violent class warfare against groups they called class enemies.)

As capitalism grows, its contradictions create the conditions for its own destruction. The bourgeoisie experience a falling rate of profit, leading to expansion of workplaces that further exploit the proletariat. The proletariat class swells in size and can organize and take action against the exploiters.

- 5 **Socialism** (The **“Lower Stage of Communism”**) The class struggle between the proletariat and bourgeoisie results in a **proletarian revolution**. The bourgeoisie is overthrown and the revolutionaries establish a **dictatorship of the proletariat**, common ownership of the means of production, and fair distribution of the products of labor. In the early period following the revolution, vestiges of capitalism remain, so this is the lower stage of communism. Classes or the remnants of them fade and eventually disappear. (The former bourgeoisie at first resent their loss of power and ill-gotten wealth but become reconciled by the fairness of the new system.)

8 V. I. Lenin on middle peasants in March 1919; <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1919/mar/x07.htm>.

Exactly what this early stage of communism meant was not well defined by Marx, allowing for divergent views among Marxists. Some, including the Bolsheviks, argued that this stage was **socialism**, where the state owned the means of production, distributed its products, and possibly continued to use money. Other Marxists argued that this stage was communal ownership without money but with some residual capitalist elements.

(Calling the early stage of communism as “socialism” was complicated, since the idea of socialism predated Marxism and meant many different things to different people and groups. Many movements espoused a wide variety of goals all called socialist. Some systems did not correspond to Marxist economic thinking and were not concerned about placing the means of production under state ownership. Even the classical Marxism of Marx and Engels quickly splintered into a variety of different Marxist systems.)

- 6 **Communism** (The “**Higher Stage of Communism**”) After all elements of capitalism are shed, society becomes fully communist, a free association of people with communal ownership of the means of production. Production is now so abundant that an age of plenty occurs, with no need of money or even barter, as there would be enough for everyone. Marx in 1875 summarized this condition as “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs”. **States, money, property, social classes, and religion no longer exist.**

In addition to these stages, Marx later also defined an “**Asiatic mode of production**” that he thought characterized Asian societies better than the ancient mode of production (slave societies) or feudalism. This concept was based on a common (at the time) European view that many Asian societies were dominated by despotism and stagnation. The Asiatic mode featured a powerful central state, communal ownership of land, artisans making crafts, and a social-religious order that greatly resisted change. In this mode, the state confiscates the economic

surplus from the countryside by tribute or military force. The surplus benefits the ruling elite, but the state also finances public works, particularly irrigation systems⁹, that benefit many common people.

The Asiatic mode of production proved controversial as a distinct mode from feudalism, and Marx later simply ceased writing about it. However, this idea continued to influence some Marxists, particularly Lenin and some other Bolsheviks. Lenin saw the Russian Empire as a mixture of three elements: feudalism, the Asiatic mode of production, and capitalism, and he often wrote that Russia had an “Asiatic political system”. The Asiatic mode of production likely attracted Lenin since it contributed to his idea that the peasants could support the proletarian revolution. (Conventional Marxists believed the peasants would oppose the revolution. Since the peasantry was by far the largest segment of the Russian population, this in turn implied the revolution could not succeed in Russia.) Lenin proclaimed that the Bolsheviks wanted “the people, i.e., the proletariat and the peasantry, to settle accounts with the monarchy and the aristocracy in the ‘plebeian way,’ ruthlessly destroying the enemies of liberty, crushing their resistance by force, making no concessions whatever to the accursed heritage of serfdom, of Asiatic barbarism and human degradation”.

To Marxists it was historically inevitable that the workers in capitalist societies would eventually revolt and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. The proletarian revolution would abolish property, take control of industry and the economy, collectivize agriculture, and abolish religion, all for the common good. Marxism thus was a utopian ideology that appealed to some intellectuals, some workers, and others who believed capitalist societies were too unjust to too many people. However, Marxism’s radical goals also meant that a wide range of people were against it. Some opposed it out of self interest, such as the wealthy, the upper clergy, and the owners of businesses, factories, and land. Others believed Marxism was outright immoral, given its focus on revolution and confiscation of property. Still others, like some social democrats, anarchists, rural populists, and philanthropists, like aspects of Marxism but believed there were better ways to reform society.

9 Later ideas on “oriental despotism” would lead to a mid-20th Century concept of *water empires* or *hydraulic civilizations* in which the centralized state maintains control by its large-scale provision of irrigation and flood control works. This theory was first put forth by Karl Wittfogel, who was a former Marxist. Wittfogel’s formulation had many similarities to Marx’s Asiatic mode of production: The need to create and maintain irrigation systems necessitated a despotic bureaucratic state that would be stable to the point of stagnation. Wittfogel maintained elements of his hydraulic empire theory applied to the Soviet Union and explained its despotism.

Russia posed a problem for the Marxist view of historical development, as it only in the early stages of capitalism and still had many aspects of feudalism (as well as the Asiatic mode of production, for those who believed in that). This meant Marxists were greatly divided on whether the Russian Empire was ready for a proletarian revolution. This divergence of opinion would soon fragment the RSDRP.

4 Early 20th Century Russia: Revolt and Reform



Arm.: Armenia; Bel.: Belarusian; Ch.: Chuvash; Est.: Estonian; Geor.: Georgian; Ger.: German; Latv.: Latvian; Lith.: Lithuanian; Mol.: M&R: Moldovan and Romanian; Mord.: Mordovian; Rus.: Russian; Sam.: Samogitian; Ukr.: Ukrainian

The Russian Empire was not only the largest country in the world, its population was very diverse, with very many ethnic groups speaking different languages and many religions. The Russian census of 1897 recorded over 100 different languages and over a dozen religions. The census covered the Russian Empire but not the Grand Principality of Finland, a semi-autonomous part of the empire. Although the census officials tried to be consistent,

the census data varied in quality, with Central Asia in particular believed to have been poorly counted.

Top 20 Home Languages of the Russian Empire in 1897

Terms in quotes are supposedly those used in the 1897 census¹⁰. The **Percentage** column lists the percent of the total population that listed the language as their native language. Be aware that “native language” was not the same as ethnic identity, although they were often closely related. Many people listed “Great Russian” as their native language who would not be considered to be ethnic Russians or ethnic Slavs. This included, for example, many urban Jews.

The census asked people what their home language (“native language”) was, but census officials grouped answers to fit preconceived language categories. For example, some dialects of the Kyrgyz and Kazakh languages were grouped together. This is covered more in the **Notes** column.

(The **Language Group** column was not part of the census.)

Had the Grand Principality of Finland been included in the census, Finnish would have been in the top 10 of “native languages” and Swedish in the top 20.

The number of Turkic and “Sartian” speakers was likely undercounted, due to problems with the census in Central Asia.

Language	Percentage	Language Group	Notes
“Great Russian” (Russian)	44.31	East Slavic	Russian officials counted three kinds of “Russian” languages: Great Russian (Russian), Little Russian (Ukrainian), and White Russian (Belarusian). This reflects Imperial thinking that their corresponding ethnic groups formed the ethnic core of the empire. These three languages were in the East Slavic group. Great Russian imperialists and nationalists often preferred to claim that Ukrainian and Belarusian were just dialects of Russians. Language was not always a guide to ethnic identity. Some people who considered themselves Ukrainians and Belarusians spoke Russian as their home language, not Ukrainian or Belarusian. These three groups shared a number of cultural elements including naming conventions ¹¹ and mostly were Eastern Orthodox Christians of the Russian Orthodox Church.
“Little Russian”	17.81	East Slavic	Ukrainians had some distinctive cultural and

10 Per <http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/census.php?cy=0> (in Russian) and associated links.

11 The naming convention was First Name - Patronymic - Family Name (aka Surname), such as Dmitri Ivanovich Sokolov or Elena Ivanovna Sokolova. Note that the patronymic is based on the father’s first name. Ivanovich is thus “son of Ivan” and Ivanovna “daughter of Ivan”. Other cultures in region beside the East Slavs also used this naming convention.

(Ukrainian)			<p>traditional differences from the Russians, including a history in which most of Ukraine was outside of Russian control for centuries. Ukrainian nationalism arose in the 19th Century among some Ukrainians. This was threatening enough that the Russian state took measure to suppress its rise, including banning the use of Ukrainian in most printed works, in religion, and in theatrical productions.</p>
Polish	6.31	West Slavic	<p>The Poles were culturally, religiously, and linguistically different than the East Slavic groups. They were much more part of a central European tradition, and they were mostly Roman Catholic, not Orthodox.</p> <p>While Polish was a Slavic language, it was a West Slavic one with considerable differences from Russian.</p> <p>The Russian government promoted an ideal of a domestic and international Slavic brotherhood, with the Great Russians as the head of the family. Many Poles ignored or rejected this. In turn, the Russian government tried to russify its Poles by restricting the use of Polish (in favor of Russian) in education and official matters.</p>
“Belorussian” (Belarusian)	4.68	East Slavic	<p>Belarusian nationalism developed in the 19th Century, but to a lesser extent than did Ukrainian nationalism. Ethnic identity remained particularly weak in the countryside. In the 1920s, for example, when the western portion of Belarusian territory was part of Poland, most rural Belarusians claimed to be “Christian” when asked about their identity.</p>
“Jewish” (Yiddish)	4.03	(see notes)	<p>Jews lived scattered across western region of the empire (the Jewish Pale of Settlement) in rural settlements, towns, and cities. Most Jews had been restricted to the Pale, but some were entitled to live outside the Pale (and others ignored the law and left the Pale). Major Russian cities, particularly Sankt-Peterburg and Moskva, had Jewish minorities.</p> <p>The Russian census listed “Jewish” (<i>Evreyskiy</i>) as a home language. This actually was Yiddish, a language derived from a German dialect containing many words from Hebrew and other languages.</p>

Hebrew was the Jewish holy language and was used in religion but not in everyday life.

Not all Jews spoke Yiddish as their home language. In the census, a number of Jews, likely almost all city dwellers, listed Russian as their native language. For example, the census recorded 5,063,156 people who spoke “Jewish” (*Evreyskiy*), which was less than the 5,215,805 people who identified as Jews (*Iudei*) for religion.

There were also a number of Jewish communities that were considered to be different ethnic groups than “Jewish”. These communities were located in lands Russia conquered from Islamic states, and they used very different languages than Yiddish. For example, the Mountain Jews (*Gorskie Evrei*) lived in the Caucasus spoke Judeo-Tat, a dialect of Persian. Russian officials considered most Kyrgyz and Kazakh dialects to be variations of a single language which they tabulated as Kirgiz-Kaysak. Kyrgyz and Kazakh are mutually intelligibility to a good degree, so this classification was not unreasonable. Kyrgyz and Kazakh typically now are considered separate to be languages.

Tatar was not a single language but a collection of Turkic languages, such as Crimean Tatar, Siberian Tatar, and Volga Tatar. This was not just for convenience, as many of these people told the census officials they spoke “Tatar” without being more specific.

The 1897 census also included Azerbaijani as “Tatar”.

18th Century Russian Empress Ekaterina II invited peoples of Europe to settle in newly-conquered Russian lands. The Germans were the only group that responded in significant numbers. Germans lived scattered across Georgia, Ukraine, and the Volga region.



Moldovan and Romanian	0.89 Eastern Romance	Moldovan (“Moldavian” to the Russians) is most often considered to be a major dialect of Romanian. (Even the constitution and laws of present-day Moldova say so.) The Russians considered them to be two different, albeit highly related, languages.
Mordovian	0.81 Uralic	Mordovian was the traditional name of two related (but mostly mutually unintelligible) languages, Erzya and Moksha. They diverged from a common ancestor about 1,500 years ago but for historical reasons Russians and other outsiders considered them to be dialects of a “Mordovian” language.
Estonian “Sartian”	0.8 Finnic 0.77 (see notes)	“Sartian” (<i>Sartskoe</i>) did not even exist as an actual language. “Sarts” was a term for people living in settlements in the Fergana Valley of Central Asia, as opposed to Central Asian peoples who lived nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyles. The Sarts did not comprise an ethnic group but instead were a mix of groups, some of which spoke Tajik (a Persian language) and others any one of a number of Turkic languages.
Chuvash	0.67 Turkic	
Georgian	0.66 Kartvelian	
Uzbek	0.58 Turkic	
Samogitian	0.36 Baltic	Russian officials considered Samogitian to be a separate language from Lithuanian, although it is often considered a dialect of Lithuanian.

Top 10 Religions of the Russian Empire in 1897

*Note: Terms in quotes are supposedly those used in the 1897 census¹². The **Percentage** column lists the percent of the total population that listed the religion as their religion.*

*(The **Type** column was not part of the census.)*

Had the Grand Principality of Finland been included in the census, Lutheran would have had a slightly higher percentage (and others slightly lower).

The number of Muslims was likely undercounted, due to problems with the census in Central Asia.

Religion	Percentage	Type	Notes
“Orthodox and Fellow Believers” (Eastern Orthodox)	69.34	Christianity	The Russian Orthodox Church was the main branch of Eastern Orthodoxy in the Russian Empire. In the 17th Century, the Russian Orthodox Church introduced a number of reforms, which some people

¹² Per <http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/census.php?cy=0> (in Russia) and associated links.

		refused to accept, becoming the “Old Believers”. Old Believers were persecuted by the state but over time those who accepted the authority of the Russian Orthodox Church (while continuing to use the old rituals) were accepted as “fellow believers”. The rest were counted as “Old Believers and Deviants from Orthodoxy”.
Muslims	11.07 Muslim	The census did not distinguish between the various Muslim branches, but the vast majority of Muslims in the empire must have been Sunni, since that was the historical pattern.
Roman Catholics	9.13 Christianity	The great majority of Poles and Lithuanians in the Russian Empire were Roman Catholic.
Jews	4.15 Jewish	According to the census, 4.03% of the population was spoke “Jewish” (Yiddish), while 4.15% practiced the Jewish religion. The reason for this is that Jewish communities in lands Russia conquered from Islamic states used different languages than Yiddish. For example, the Mountain Jews (<i>Gorskie Evrei</i>) lived in the Caucasus spoke Judeo-Tat, a dialect of Persian.
Lutherans	2.84 Christianity	Many Lutherans in the Russian Empire derived from German Protestants who settled there starting in the 18th Century. Other Lutherans included many inhabitants of the Baltic region (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania). The Grand Principality of Finland was mostly Lutheran, but this region was not included in the census.
“Old Believers and Deviants from Orthodoxy”	1.75 Christianity	Old Believers originated from people who rejected reforms of the Russian Orthodox Church in the 17th Century. The Russian state persecuted them for their beliefs. However, Old Believers who accepted the authority of the Russian Orthodox Church (while continuing to use the old rituals) were accepted as “fellow believers”. Old Believers who rejected the authority of the Russian Orthodox Church were counted as “Old Believers and Deviants from Orthodoxy”. It was only in 1905, when the Russian Empire adopted religious liberty, that the state ceased to persecute Old Believers. I suspect the census also counted as “deviants” believers in the Eastern-rite (aka “uniate”) churches

"Armenian-Gregorians" (Armenian Apostolics)	0.94 Christianity	<p>of Roman Catholicism. These churches originated from Eastern Orthodoxy but later recognized the Pope as the head of the church while keeping their Eastern Orthodox rituals and traditions. The Russian Empire persecuted these churches until 1905. If this presumption is correct, this category did not, however, include the Armenian Apostolics Church (see "Armenian-Gregorians" below).</p> <p>Many Armenians belonged to the Armenian Apostolic Church. This church was part of Oriental Orthodoxy and was a separate religious tradition from Eastern Orthodoxy. This meant Russian officials did not consider the Armenian Apostolics as "deviants" from Eastern Orthodoxy, although some works claim Russian officials were at times reluctant to grant this distinction.</p>
Buddhists	0.34 Buddhism	<p>Armenian Apostolics were called "Armenian-Gregorians", as Gregory the Illuminator was the patron saint of the Armenian Apostolic Church.</p> <p>Buddhists in the Russian Empire were mainly concentrated into two regions: in the regions of southern Siberia near Mongolia and in Kalmyk area of the North Caucasus region of European Russia.</p>
"Reformists" (Calvinists)	0.07 Christianity	<p>Calvinists were followers of the Reformed Tradition of Protestant Christianity, hence the census name "Reformists". Most Calvinists in the Russian Empire derived from German Protestants who settled there starting in the 18th Century.</p>
Mennonites	0.05 Christianity	<p>Flemish and Frisian Mennonites moved to the Vistula River delta region of Poland where their languages merged with the German dialect spoken in the region. This area became part of Prussia, and many Mennonites then emigrated to Russia in the 18th Century, establishing a Mennonite presence there.</p>
Armenian Catholics	0.03 Christianity	<p>The Armenian Catholic Church was an Eastern-rite member of Roman Catholicism. The Russian considered them "the lost progeny of that ancient church"¹³ and did not count them in another</p>

13 Stephen Riegg; "Divine Diplomacy: The Armenian Church and the Russian State, 1825-55" (draft); 2015; <https://cseees.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/282/2015/07/Carolina-Seminar.pdf>.



Painting depicting Lenin speaking at the Second Congress of the RSDRP, 1903

Like all political parties in the Russian Empire at this time, the RSDRP was illegal under Russian law and could only meet in secret in Russia. The first congress met in Russia but saw many of its delegates arrested soon afterwards. To make it easier to convene, the second congress met outside Russia. It started in Belgium, but Belgian police forced the delegates to leave the country, likely due to Russian diplomatic pressure. The congress reconvened in Britain.

The Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party (RSDRP) was an illegal political party from its very formation, since at the time all political parties were banned in the autocratic Russian Empire. It was formed in secret in 1898 in a clandestine congress of Russian pro-socialist groups in Minsk, a Russian Empire city (now the capital of Belarus). Soon after the meeting, the Okhrana, Russia's secret police force, arrested five of the nine delegates who attended the meeting. The second congress in 1903, held outside of Russia for the security of the delegates, put the RSDRP on a firmer organizational basis but also saw the creation of what would become an irreconcilable schism in the party.

The RSDRP operated in Russia as an underground party. The Okhrana monitored and infiltrated the RSDRP, like it did with all other political parties and movements, even peaceful ones advocating nonviolent reform. The RSDRP advocated revolution and at first condoned violence and terrorism to achieve its goals. The Okhrana arrested many RSDRP

members. Some were imprisoned or sent into internal exile to places like Siberia while others were turned into double agents to spy on the party. The Okhrana was also skilled at inserting its own operatives as *agents provocateurs* into the party. They would encourage loyal party members to commit crimes and thereby get arrested. Some Okhrana agents, however, would find Marxism attractive and become double agents working for the party against the state.

Spotlight: Governing the Party, Part 1: The RSDRP

The **party congress** was the highest governing authority for the RSDRP. These congresses met occasionally for a few days or few weeks, never more than once per year and often just once every few years. Delegates to a congress were selected by the various organizations that wanted to advance socialism in Russia, not just from the RSDRP but at times including the Jewish Bund, the Finnish Labor Party, and other groups. Once, the Social Democratic Labor Party of Bulgaria participated, even though Bulgaria was not part of the Russian Empire. Other socialist groups, such as those in Austria-Hungary, Germany, and France, did not participate in RSDRP congresses. However, many socialist and labor parties and movements from around the world cooperated together in the **Second International** (also called the Socialist International)¹⁴. The Second International proclaimed 1 May as the International Workers' Day ("May Day"). RSDRP congresses came to have a two-tier system of delegates, those with full voting powers and others who could participate in the discussions but could not vote on decisions (or at times could cast non-binding advisory votes). Decisions made at a congress became RSDRP rules and policies, which party members were supposed to follow. This did not always happen.

The RSDRP needed some way to administer party issues and make decisions between congresses. This was the role of the **Central Committee**. Each party congress would elect members to the Central Committee. Similar to party delegates, the Central Committee had a two-tier system of full members and non-voting candidate members. A subsequent congress could change or negate Central Committee decisions.

¹⁴ Participating parties and movements came from Europe, the USA, Japan, Australia, South America, and India (then under British control). Africa, most of Asia, and most of Latin America were poorly represented in the Second International, partly due to colonialism and partly due to lack of economic development that would give rise to socialist and labor organizations.

RSDRP party congresses set the example that the RSDRP's successors and other parties would follow, at least in theory. This included the Soviet Communist Party as well as other communist parties in existence to this day. However, these communist parties perverted to the system once they came to be controlled by oligarchies or dictators. Party congresses in these system became rubber stamp bodies for the oligarchs and autocrats.

Although the RSDRP brought together many Russian Marxist groups, it failed to unite them. The party was riven by factions over the best ways to achieve Marxist goals, especially the proletarian revolution. Russia in the early 20th Century posed a problem for Marxism, as it was only in the early stages of capitalism and still had many features of what the Marxists called feudalism. The Russian economy was primarily agricultural, having a relatively small industrial sector compared to advanced capitalist countries of the same time. This meant the workers (the proletariat) were only a small segment of Russia's population, about 2–3% circa 1900). The farmers (the peasants) were the great majority of the population (on the order of 80% or so). In conventional Marxist thought, the peasants would want to own their land¹⁵, so they would ally with the bourgeoisie and aristocracy. By sheer weight of numbers, this meant defeat for the proletariat revolution. One RSDRP faction, the Mensheviks, believed that Russia would have to transition to full capitalism. Industrialization would then turn most of the reactionary peasantry into revolutionary proletarians. The Mensheviks thus mostly advocated a gradual evolution of Russia into socialism, mostly through peaceful democratic means by a broad-based RSDRP party working with other groups with similar goals.

The Bolsheviks were another important, albeit smaller faction. They believed it was possible for Russia to skip full capitalism, transitioning directly to socialism via violent revolution. They did believe that the small Russian proletariat could not win a revolution on their own but would succeed under the leadership of a small party of highly-motivated elite revolutionaries. These revolutionaries of course would be the Bolsheviks, the self-proclaimed **vanguard of the proletariat**. The problem represented by the peasantry was dismissed by The Bolsheviks also believed they could co-opt the peasantry to their side, which in their thinking turned the peasants from an obstacle to the revolution into a force that would help ensure the success of the revolution in Russia.

¹⁵ Marxism in the middle of 19th Century had hopes the Russian peasantry might join the proletarian revolution, since the land they farmed was held in communes rather than privately. By the 20th Century, Marxists believed the communes were in decay and the Russian peasants would oppose the revolution.

Sidetrip: What's in a Name: Bolshevik and Menshevik

Bolshevik in Russian means majority while *menshevik* means minority. The names of these factions originated at an RSDRP party congress during a meeting where the faction that became the Bolsheviks were in the majority in a vote.

Paradoxically, for the overall congress and for many years afterward, the Bolsheviks were the much smaller faction of the RSDRP and the Mensheviks were the larger faction.

The Bolsheviks and Mensheviks were not the only RSDRP factions. There were several others, some quite important at times. There were also RSDRP members who ended up outside the factions, at least for a while. The most important of these was Lev Trotskiy, a skilled Marxist ideologist and revolutionary activist. As the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks factions formed in 1903, Trotskiy disagreed with Lenin and sided with the Mensheviks, only to then split with the Mensheviks over policy issues in 1904. He would rejoin an internationalist RSDRP faction in 1917 and then move on to bigger things, as we shall see.

The Bolshevik faction constantly clashed with the Mensheviks and other RSDRP factions. Vladimir Lenin, the leader of the Bolsheviks, did not like the constant squabbling between factions and advocated **democratic centralism** as a solution. In essence, while all party members had the right to their own views, once a decision was reached everyone had to support it. This was controversial, since to many RSDRP members democratic centralism seemed autocratic like the Tsarist state and not democratic. The underground nature of the party meant that decisions could be made by a small group of party leaders: a simple majority on the Central Committee. Democratic centralism would thus allow an inner group to enact policies that the entire party would be expected to obey. This likely was a major attraction of democratic centralism to Lenin: if the Bolsheviks managed to gain control of the Central Committee, Lenin could foist the Bolshevik program on the entire party even if the majority of party members were against it. The danger that a different group could gain control and force policies on the Bolsheviks was minimal, since the Bolsheviks were already willing to ignore party policy if it did not suit them.

From 1903, the RSDRP was increasingly riven by these irreconcilable factions, which clashed over vanguardism, democratic centralism, and control of the party. The nature of the Bolsheviks themselves was controversial: they believed the ends justified the means and committed violent crimes to finance themselves. One notorious act was the Bolshevik's 1907 Tiflis bank robbery that killed 40 people and left about 50 injured, including many civilians

who just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. This crime further alienated the Mensheviks, not least because a party congress had overwhelmingly passed a resolution against committing acts of violence and “expropriations” (armed robberies) just weeks before the Tiflis robbery. The two factions finally split into what effectively were separate parties in 1912, with both claiming to be the “Russian Social-Democratic Workers’ Party”. This confusing situation eventually led to the Bolsheviks calling themselves the Russian Social-Democratic Workers’ Party (B), more popularly as the Russian Social-Democratic Workers’ Party (Bolshevik). The Mensheviks similarly called themselves the Russian Social-Democratic Workers’ Party (Menshevik), although they also sometimes just used Russian Social-Democratic Workers’ Party without any qualifiers.

If two RSDRPs were not enough, in 1913 a third RSDRP formed with members whose politics were intermediate between the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks. They were the Russian Social-Democratic Workers’ Party (Internationalists), popularly known as the *Mezhrayontsy* (roughly meaning “those in-between” but often translated as the clumsy “Interdistrictites”). The goal of RSDRP (Internationalists)¹⁶ was to reunite all RSDRP parties and factions into a unitary RSDRP. This failed.

The Russian Empire was a classic land-based imperialist power, with most of the empire having been acquired through conquest of adjacent lands (such as the Russian conquests of Siberia and Central Asia) or by great-power dealings (such as the lands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth being partitioned between Austria, Prussia, and Russia). The result was a huge empire of many different ethnic groups and religions. Russian rulers and officials opposed attempts by ethnic or religious groups to become independent or autonomous. Traditional rulers of conquered lands sometimes tried to regain their sovereignty, as occurred for example in Georgia and Central Asia. Muslims resentful of control by Christian Russia were restive or rebellious in newly-conquered lands in Central Asia and the Caucasus.

Unrest was not just confined to non-Christian or newly-conquered peoples. Even in the core empire of the Belarusians, Russians, and Ukrainians, rebellion and revolution could occur. Russian peasants dissatisfied with their condition could revolt, as had happened many times throughout Russian history. The rise of liberalism in Europe spread to Russia, once leading to a revolt of Imperial Russian Army officers in favor of replacing the Tsar’s autocratic

16 If this is not confusing enough, there later was a “Russian Social-Democratic Workers’ Party (of Internationalists)” which was a completely different group from the Russian Social-Democratic Workers’ Party (Internationalists), the *Mezhrayontsy*. This formed in 1917 as the Organization of the United Social Democrats-Internationalists but took the name RSDRP (of Internationalists) in 1918, as the *Mezhrayontsy* had merged into the Bolsheviks in 1917.

powers with a constitutional monarchy. Populist, socialist, Marxist, and anarchist groups at times all tried to overthrow the Imperial government.

Another growing threat among many was nationalism. The annexation of much of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth had brought many Poles and Lithuanians into the Russian Empire. These peoples had a long tradition of independence, and many resented being part of Russia. Each group revolted against Russian domination several times, and their nationalist rebellions were put down with military force, often excessively applied.

As the 19th Century progressed, nationalism increasingly spread to other parts of the Russian Empire. Ethnic nationalism sometimes mixed with a desire for independence, as in Poland, but it was sometimes mainly a wish to be able to express ethnic customs and traditions, as in Finland. The Russian government, however, regarded all nationalism as threat to the integrity of the empire and came up with a principle of **Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Narodnost** (*Pravoslavie, Samoderzhavie, Narodnost*), which was supposed to unite the empire and oppose nationalism:

- Orthodoxy meant that Eastern Orthodox Christianity, particularly through the Russian Orthodox Church, was a bedrock of the Russian Empire. From the time of Pyotr I (“Peter the Great”), the empire controlled the church¹⁷. The church became a branch of the government, the “Ministry of the Orthodox Confession”, and its workings were intertwined with government policy and the other state institutions.
- Autocracy meant unconditional loyalty to the Russian Emperor, the Tsar.
- *Narodnost* is often translated as “Nationality” but in this context it meant the Russian people with their customs and traditions. It did not mean modern nationalism like that arising from the French Revolution. *Natsionalnost*, a different Russian word, meant modern nationalism, and the empire even viewed *natsionalnost* for the Russians themselves as dangerous, since it implied the aspirations of the Russian people mattered more than their rulers, who thus might be replaced¹⁸.

Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and *Narodnost* was not a hollow slogan but a call for government action. In practice, it meant that the government was to russify many parts of the empire.

17 The patriarch of the church had been independent of state control. The patriarchate was replaced with a state-controlled synod. The patriarchate was brought back in 1917 after the February Revolution replaced the Tsarist government with a liberal one.

18 Adapted from Theodore R. Weeks; “Russification: Word and Practice 1863-1914”; *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*; Vol. 148, No. 4; 2004; <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1558142>.

This almost invariably involved repressive measures, especially to try to suppress all forms of ethnic nationalism, even in peaceful Finland or loyal Armenia.

Russification (*obrusenie*) meant conducting some or all education in Russian rather than the local language and requiring Russian for official business and some other purposes. Russification also encouraged people to convert to the Russian Orthodox Church and forbade these converts to revert back to their former religion. Interfering even to this extent with religion caused resentment and resistance among people who were otherwise pro-Russian. Another aspect of Russification involved the government encouraging Russians and other trusted ethnicities to settle in non-Russian regions of the empire, with the government in effect running a Russian colonization program. For example, the government took control of considerable amounts of land in newly-conquered Central Asia and preferentially allocated it to Russian and Ukrainian settlers, causing resentment among the Muslim inhabitants of the region. Christian places like Armenia also saw Russian settlement.

Groups that had some autonomy due to historical reasons either had it outright rescinded, as in Poland, or faced frequent attempts to reduce it, as in Finland. Christian Armenia had become quite pro-Russian after centuries of Muslim rule was replaced by Russian rule. However, as Armenian culture flourished under the empire, Russian government officials incorrectly concluded that the Armenians were becoming disloyal. They were subjected to russification, with the result that Armenian nationalism and resistance to Russian policies grew. Even in the core regions of the empire, Ukrainians were subject to russification, with use of the Ukrainian language being restricted.

Russification and repression mostly failed, engendering resistance and strengthening nationalism far more than it russified people. Some individuals did become russified, but I believe it was mostly due to other factors than Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and *Narodnost*. Instead, people often russified to have the chance to prosper in commerce across the empire or to have careers in the Imperial government.

The issue of nationalism also posed problems for the pre-revolution Bolsheviks. Traditional Marxists viewed nationalism as an aspect of bourgeois capitalism that had no place in international socialism and the future dictatorship of the proletariat. Many Bolsheviks and Lenin in particular wanted a highly centralized unitary state rather than some federation of nationalities. On the other hand, nationalism was a potent force that caused problems for the Russian Empire. The Bolsheviks would come to terms with nationalism, attempting to harness it in their struggle against the empire while otherwise trying to controlling it. Lenin would write that Russia was “a prison house of nations”. It was Iosif Stalin, however, who

became the Bolshevik authority on nationalism, because of his 1913 work, *Marxism and the National Question*.

Spotlight: Stalin's Marxism and the National Question

In *Marxism and the National Question*, Stalin acknowledges near the start that national groups have the right to self-determination, including independence. Marxism meant that it was not legitimate for bourgeois elements to seek autonomy or independence for their group. The bourgeoisie were the exploiters of the workers and thus would only be working for their own benefit. Therefore, only the workers, the “class-conscious proletariat”, had the right of self-determination.

Stalin somewhat narrowly defined what was acceptable nationalism. A group was a “nation” only if it met his criteria of language, territory, economic conditions, and character. Other groups were not nations and thus did not have a right of self-determination. For example, the Jews in the Russian Empire were connected by religion and history but not by territory or (partially) character and so were not be a nation. Stalin did see a role for some form of “regional autonomy” for a collection of groups that might not fully be nations in themselves but did inhabited a specific territory.

Self-determination and especially independence implied division rather than unity. This posed a problem for Marxism, with its goal of worldwide proletarian revolution and slogan “Workers of the world, unite!”. It was a particular problem for the Bolsheviks, who believed in highly centralized control. Stalin’s solution was to declare that self-determination was not an unlimited right for the workers of nation¹⁹, as “the principle of international solidarity of the workers” was also “an essential element”. Stalin meant that the workers of national groups had a nominal right to independence but their class-consciousness for the greater interest of all workers would keep them united under the Bolsheviks. Although Stalin did not state it, since the Bolsheviks were the “vanguard of the proletariat”, all this meant the Bolshevik leaders and not the actual workers would decide questions of self-determination and independence.

Stalin was an ethnic Georgian, and his essay cemented his position as the Bolsheviks’ expert on nationalities. Many top Bolsheviks were ethnic Russians or

¹⁹ At least in Russia, the focus of Stalin’s work. His text is vague on whether it applied universally.

non-religious Russian-speaking Jews and had been opposed to national self-determination. However, the government of the Russian Empire was against national self-determination, so taking a stand in favor of self-determination would increase the popularity of the Bolsheviks in at least some of the empire's ethnic groups. Stalin's formulation meant the Bolsheviks did not have to actually grant self-determination once they took over the country.

Following the appearance of *Marxism and the National Question*, the Bolsheviks and Lenin in 1913–1916 officially embraced and developed policies for the national minorities in Russia. Lenin in his 1916 *The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination* proclaimed a right to free political secession for all nationalities without qualification. However, Lenin also stated that the right to secede by itself secured the rights of nationalities “democratic state” (which meant the Bolshevik socialist state). This was Lenin's solution control nationalism: nationalities had the right to secede but would not choose to exercise it. Under Marxism-Leninism, only the proletariat had the right to choose to secede, and the Bolsheviks/Communists as the vanguard of the proletariat would be the ones to decide. So, in the future Soviet Union, no group would secede as long as the Communists were in complete control.

Sidetrip: The Lumpenproletariat

Marxism and the National Question, mentions the “class-conscious proletariat”. This was the good proletariat in Marxism, as they were aware of their plight and supported the revolution. There was also a bad proletariat in Marxism, the **lumpenproletariat**²⁰. This comprised the dregs of society and included the chronically unemployed (“loafers” to Lenin), criminals, vagrants, beggars, and so on. They lacked class consciousness and operated out of personal self interest. In Marxism, they were easily manipulated by bourgeoisie to be strikebreakers, fighters against the revolution, and (in the 20th Century) fascist thugs.

The Soviets used *lumpenproletariat* in reference to capitalist societies, as per Marxist-Leninist doctrine the *lumpenproletariat* “disappears with the destruction of the capitalist system”²¹. The Soviet thus rarely used the term *lumpenproletariat* in context with their own socialist state. They did have a different but equivalent term: *deklassirovannyye elementy*, meaning *déclassé* elements, people who were

20 Lumpenproletariat roughly means the proletariat in rags or the knavish proletariat, depending upon how the German word “lumpen” is taken.

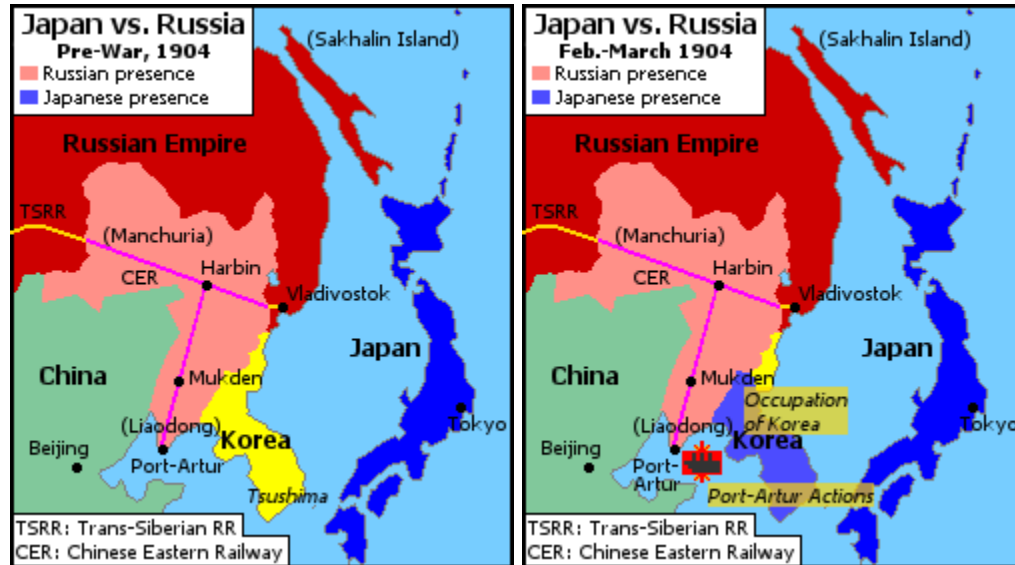
21 Per the 1979 edition of the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*: “L.-p. ischezayet s unichtozheniyem kapitalisticheskogo stroya”; “L.-p. disappears with the destruction of the capitalist system”.

incapable of having class consciousness. The political wishes of the *déclassé* did not matter in the early Soviet system, since there were not the class-conscious proletariat. Conveniently, if the Soviets wanted, they could decide that workers who disagreed with socialism were *déclassé* elements rather than class-conscious proletarians.

The 1920s Soviets could even prevent the *déclassé* from voting. Voting was a right for “All who have acquired the means of livelihood through labor that is productive and useful to society, and also persons engaged in housekeeping which enables the former to do productive work”. Note that this phrasing could exclude unemployed people. Also, voting was denied to various groups including “Persons who have been deprived by a soviet of their rights of citizenship because of selfish or dishonorable offenses, for the period fixed by the sentence”.

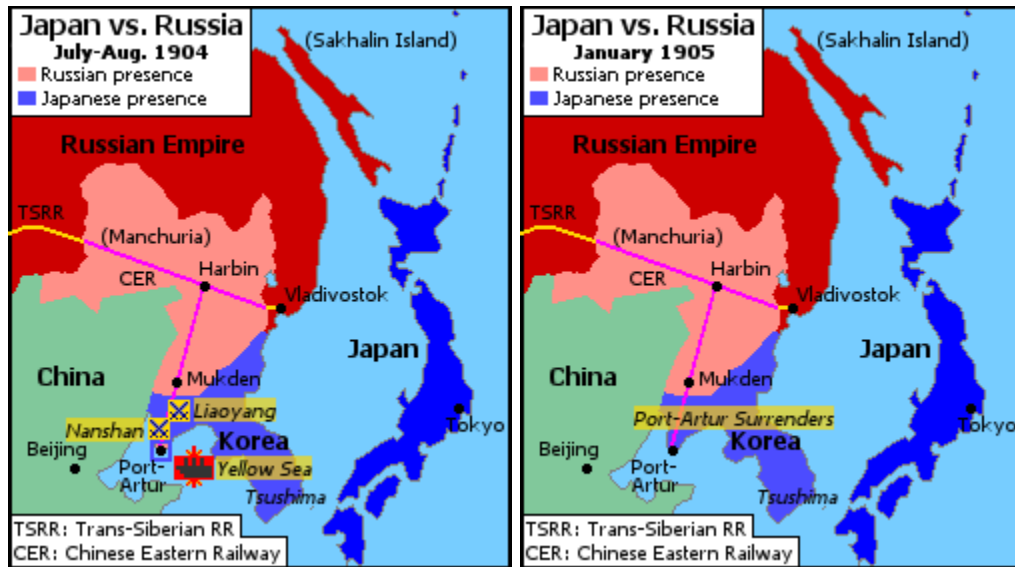
5 War, Revolution, War, and Revolution Again

The Russian empire had serious problems in the early 20th Century, including agrarian poverty, a strike-prone labor force, alcoholism, student radicalism, revolutionary movements, and unrest among many of its minorities. In 1904, war with Japan broke out.



Russia and Japan had both been expanding in eastern Asia, often at the expense of China. Both countries correctly feared that the other desired dominance over Manchuria, a part of China, and Korea, an independent but militarily weak country. Russia appeared to be gaining the upper hand, leasing the Liaodong Peninsula from China, constructing the Port-Artur²² naval base there, and building railroads across Manchuria to the Russian port of Vladivostok and across northern China to Port-Artur. With Russia increasingly in a position to take over the region, Japan proposed an accommodation, basically that Japan would not oppose Russia's domination of Manchuria if Russia would not oppose Japan's domination of Korea. Russia would not agree to this arrangement and simply prolonged negotiations while continuing to build up military strength in the region. Japan responding by going to war with Russia in early 1904, starting with a surprise naval attack on Port-Artur.

²² "Port Arthur" in English. The area is now part of Dalian, China.



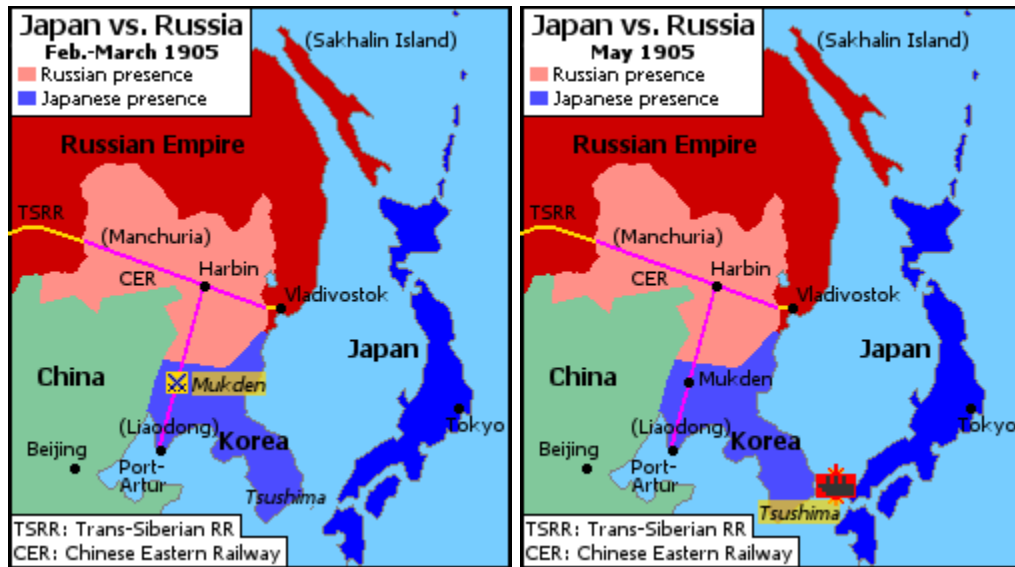
Russian Emperor Nikolay II at first welcomed the war. European powers had won all wars against Asian countries for decades, and Nikolay II, who held demeaning racist views about the Japanese, believed Russia would easily win²³. Japan, however, had been modernizing and militarizing for decades. The Japanese quickly occupied Korea, marched into northern China and Manchuria, and by April besieged Port-Artur. Russia sent troops east via the Trans-Siberian Railroad, but this lightly-built rail line could not handle all the soldiers, weapons, and supplies the Russians needed²⁴. The Russian garrison of Port-Artur withstood the Japanese siege for months, including several Japanese attempts to break through the fortifications, to no avail. The Russians in Port-Artur surrendered on 2 January 1905.



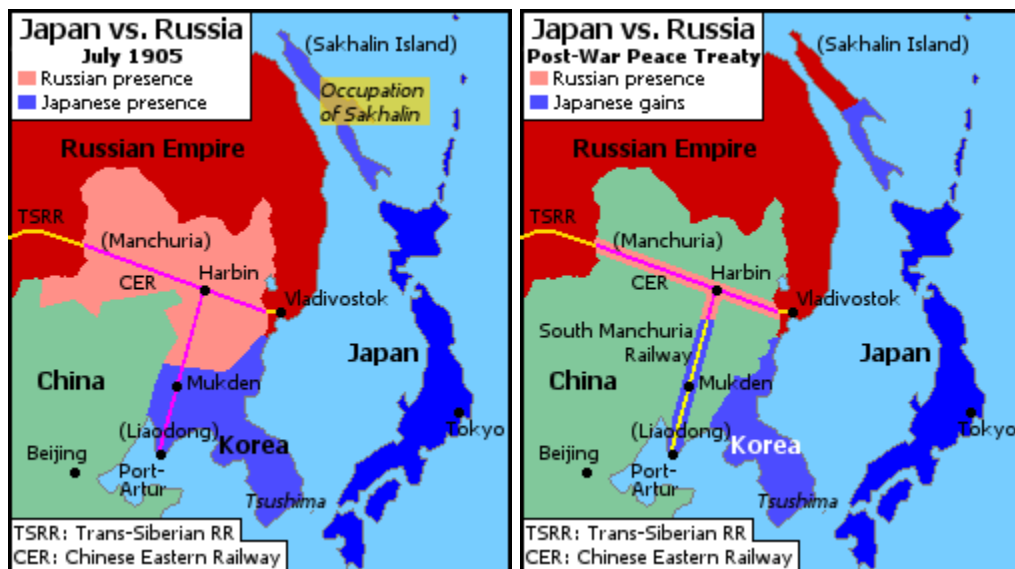
Japanese 28-cm siege howitzers at Port-Artur

23 Some historical works claim the Russia government believed a quick victory over Japan would cause a wave of patriotism, uniting the country and distracting the public from Russia's many domestic problems. However, historians have so far found no convincing documentation for this view. Instead, knowledgeable Russian officials seemed to have been concerned of the likely problems of Russia trying to fight a major land war in east Asia using inadequate lines of communications.

24 After the war, the Russians would rebuild the Transsib into a high-capacity railway that would serve Russia well during World War II and especially the Soviets during World War II.



The war did not improve for Russia as 1905 progressed. The Japanese next defeated the Russian Army at Mukden in Manchuria, albeit with heavy losses. Russia had also sent much of its navy in European water around Africa to Asia, but on arrival the Russian fleet suffered a devastating defeat by the Japanese navy at Tsushima. The Japanese then invaded and occupied Sakhalin, an island the two countries had been jostling over for decades.



Russia, now with a revolution going on at home (covered below), wanted to end the war. Japan did too, as the war had exhausted the Japanese government's financial reserves. Both sides agreed to a peace mediated by the USA. Russia ceded the southern half of Sakhalin Island to Japan and turned over its Chinese leases to Japan, giving the Japanese control of the Liaodong Peninsula including Port-Artur and the rail line there. Russia also had to recognize Japanese dominance of Korea and had to evacuate its military forces from

Manchuria, although it did retain control of the Manchurian rail line to Vladivostok. China and Korea had no say in these arrangements.

The Japanese victory was the first time in the modern era that an Asian country has defeated a European power in a major war. To many people in Russia, the defeat was humiliating and proof that the Tsar's government was incompetent and backward. This increased the wave of social unrest and revolution that was already sweeping Russia.



Illustration of Bloody Sunday, Sankt-Peterburg, 22 January 1905 (9 January, Julian calendar)²⁵

The Russo-Japanese War had become unpopular in 1904 among many Russians once it became clear that Russia was losing to Japan. The loss of Port-Artur on 2 January 1905 deepened discontent. On 22 January, Russian Orthodox priest G.A. Gapon led an unarmed, peaceful march to petition the Tsar for better working and living conditions for Russian workers, as well as for universal suffrage in Russia and an end to the war with Japan. Tsarist troops opened fire on the marchers, killing hundreds and wounding many more. This event, Bloody Sunday, sparked widespread public outrage, labor strikes, and peasant uprisings across Russia, leading to mass unrest, revolts, and revolution. Peasant revolts were widespread, due to many peasant families being saddled with generational debt since the 1860s (from how the emancipation of the serfs allocated land to many former serfs) and many landless peasants working in terrible conditions on large estates owned by landlords. The Russian government responded with military force and police repression.

²⁵ *Gapon at the Narva Gate*; unknown artist; 1905.

The unrest took on aspects of a civil war, as Russian ultra-nationalist, pro-Tsarist “Black Hundreds” militias²⁶ were formed to fight against revolutionaries and revolting peasants. The Russian military, police, and Black Hundreds all proved unable to halt the growing revolution. It became clear that political concessions were necessary, and in August 1905 Tsar Nikolay II proclaimed the creation of a “special consultative body” to advise him on legislative matters. This would consist of two chambers, a State Council and an elected State Duma. Many details about this body were left vague, but it was clear that it would only be advisory and have no real legislative power. This August Manifesto failed to pacify in the country, and the revolution grew in strength.



Left: Painting of moderates celebrating the October Manifesto²⁷

Right: Painting of radicals continuing the revolution in the Presnya district of Moskva²⁸

Government officials convinced the recalcitrant Tsar that substantial concessions were necessary, and in the autumn Nikolay II proclaimed the October Manifesto. This promised the people basic civil rights, such as freedom of speech, of assembly, and of association. The adult male population was granted the right to vote for deputies for the State Duma. The Duma would have real power, as the Manifesto promised no law would be enacted without consent of the Duma. The majority of the population were in favor of the announced reforms and ceased to support the revolution.

Revolutionary socialists, radical workers, anarchists, and some other groups denounced the Manifesto and tried to continue the revolution. Without the support of most people, they

26 Black Hundreds derived its name from the 17th Century, when a people’s militia of “black hundreds” helped liberate Moskva from Polish occupation and saved Russia from conquest. “Black” in this context could refer to town and city folk or could also include peasants who were not serfs.

27 *Demonstration on 17 October 1905*; Ilya Repin; 1907.

28 *Barricade Fighting in Red Presnya*; I.A. Vladimirov; before 1947. The Soviets after taking power in 1917 renamed the Presnaya district Red Presnaya in honor of the 1905 revolutionaries. The Bolsheviks and later Soviets greatly exaggerated the brutality of the attack on Presnya, claiming that the Russian Army machinegunned any resistance with a “no prisoners taken” order and that Russian artillery mostly destroyed this district of 150,000 people. The army did use violence, with over 500 people being killed, but did not indiscriminately slaughter the residents or raze the district.

were unable to resist Tsarist forces suppressing the remaining revolutionaries. This did not even matter for the most radical revolutionaries, the Bolsheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries, both whom were more than willing to sacrifice lives even in hopeless situations. The Bolsheviks had urged a policy of “No negotiations with the autocracy!”²⁹ during the revolution. After the October Manifesto, Lenin wanted a violent uprising in Moskva even though it had no chance of success:

Victory?!... That for us is not the point at all... We should not harbour any illusions, we are realists, and let no-one imagine that we have to win. For that we are still too weak. The point is not about victory but about giving the regime a shake and attracting the masses to the movement. That is the whole point. And to say that because we cannot win we should not stage an insurrection—that is simply the talk of cowards.³⁰

Parts of the October Manifesto went into effect immediately, such as the basic freedoms for the people. Preparations for enacting other parts of the October Manifesto continued into the spring of 1906, when elections to a State Duma were held. Later that spring, before the Duma was to meet, the Tsar reluctantly proclaimed a constitution³¹ that limited his power. This meant the Tsar was no longer an absolute ruler able to proclaim laws as he wished, despite the constitution stating that the Russian emperor “possesses Supreme Sovereign Power”³².

The constitution provided for somewhat less than what the October Manifesto had promised or implied. Male subjects, with some exceptions³³, were indeed enfranchised to vote for the State Duma, but the elections used a complicated system that greatly diluted the votes of various groups, especially peasants and workers. The State Council, the other chamber, was controlled by the Tsar, with half of its members directly appointed by the Tsar himself. The other half were elected from a narrow electorate that excluded peasants and workers, who would more likely elect liberals or radical, and favored many conservative groups. For example, the Russian nobility, the Russian Orthodox Church, and leading business groups all elected members to the Council.

29 M.I. Vasiliev-Yuzhin; *Moskovskiy Sovet Rabochikh Deputatov v 1905 g.* (*The Moscow Soviet of Workers' Deputies in 1905*); 1925.

30 Lenin's quotation from Orlando Figes; *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution: 1891–1924*; 1996.

31 Technically, this was a new set of Fundamental Laws for the Russian Empire, revising those of 1832.

32 <http://imperialhouse.ru/en/dynastyhistory/dinzak1/441.html>.

33 Soldiers, some government officials, and a few other groups could not vote for the Duma. Voting was restricted to males over the age of 25. Since Russia had a young and growing population, this excluded many young adult males. However, it was fairly common even in more democratic European countries of the time to set minimum age limits of 22–25 for voting, so Russia's restrictions were not excessive for the time. Russia's exclusion of females from voting was also common throughout all democratic countries of the time. Some Russian revolutionaries had wanted females to be enfranchised, but this did not happen except in Finland. Finland's example did lay the groundwork for female suffrage in Russia in 1917.

Both chambers had to pass a bill for it to become law, so a basic promise of the Manifesto was met, but the Tsar had absolute power to veto any law the Duma and Council managed to enact. The constitution also stated that the Tsar could dismiss a sitting State Duma for any reason, which would trigger elections for a new Duma. Nikolay II would use this power when he disliked the actions of a Duma.

The new system was not a parliamentary government, as the two legislative bodies³⁴ could not appoint or dismiss government ministers, only the Tsar could. Despite retaining considerable powers, Nikolay II detested the concessions he had granted and wished to resume autocratic rule.

The Grand Principality of Finland with its history of partial autonomy was recognized as special, although ambivalently so, in the 1906 constitution:

The Grand Principality of Finland, while comprising as inseparable part of the Russian State, is governed in its internal affairs by special decrees based on special legislation.³⁵

Finland received its own legislature³⁶, the only region within the Russian Empire authorized to have such a body. However, the Tsar was opposed to giving any real authority to the Finnish legislature. Like with the State Duma, the Tsar had the power to dissolve the Finnish legislature for any reason, resulting in new elections, and Nikolay II frequently did so to neutralize the body.

The freedoms of speech, assembly, and association meant that political parties were now legal. Formerly illegal parties came out of hiding, and new parties were formed, with a wide range of political stances from monarchical, conservative, moderate, liberal, socialist, and anarchist, as well as narrower-interest groups such as for ethnic and religious minorities. The RSDRP and other revolutionary parties boycotted the 1906 Duma elections. They changed their minds when the State Duma proved willing to oppose the Tsar, and they participated in subsequent elections.

34 The constitution proclaimed State Council and State Duma to be equal legislative bodies. They were also completely separate bodies (and a person could not serve in both of them at the same time). There was no single overarching name for the two bodies, like there was in Britain (the Parliament with its House of Commons and House of Lords) or the USA (the Congress with its House of Representatives and Senate). Some English-language works collectively call the Duma and council the “parliament” of the Russian Empire for convenience, but I feel this implies the system was a parliamentary government, which it definitely was not.

35 <http://imperialhouse.ru/en/dynastyhistory/dinzak1/440.html>.

36 The legislature was named the *Eduskunta* in Finnish and *Riksdagen* in Swedish. (Finnish was the majority language in Finland while Swedish was a significant minority language.) The Finnish legislature is often called the Finnish “parliament” in English-language works about this time, but the Grand Principality of Finland was certainly not a system of parliamentary government.

The Okhrana still monitored and infiltrated political parties in search of illegal activities. As it turned out, the Bolsheviks were secretly continuing to carry on revolutionary activities as well as financing themselves through violent robberies. A number of top Bolsheviks went into voluntary exile in western and central Europe, fearing that the Okhrana would arrest them. Among them was Lenin, whose numerous political writings continued to be disseminated in Russia.



Nikolay II giving a speech at the opening of the First State Duma, 27 April 1906

The constitution of 1906 resulted in some actual improvements in the Russian Empire. For example, the State Duma was quite interested in improving the mediocre state of Russian child education. Education laws led to a significant expansion of the public school system, particularly for primary schools. Education became compulsory for children aged 8–11, with schools not allowed to charge tuition fees. Nonetheless, Russia was a vast country with a rapidly growing population, so the education plan was not expected to be complete until 1922. Education reforms also faced cultural obstacles in some places. Female education lagged behind male education in most places and especially in Muslim Central Asia where traditional (“pre-capitalist” in Soviet terminology) cultures and semi-nomadic lifestyles still dominated. Nevertheless, education reforms were sufficient to significantly raise the literacy rate among children.

In 1907, the Russian Empire introduced agrarian reforms aimed at improving the lot of many peasants. Generational debts due to the emancipation of the serfs were eliminated, and various measures to make farming more productive and profitable to the peasants were enacted, including educating peasants in modern agricultural methods. These reforms were not the work of the State Duma, but an initiative of the Tsarist government. The Revolution of 1905 had shown that many peasants were becoming radicalized, so the reforms aimed at turning the peasantry into conservative land-owning capitalists resistant to socialist

radicalization. (In Marxist ideology, the government was seeking to make the peasantry part of the petty bourgeoisie and thus against the proletarian revolution.) The reforms partially succeeded, although many peasants remained impoverished, landless, or both.

Sidetrip: Russian Agricultural Cooperatives

Although the Soviets became famous and infamous for collective agriculture, a cooperative forms of agriculture existed in the Russian Empire long before the Soviets came to power. From the second half of the 19th Century, voluntary cooperatives of all sorts were organized in Russia, inspired by cooperatives in European countries like Germany. These were voluntary associations organized for a particular purposes, like consumer cooperatives (usually formed in cities to help people purchase items), credit cooperatives, savings-and-loan cooperatives, and producer cooperatives (which banded makers of items together to help sell their goods). In the countryside, one form of cooperative was the agricultural cooperative (also called the peasants' cooperative), in which a group of peasant families cooperated over agricultural matters, such as in selling their output to the markets. Peasants typically had small farm and very limited resources, so cooperatives gave them improved access to markets, credit, and agricultural technology.



The Third All-Russian Congress of Cooperatives, Kiev 1913³⁷

Agriculture cooperatives were not associated with a particular political ideology, which meant many movements could find good in them. Since cooperatives competed like companies in free markets, capitalists could see them as ways for entrepreneurial peasants to seek to profit from agriculture. Liberals could see them as ways to improve peasants' lives. Socialists could see them as initial stages of collective, socialist agriculture. Even conservatives could see them as ways of helping keep the social system stable by reducing peasant unrest and increasing respect for private property (since the peasants benefited from the cooperative without giving up their property).

The Russian government had initially been leery of agricultural cooperatives, out of fear that revolutionary socialists would use them to insinuate themselves into the peasantry. The need to improve Russian agriculture caused the government to embrace them in the 1890s through enabling legislation. The agricultural cooperative movement grew slowly, however, since most peasants did not have the knowledge and resources to organize cooperatives on their own. Instead, volunteers from the educated classes made themselves "cooperators", helping to create cooperatives. Some of these individuals were politically motivated with

37 Picture from J.V. Bubnoff; *The Co-operative Movement in Russia*; 1917;
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/40/The_co-operative_movement_in_Russia%3B_its_history%2C_significance_and_character_%28IA_cooperativemovem00bubn%29.pdf

liberal or socialist ideas. The abortive Revolution of 1905 saw widespread peasants revolts, which the government mostly preferred to blame on revolutionaries who had infiltrated the peasantry. This led to a crackdown on the cooperatives and a purging of their leaders, followed by a new, more effective wave of agricultural reforms. This included cooperatives: Government inspectors now organized and audited cooperatives, which had their power expanded and were made easier to join by the poorer peasants. By 1914, about a quarter of Russia's peasants were in agricultural cooperatives (up to a third in the traditional Belarusian-Russian-Ukrainian core of the empire).



Issue 1 of *Cooperative World* magazine, January 1917

The reforms to agricultural cooperatives were also part of a surge of all sorts of cooperatives in Russia. The cooperative movement organized and met in regional congresses. It then occasionally met in congresses for the entire country, starting with the First All-Russian Congress of Cooperatives at Moskva in April 1908. After the first Russian revolution, in which the Tsar abdicated and his government was replaced by the liberal Russian Provisional Government, the cooperative movement became politicized. The new government enacted a law favorable to cooperatives, and in return the cooperative movement publicly supported the government (with producer cooperatives then receiving many government orders)³⁸.

Reforms in other areas proceeded slowly or not at all, especially when vested governmental or commercial interests opposed change. For example, the State Duma attempted to address

38 Patrick Le Tréhondat; *“La révolution russe et les coopératives”* (“The Russian Revolution and the Cooperatives”); 2016; <https://autogestion.asso.fr/la-revolution-russe-et-les-cooperatives/> (in French).

Russia's problems with excessive drinking and alcoholism but made little progress. The Russian government itself resisted attempts at alcohol reform, as up to 30% of the government's revenues derived from alcohol sales and taxes. For another example, a law allowed workers to organize into trade unions, but these unions were highly regulated and restricted by the government in favor of business interests. Officials would deny hundreds of requests to form unions and would shut down hundreds of unions that had managed to form. Insufficient reforms meant many groups in the Russian Empire remained restive and open to radicalization.



Left: A peasant plowing a field. Most peasants were impoverished and very few could afford mechanized agricultural equipment like tractors.

Right: The Yuzovka steel works, perhaps circa 1900. Russian industry of the early 20th Century could have built tractors had there been any domestic demand for them.

The Russian economy in the early 20th Century was undergoing significant changes. Russian agriculture remained by far the dominant sector of the economy, and Russian was a major exporter of agricultural products, especially wheat. Resource extraction, including simple petroleum refining, was also important, with Russia exporting lumber, crude oil, and kerosene. By the late 19th Century, the Russian government had become well aware that industrialized countries were increasingly more prosperous, more technologically advanced, and more militarily powerful than Russia. The government undertook reforms that allowed private enterprise to begin building an industrial sector.

Russia's vast natural resources of coal, iron ore, crude oil, timber, cotton, and other materials provided the inputs to make manufactured goods. Foreign investment and expertise built factories. The Russian population was growing quickly, and increasing numbers of peasants were moving to cities to work in factories, so finding workers was not a problem.

Russian industry also had profound negative effects. Russian law favored factory owners, investors, and other capitalists over the factory workers. Most workers were poorly paid, badly treated, worked in unsafe conditions, and lived in Dickensian squalor with very inadequate housing, nutrition, and medical care. Strikes were frequent as workers tried to gain better conditions. A small but very active group of workers were radicalized and supported the goals of the revolutionary socialists. They were willing to resort to armed violence and could convince many other workers to follow their lead. This wasn't quite the incipient proletarian revolution per Marxist ideology, but it did have elements of it.

World Industrial Production, 1913³⁹

Country	Percentage
USA	35.8
Germany	15.7
Britain	14.0
France	6.4
Russia	5.3

The Russian industrial sector was small at first but in the early 1910s was growing rapidly. By 1913, Russia was the fifth largest industrial country in the world, although with only a 5.3% share of world industrial production it was still quite far behind the top three industrial countries. Had the Russian economy continued to develop as it had in 1910–1913, Russia might have soon become a major industrial power. Instead, war intervened and the Russian Empire collapsed.



³⁹ Folke Hilgerdt; "Industrialization and Foreign Trade"; League of Nations report); 1945.

The leading powers of Europe had divided into two rival camps, an alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy and a countering alliance of France and Russia. The Franco-Russian alliance was bolstered by Britain, which officially was neutral but had understandings with France and Russia. War broken out between the two alliances over Serbia, beginning World War I. Britain joined the Allies after Germany invaded Belgium as part of its plans to attack France. Italy, however, remained neutral and then later joined the Allies. After initial advances by all sides, the conflict seized up into a searing war of attrition with few advances and heavy casualties.

The outbreak of war in 1914 was met with mass outpourings of patriotism, nationalism, and enthusiasm in every major belligerent. With Russia at war with the Germanic powers of Germany and Austria-Hungary, it became a liability that the capital of Russia, Sankt-Peterburg, had a Germanic name. It was soon russified to Petrograd (“Peter’s City”)⁴⁰.

Socialist parties in Europe had espoused internationalism but were organized along national lines. When the war came, most socialist parties supported their governments in the war effort, even though, for example, this pitted German socialists against French and Russian socialists. Some individual socialists and a few more radical parties denounced the war and advocated peace. In Russia, the Mensheviks supported the war effort despite reservations of some members, while the Bolsheviks opposed the war.



Russia did not have a good war. The Allies had initially hoped that the huge Imperial Russian Army would quickly overrun the Eastern Front and win the war. Instead, Russia

⁴⁰ For similar anti-German sentiments, in 1917 the House of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, the British monarchy, was renamed as the House of Windsor.

struggled. The Russians could usually defeat the Austro-Hungarians in battle, but they lost most of their battles with the Germans, despite outnumbering them. Most of the rank-and-file Russian soldiers were poorly educated, often were poorly trained, and were sometimes poorly equipped and supplied. The result was that the Russians were usually no match against the better educated, better trained, and better equipped German soldiers.

By the end of 1914, Russia had taken heavy casualties with little to show for its massive effort. With the war now clearly about to continue for some time, the Russian war effort faced serious problems. Russian industry could not make everything the Russian military needed, such as weapons, manufactured goods, ammunition, and advanced chemicals. Even basic items like bolt-action rifles were a problem: Russia needed about 100,000 per month by late 1914 but Russian factories were only making about 42,000 per month. In early 1915, some Russian soldiers had to go into battle armed with just bayonets (no rifles) and a couple of hand grenades. In turn, the better-equipped German forces in 1915 inflicted a major defeat on the Russians and forced them to retreat across the entire northern sector of the Eastern Front.

Sidetrip: 1915 and 1941

The German defeat of the Russian Army in Poland prompted Russia to retreat deeper in to Russia to save their forces from annihilation. The Russians lost Lithuania, their part of Poland, and western Belorussia. The Russians were able to evacuate important factories out of reach of the Germans, rebuilding them further east. The later Soviets were well aware of this effort and would implement their own version of industry relocation when Germany invaded in 1941.

The Russian Empire in 1915 also forcibly relocated the “alien elements” away from the battle zone. They feared these people would betray Russia and help Germany. These people were actually native-born subjects of the Russian Empire, whose ancestors had moved to the region in past centuries. They included Jews, ethnic Germans, and some other groups. The later Soviets were also well aware of this effort and would implement their own version of it in 1941, forcibly relocating the Volga Germans and other Soviets citizens of German descent.

Although Russian industry was insufficient for Russia’s war needs, the Russians also had great difficulties in importing military goods and supplies. They lost their major industrial

trading part when the war broke out: Germany. German companies had been supplying Russia with machine tools for factories, manufactured goods, parts for assembly of products in Russia, and advanced chemicals. All these necessary products ceased arriving once the two countries went to war. Russia mostly could not make up these lost goods by importing products from its allies and neutral countries, as Russia's two main trade routes were closed. Germany had blockaded the Baltic Sea at the start of the war, and the Ottoman Empire had then blockaded the Black Sea. The remaining routes, at Arkhangel'sk in the Russian far north and at Vladivostok on the Pacific Ocean, were far from the front lines, and the Russian railroad system only had limited capacity to haul freight from these distant ports of entry.

In 1915, Russia's allies attempted to open a naval route into the Black Sea to supply Russia. They launched naval attacks and amphibious invasions against the Ottoman Empire, but the campaign ended in defeat after almost 11 months of fighting. The Russian government in the meantime began to build new factories for the war effort, but this took considerable time before these factories could start making goods in quantity. Also, building factories took money, adding to the already-huge expenses of the war.

In addition to lack of industrial goods, Russia soon faced growing food shortages despite having been a major grain exporter before the war⁴¹. Millions of male peasants were mobilized into the Russian army to fight the war. This decreased the amount of labor available to grow crops and resulted in a significant decrease in the amount of land being farmed. On top of this, the millions of peasants in the army now needed to be fed, whereas before they had been self-sufficient in food from their farms. Russia might have been able to overcome this issue, but government policies made things worse, not better.

41 There are some false claims that pre-war Russian grain exports were "hunger exports" and did not leave enough food for the common people in Russia. An extreme version of this aired on the "Rossiya-24" state-controlled TV station in 2013, with the absurd claim that 1.5 million people in Russia were dying of starvation each year in the years just before the start of World War I in 1914.



People waiting in line for bread, Petrograd, 1917

Russian efforts to finance the war led to high inflation (20–30% per year at first, about 90% in 1916⁴²), greatly eroding the ability of most Russians to purchase food and other necessities. The government imposed price caps on grain and other agricultural products in attempt to keep food affordable. In 1916, the state also began appropriating grain and fodder from the peasants for governmental, military, and naval use. This was supposed to take surplus output and did pay products taken, but at below-market rates. The system used complicated quotas, was subject to cheating, and failed while adding another burden on the peasants.

The war was thus a disaster for the peasants farming the land. Most soon could not profit from their labor and then could only sell their crops at a financial loss. They increasingly could not even afford the ever-increasing prices for fertilizer and the manufactured goods they needed. Many peasants simply stopped growing food for sale and only grew enough to feed their families. Others sold their food on the black market, while some held back their crops in hopes the government would abandon price caps. Many peasants who could no longer make a living at farming migrated to the cities to become wage laborers. This was an increasingly attractive option, as the government was expanding industrial production and building new factories to support the war effort. Civilians in town and cities ran short of food. Russian went from a major grain exporter in 1914 to having famine in places in 1917.

42 Steven M. Efremov; thesis, “The Role of Inflation in Soviet History: Prices, Living Standards, and Political Change”; 2012; <https://dc.etsu.edu/etd/1474>. Efremov’s thesis must be used carefully, however, as parts of it do not agree with historical studies of the USSR, and it is unclear if Efremov is correct in these instances.



Left: Tea Room “Ten”, a front for black market cocaine sales⁴³.

Right: Wounded Russian soldiers, who were often over-dosed with morphine.

The black market was another major problem. At the start of the war, Russia banned the production and sale of vodka and some other alcoholic beverages, as an attempt to limit drunkenness in the military and civil population. This extreme measure created a black market for alcohol in 1914. By 1915, the black market was selling drugs, particularly opium and cocaine. Black market cocaine became a serious problem in many places, with the rich buying potent “white fairy” while the poor bought cocaine adulterated with chalk or aspirin. Badly wounded soldiers released from service also brought home a new addiction. Russian army medics over-used morphine to treat the wounded, and the discharged soldiers brought their morphine addictions home with them. The black marketeers quickly began selling morphine to the ex-soldiers and pushing it to the civilian population.

The black market began selling food and other products as these items became scarce. Many people in urban areas had to buy food and essential goods from the black market or go without. With the black market providing necessities, some police and government officials ignored the market rather than trying to shut it down. Many of them also had to use the black market themselves. Black marketers would also bribe officials to leave them alone. The black market thus was an insidious corrupting influence across much of urban Russia, lessening public respect for law and authority. Further, the Russian police were mostly poorly paid and increasingly turned to extorting bribes from the public, which greatly damaged confidence in the police.

⁴³ This picture is from Petrograd in 1918, after the Soviets took over, but similar operations occurred earlier during the war.

By early 1917, the Imperial Russian Army had suffered many defeats, taken massive casualties, and lost territory, with no foreseeable prospect of victory. The morale of many Russian soldiers was low, verging on mutinous. The morale of many Russian officers was also low and defeatist. Even many generals were so discouraged by their frequent defeats that they were now advising against trying to go on the offensive. The civilian population was demoralized by the military situation as well as by growing shortages, relentless inflation, and the corruption of officials. Russia was ripe for revolution and suffered two of them in 1917.

The first was the February Revolution. It began on 8 March 1917 according to the calendar of most western countries, but it was 23 February in Russia, which was still using its Old Style calendar. The revolution caused Tsar Nikolay II to abdicate, and he was then mocked as “Citizen Nikolay Romanov” by his former troops. A Russian **Provisional Government** was set up to run Russia until an all-Russia elected Constituent Assembly could meet and decide on the form of government Russia would have. The Provisional Government was formed mostly from moderates and liberals. The Bolsheviks scorned it for being bourgeois and would call the revolution that brought them to power as the February Bourgeois Democratic Revolution.

The Provisional Government was, however, truly reforming and immediately announced measures reaffirming basic civil rights, granting a wide amnesty on political and religious matters, and abolishing hereditary, religious, and national class restrictions. It also started the process of replacing the corrupt police force with a public militia (the *Militsiya*) and somewhat slowly began to organize elections for the Assembly, which ended up scheduled for September and then postponed to November.

This government was far short of what revolutionary socialists, rebellious soldiers, militant workers, and other left-wing groups wanted, who set up revolutionary soviets in many parts of the country. In the capital, the **Petrograd Soviet** of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies pushed for a far more radical agenda and competed with the Provisional Government. This Soviet sought to discredit the Provisional Government and usurp its authority, a situation that came to be known as **dual power**. To further its country-wide ambitions, the Petrograd Soviet eventually added deputies from throughout Russia and renamed itself the All-Russian Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies, although it was still popularly known as the Petrograd Soviet.

Monarchist and other right-wing groups also existed throughout the country, but they were not well organized and were set back by the Tsar’s abdication. The Provisional Government

outlawed the Black Hundreds, although many of its former members would later join other reactionary groups. Militant workers organized themselves into local paramilitary units, often called **Red Guards**, red being the color for socialism and communism. They were not a unified paramilitary force, but their goals tended to be to defend their own factories, to guard against right-wing attempts to overthrow the Provisional Government, and to back up demands for better rights for workers with shows of force. Although left-wing, they were did not have a common political agenda: a Red Guards militia might support no party, any one of the several socialist parties, or some anarchist movement. As the interests of these soviets and the radical Bolsheviks became increasingly aligned, many Red Guard militias in effect became paramilitary forces for the Bolsheviks.

The Provisional Government also enacted numerous progressive reforms, including women's right to vote, separation of church and state, and abolition of capital punishment. They placed the former Tsar and his family under house arrest in a palace outside Petrograd. The government had wanted to send Nikolay II and his family into exile in Britain, which initially agreed to take them but withdrew the offer when the British left strongly objected.

After the initial euphoria over the February Revolution wore off, most of the Russian population became discouraged again. The Provisional Government turned out to be weak, with the Petrograd Soviet, the other soviets, and radical groups like the Bolsheviks all working to undermine the government's authority. Peasant unrest rose greatly, with many who leased land from landlords ceasing to pay rent, others seizing landlords' estates, and the most radicalized ones demanding the immediate end of private ownership of land (at the spring 1917 First All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Peasants' Deputies)⁴⁴. Right-wing groups also disdained the government and wanted to bring back the monarchy or institute a military dictatorship. Left and right groups both undermined the Army, which further lowered its morale, increased desertions, and reduced the authority of officers to control their troops. The situation was so fraught that the government instituted political commissars to watch over the army, an example the Bolsheviks would follow when they came to power.

Separatism among various non-Russian ethnic groups became a problem, with some agitating for autonomy or independence. This even extended to the Ukrainians, the "brother Slavs" or "little Russians" to the Russians. Soon after the February Revolution, some Ukrainian groups formed a Central Rada (the Ukrainian equivalent of a soviet or council),

44 Vladimir Maksovich Efimov; *"Russkaya Agrarnaya Institutsionalnaya Sistema (Istoriko-Konstruktivistskiy Analiz)"* ("The Russian Agricultural Institutional System (Historical-Constructivist Analysis)"); 2013; <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/211608602.pdf> (in Russian).

The Rada in June proclaimed Ukrainian autonomy within Russia⁴⁵, with the intent of Ukraine being one of several autonomous republics inside a federal Russian state. The Provisional Government was opposed to autonomy at first but later accepted it, although over a much-smaller part of Ukraine than what the Rada had claimed.

Communist propaganda liked to brag that the Revolution of 1905 prepared the Bolsheviks for their future revolution, but they were unprepared for the February Revolution and played little role in it. While the soviets were dominated by socialist groups, the Bolsheviks at first had little influence in them. The crucial Petrograd Soviet initially had not a single Bolshevik in its leadership committee. Instead, Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries dominated. Lenin, the charismatic, energetic leader of the Bolsheviks, and other top Bolsheviks in 1917 were in exile in Switzerland when the February Revolution began, and they had no easy way to return to Russia. Switzerland was completely surrounded by Allied and Central Powers territory. As anti-war revolutionary Marxists, they would be arrested if they tried to pass through Allied lands. As Russian subjects, they could not travel through Germany, the shortest way back, without being interned. That is, until Germany let them.



Left: Lenin arriving at the Finland Station in Petrograd, April 1917

Germany had first hoped the February Revolution would result in Russia leaving the war, but this did not happen. The Germans were well aware of Lenin's opposition to the war and decided that his presence in Russia would cause that country to descend into chaos. They

⁴⁵ Some Ukrainian groups wanted outright independence but cooperated with those seeking autonomy in hopes of securing this as a first step.

sent Lenin and 31 other Russian exiles⁴⁶ in a so-called **sealed train**⁴⁷ from Switzerland across Germany to the coast of the Baltic Sea. There, Lenin's train carriage was ferried across the sea to neutral Sweden, where the group then traveled by train to Petrograd.

Lenin's arrival in April energized the Bolsheviks. Fortuitously, April was also the month when the Russian public discovered the Provisional Government intended to stay in the war. The government's leadership believed it Russia's duty to honor its treaties and agreements with its allies. The public had believed the government would negotiate peace with the Central Powers, and these disclosures caused considerable unrest. In response, the government reorganized, bringing in socialists for the first time, including Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries.

Spotlight: The Socialist-Revolutionary Party

The Party of the Socialist-Revolutionaries (SR⁴⁸) arose out of an earlier, violent movement in the Russian Empire that espoused agrarian socialism, abolition of the Russian monarchy, fair distribution of land for the peasantry, and various populist causes. The SR coalesced out of several smaller groups in 1896–1902 and became a major political movement in Russia. It was an illegal party at first since until late 1905 all political parties were banned in the Russian Empire. Even if political parties had been legal in Russia, the SR still would have been a criminal organization in its early years for its use of violence.

The SR advocated democracy and socialism; it was influenced by several aspects of Marxism but did not become a Marxist party. For example, classic Marxists did not believe the peasantry would embrace revolution, but the SR did. The Marxist Bolsheviks did believe the peasantry could be co-opted to the revolution, but the SR had different goals than the Bolsheviks. For example, the Bolsheviks wanted to collective agriculture, while the SR wanted to allocate agricultural land to the peasants.

46 The other 31 included 11 Bolsheviks from Switzerland, plus 20 non-Bolshevik Russian revolutionaries Lenin insisted on bringing along, in the somewhat forlorn hope that it would not look like the German enemy had done a deal the Bolsheviks.

47 A sealed train was a legal fiction for international travel without its passengers being liable to border controls or arrest by national authorities and without its content being subject to customs, taxes, or confiscation. These trains needed not be physically sealed off, and Lenin's wasn't.

48 One common Russian abbreviation for the Party of the Socialist-Revolutionaries was SR, from **S**otsialisty-**R**evolyutsionery.



Assassination of Grand Prince Sergey Aleksandrovich, uncle of Tsar Nikolay II, by the SR, 17 February 1905

An SR goal was to build a mass movement of people who opposed the Russian monarchy and its political-economic system. This did not mean the early SR sought to change Russia by peaceful means. Instead, the SR assassinated Russian government officials, in hopes of gaining supporters and of also intimidating the government into making concessions. This terrorism was controversial even within the party. When the SR discovered in 1908 that an Okhrana agent provocateur was organizing assassinations, the SR renounced its policy of assassination.

World War I brought dissension within the SR as it did to most socialist organizations in the countries at war. Socialist parties had earlier participated in the Second International, which among its many goals stood for international socialist solidarity and opposition to nationalism and war. WW1 broke this consensus, and most socialist parties in the warring states decided to support their countries' war efforts. This led to the dissolution of the Second International in 1916.

Some socialist parties, such as the Bolsheviks, denounced the war and remained committed to the internationalist ideal, although this initially hurt their popularity. Socialist parties that supported their countries' war efforts instead faced dissent within their ranks from their internationalist-minded members. In Russia, this affected both the SR and Mensheviks, with a majority in each party supporting Russia in the war and a minority being against the war.

SR dissension was further exacerbated after the February Revolution of 1917, which resulted in the abdication of the Tsar and the creation of a liberalizing, non-socialist Russian Provisional Government. Many SR members supported the Provisional Government and grew into a right-wing SR faction. The radical members became the left-wing SR faction and opposed the Provisional Government in favor of a socialist government. The Left SRs increasingly cooperated with the Bolsheviks against the Provisional Government. After the Bolsheviks' October Revolution overthrew the Provisional Government and created the Soviet state, the Left SRs split from the Party of Socialist-Revolutionaries (popularly called the Right SR) and formed their own party, the Party of Left Socialist-Revolutionaries. This party supported the new Soviet government, and the Bolsheviks rewarded the Left SR by allowing the party to head a few minor people's commissariats.

The decisive split between the Left SR and Right SR happened while preparations for elections to the Constituent Assembly were being organized. Many local SR organizations did not have time to split up, and most election ballots for the assembly did not differentiate between the Party of Socialist-Revolutionaries and the Party of Left Socialist-Revolutionaries. The result was a large peasant vote for the Right SR. This led the Bolsheviks and Left SR to argue (in their own self interest) that the elections did not really reflect the will of the peasants.

The Bolsheviks refused to join the reorganized Provisional Government, and Bolshevik popularity began to rise in Russia, especially among workers and soldiers. The association of the Menshevik and SR Parties with the weak and often ineffective Provisional Government in turn decreased their popularity, again especially among workers and soldiers. The Bolsheviks came to dominate the radical soviets (which came to be called the **Bolshevization of the soviets**). This led to their self-serving slogan, **All power to the soviets**, since this now meant power for the Bolsheviks. They also advocated for **Peace, Bread, and Land**⁴⁹, a potent call to many war-weary Russians.

The call for peace particularly resonated among common people and soldiers, since the war still did not go well for Russia. In July, Russia launched an offensive on the Eastern Front,

⁴⁹ This slogan came from Lenin's writings and appeared in several versions 1917. One popular one was "power to the soviets, land to the peasants, peace to the peoples, bread to the hungry" (<http://leninvi.com/t34/p339> in Russian) and another was "freedom, peace, bread for the hungry and land for the peasants" (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/jul/26a.htm> in English).

despite the shaky morale of many Russian soldiers. About a million Russians attacked a sector of the front held by about 300,000 Central Powers soldiers, with Germans in the north and Austro-Hungarians in the south. As was typical in this theater by now, the Russian offensive pushed back the Austro-Hungarians but failed against the Germans. Many Russian soldiers then refused to resume the assault, and their morale broke entirely when the enemy launched a counter-offensive. The Russians fled, losing much territory⁵⁰. This disaster not only proved that the Russian Army was unreliable, it caused further unrest on the home front.

To finance the war, the Provisional Government continued the same ruinous policies of the Tsarist government and introduced new ruinous ones. They attempted to address the crisis in food procurement with a grain monopoly⁵¹, which was supposed to take all grain and fodder at fixed prices, except for the amounts the peasants needed for their own consumption and necessary economic needs (meaning free-market sales to cover their expenses of growing the crops). Harsh economic penalties were instituted for peasants who tried to hide their output from the authorities. A Ministry of Food was created to supervise the monopoly. These measures were extremely unpopular with the peasants, resulting in widespread resistance and occasional violence against its implementation. The monopoly essentially failed, prompting the government to try to limit peasants selling grain to the free market for their necessary economic needs and then outright armed seizure of grain from the largest farms and from farms near railroad stations. All this failed, and the Ministry of Food only managed to collect about 40% of the agricultural output it intended to⁵². Even more repressive measures towards a total grain monopoly were under consideration in the final weeks of the government.

Inflation and food shortages thus worsened under the Provisional Government. Inflation had reached about 90% in 1916, damaging the Russian Empire, but soared to over 600% in 1917. The black market grew. Once the summer offensive failed, all the sacrifices the Russians were making seemed in vain. The economy, treatment of workers, and land reform

50 The Central Powers only halted when they outran their supply lines. Germany in 1917 was heavily engaged in defending against Allied offensive on the Western Front and did not have the resources to wage a prolonged offensive on the Eastern Front. Had it been able to, the Russian Army might have disintegrated.

51 The Russians at this time often referred to cereal grains as “bread”, so many works call it a “bread monopoly”. The Russians also used “bread” to mean food in general, since bread was the daily staple of most common people in Russia. Thus, the Bolsheviks 1917 call for “Peace, Land, and Bread” meant food.

52 They collected about 280 million *poods* (4.59 million metric tons; 5.06 short tons), about 43% of the planned 650 million *poods* (10.65 million metric tons; 11.74 short tons); <https://www.prlib.ru/en/node/363278/>.

for the peasants all remained potent issues the Provisional Government could not solve, so the soviets became the main beneficiaries of people seeking major reform in Russia.

The failure of the offensive sparked the July Days, a period of armed and violent demonstrations in the streets of Petrograd. Among the protesters were many soldiers, sailors, workers, and Bolshevik supporters, who called for an overthrow of the Provisional Government. The Bolshevik leadership itself refused to try to take power, but the Bolsheviks were blamed for the lawlessness and violence of the July Days. This gave the Provisional Government a pretext to move against the Bolsheviks. Government forces arrested some Bolshevik leaders and disarmed pro-Bolshevik Red Guards. Lenin and other Bolshevik leaders managed to go into hiding.

Spotlight: Governing the Party, Part 2: The Bolshevik Party

After the RSDRP split up into the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, both groups continued to use the organization scheme of the original RSDRP (see [Part 1](#)). Thus, the Bolsheviks had party congresses as their highest governing authority, with central committees handling issues between congresses.

The government cracked down on the Bolshevik leadership after the July Days but did not ban the Party itself. Its 7th Party Congress met just after the July Days, with 257 delegates. They did meet in secret to avoid the possibility of the authorities breaking up the meeting and arresting more members. Lenin and other Bolshevik leaders in hiding did not attend but had their followers direct the congress to approve Lenin's goals and policies.

The Mezhrayontsy, another RSDRP party that arisen in 1913, officially merged with the Bolsheviks at this congress. The Mezhrayontsy had originally been in between the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks in outlook, but the events of 1917 increasingly caused them to agree with the Bolsheviks. The Mezhrayontsy merger brought Lev Trotskiy into the Bolshevik Party. Trotskiy had become non-factional in the RSDRP in 1904, disagreeing with both the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks. He was a leader in the failed Revolution of 1905, afterwards escaping into foreign exile. He returned to Russia in May 1917 after the February Revolution, joined the Mezhrayontsy, and became chairman of the Petrograd Soviet. Once in the Bolsheviks, he would quickly become one of its more effective leaders.

This would be the Bolshevik's last clandestine congress before taking power. Afterwards, party congresses were held openly and their decisions were publicized throughout the state.

Lenin's policy of democratic centralism meant that a small group of leaders could exercise a great amount of power over the Bolshevik Party. All Lenin needed was a majority of Central Committee members in order to set the policies for the entire Party. Lenin's popularity and force of personality within the Party ensured that he and his followers would be on the committee. While a congress in theory could override policies made through the Central Committee, in practice this did not happen. Thus, rather than a bottom-up party democracy where the majority preferences of party members became policy, the Bolsheviks were a top-down party where the preferences of the top leaders became policy for all members.

The Central Committee itself only met intermittently. To make decisions, a committee meeting had to be scheduled and its members had to assemble, which could take time, particularly in chaotic times. With the situation so volatile in 1917, Lenin wanted a structure able to respond rapidly. He created the Political Bureau or **Politburo**, which consisted of a small group of Central Committee members who could meet as needed and were empowered to make decisions for the Central Committee when that body was not in session. In theory, the Central Committee when it did meet could change or negate Politburo decisions. In practice, this did not happen, and so by its nature the Politburo became the actual Party power center.

The Politburo was technically a temporary body because of the situation in Russia at the time. It would later be brought back and made a permanent feature of Party organization.



In August 1917, Lenin set up the first Politburo (*Politbyuro* in Russian, from *Politicheskoe Byuro*⁵³, “Political Bureau”) to provide political leadership for the Bolshevik’s impending revolution.

Lenin was head of the Bolshevik party and would be first head of the Soviet state. **Zinoviev** and **Kamenev** would often clash with Lenin and Trotsky but always reemerged as top Bolsheviks while Lenin lived. Later, Stalin had both arrested, convicted on false charges, and executed.

Trotsky was a fiery revolutionary and would become the tireless head of the Red Army, which he would lead to victory in the Russian Civil War. After the death of Lenin, Trotsky was deeply involved in the power struggles to take over the party. His opposition to Stalin ultimately resulted in him being expelled from the party, exiled from the country, and finally assassinated.

Stalin was fanatical and ruthless, but some at the time believed he was not quite up to the same intellectual caliber as other top Bolsheviks. After Lenin’s death, he progressively outmaneuvered all his opponents and gained supreme power. He proceeded thereafter to ruthlessly destroy all real, potential, or imagined enemies to his leadership.

Sokolnikov and **Bubnov** did not vie for top power. Both helped secure the revolution, fought in the civil war, and became competent people’s commissars. Sokolnikov had opposed Stalin’s rise and was rewarded with demotion, arrest, and conviction on false charges. Once in prison, Stalin had the NKVD kill Sokolnikov and blame it on other convicts. Bubnov was a loyal supporter of Stalin, but nonetheless he, too, was arrested, secretly sentenced to death, and executed.

The 1917 Politburo technically was a temporary body. Many English-language works claim it was disbanded in late 1917 after the Bolsheviks seized power. Actually, it just dropped “Political” from

53 Until October 1917, it was called the Narrow Composition (of the Central Committee).

its name and became the Bureau (*Byuro*) of the Central Committee. It had a varying composition of 4–6, but Lenin, Trotskiy, and Stalin were always members. Ya.M. **Sverdlov** was also on the Bureau. Sverdlov was a top Bolshevik, adroit at organizational administrative work, and “the most perfect type of professional revolutionary” in Lenin’s words. Sverdlov had a prodigious memory and was an invaluable source of information about Party members. Lenin came to rely on him extensively.

In August, the Russian Provisional Government tried again to get Britain to take the former Tsar and his family, but Britain refused. Instead, they were sent to a mansion in Tobolsk in western Siberia, living under house arrest. Tobolsk was a remote town about 240 km (150 miles) from the nearest railroad station. Officially, the move was for the former Tsar’s safety, due to the unrest of the July Days. It seems likely it was also to get the former Tsar out of easy reach of monarchist groups.

Conservative Russians, monarchists, and various army officers were dissatisfied with the Provisional Government. In September 1917, L.G. Kornilov, the commander of the Russian Army, marched troops towards the capital, ostensibly to end the revolutionary threat posed by Petrograd Soviet. It was widely believed, including by members of the Provisional Government, that Kornilov also planned to stage a coup against the government and establish himself as a military dictator. To bolster the defense of the capital, the Provisional Government provided weapons for the Petrograd Soviet to arm its supporters, including the previously-disarmed Red Guards. Imprisoned Bolshevik leaders were also released to help lead the Red Guards.

An armed struggle for the capital did not occur. The Petrograd Soviet used its influence over Russian railroad workers slow the transport of Kornilov’s force and to have agitators convince many of Kornilov’s soldiers to desert. Kornilov’s advance collapsed, with the government removing Kornilov from his post. Although a right wing threat had been dealt with, left wing groups were now even stronger. The freed Bolsheviks remained at large, and the Red Guards kept their weapons, an ominous situation.

The basic structure of Russia had been in question ever since the February Revolution: monarchy, republic, or some other arrangement? There was even a potential emperor in waiting. When Nikolay II abdicated in March, he had named his brother, Grand Prince Mikhail as his successor⁵⁴. Mikhail, however, realized how unpopular the Romanovs had become and declared he would take the throne only if the Constituent Assembly decided to invest him with “supreme power”. Although Nikolay II and his family were soon placed

⁵⁴ Nikolay II did not name his son, Crown Prince Alexey, as successor since Alexey was seriously ill with hemophilia. Mikhail is often called a “Grand Duke” in English, but his title was “*Velikiy Knyaz*”, meaning Grand Prince or Great Prince.

“Grand Prince Mikhail” is often rendered in English as “Grand Duke Michael”. Russia did not even have a ducal title.

under house arrest, under the Provisional Government Mikhail remained free except for one short spell of house arrest.

In September 1917, the Provisional Government declared the country to be a republic, the Russian Republic, even though technically this was a matter for the Constituent Assembly. This decision was taken in part as a political move to dampened the soviets' demands for a "democratic republic". The declaration was popular with liberal Russians but not with monarchists who wanted to restore Imperial rule, other conservatives who wanted a military dictatorship, radical socialists who wanted some form of socialist state, or anarchists who wanted the state dismantled to varying degrees. The Constituent Assembly was still charged with creating a constitution when it finally met, and it could in theory choose another form of government for Russia other than a republic.

Before the elections to the Constituent Assembly began, the Bolsheviks struck.



Left: V.I. Lenin Proclaims Soviet Power (painting by V.A. Serov, 1947)

Right: V.I. Lenin Proclaims Soviet Power (painting by V.A. Serov, circa 1956)

Serov depicts a highly dramatized scene of Lenin at the Smolny Institute in Petrograd on 7 November 1917 (25 October, Julian calendar). He is "proclaiming Soviet power", which actually means he is announcing the start of the Bolshevik Revolution.

This scene was painted during Stalin's rule as dictator of the USSR. It is no coincidence that the person immediately behind Lenin on the podium is Stalin, with arch-rival Trotsky nowhere to be seen. After Stalin died in 1953, the new Soviet leadership began dismantling the cult of personality Stalin had built up around himself. Serov was ordered to create new versions of the painting, replacing Stalin and the other Bolshevik leaders behind Lenin with common proletarian workers.



(Finland) was a semi-autonomous region of the Russian Empire and Russian Republic. In December 1917 Finland declared its independence following the Bolshevik Revolution, and the Soviets recognized Finnish independence later that month.

(Bukhara), (Khiva), and (Tuva) on the map had officially been protectorates of the Russian Empire but with no true autonomy. All three would become battlegrounds during the Russian Civil War.

The **CER Zone** was the Russian-administrated zone of the Chinese Eastern Railway, the rail shortcut through Manchuria between Vladivostok and the Trans-Siberian Railroad. During the Russian Civil War, the CER Zone came under the control of White Russian forces, although it would go over to Soviet control in 1924.

Russian forces on the **Eastern Front**, **Caucasus Front**, and **Iran** (at the time, called “Persia” in English and “*Persiya*” in Russian) had been controlled by the Russian Provisional Government. After the revolution, the Soviet state controlled these troops. The Eastern Front remained intact but fragile. Troops on the Caucasus Front fell into disarray. Many soldiers on this front simply went home, other than some Cossacks and local troops like Armenians that remained facing the Ottomans. Iran had been divided into Russian and British spheres of influence before World War I. Northern Iran was the Russian sphere, with Russian troops stationed there. The Bolsheviks renounced the sphere of influence in 1917 and withdrew all remaining Russian forces from there in early 1918, although some anti-Bolshevik officers and troops refused to leave and went into exile.

The Bolsheviks seized control of the city of Petrograd and Russia’s government. This occurred on 7 November 1917 per the calendars of most western countries but was called the October Revolution since it began on 25 October per Russia’s Old Style calendar. Red Guards, revolting soldiers, mutinying sailors, and other groups assisted the Bolsheviks in their seizure of power. The Red Guards in Petrograd Soviet proved crucial in taking over the capital and suppressing the Provisional Government. The revolution quickly spread to other places in the country, with the Bolsheviks soon gaining control of many other cities. Industrial cities quickly fell to Bolshevik control, as local Bolshevik organizations, Red Guards, and rebellious soldiers and sailors took over the city governments. Even some non-industrial cities without many factories or workers easily fell to the Bolsheviks, including Vladivostok (taken over by mutinying sailors), although other non-industrial cities like Irkutsk were taken only after bloody battles.

Spotlight: Why 7 November 1917?

The Bolsheviks picked 7 November (25 October Julian) for their coup against the Russian Provisional Government, as this was the day the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies was scheduled to convene in Petrograd. The Bolsheviks planned to have this congress legitimize their takeover. Although the congress technically did not have the legal authority to usurp the Provisional Government, its approval nonetheless would count among the many people favoring a socialist state in place of the Provisional Government. The congress was guaranteed to recognize the Bolshevik power grab, since it was controlled by Bolsheviks.

Deputies to the Second Congress were elected by the various soviets throughout Russia, and the Bolsheviks over the course of 1917 gained control of many of these soviets. These in turn elected deputies to the congress that gave the Bolsheviks an absolute majority, although the left wing of the Socialist-Revolutionaries could also be counted on to support the Bolsheviks.

Composition of the Second Congress (649 deputies; 325 needed for a majority⁵⁵)

390 Bolsheviks

160 Socialist-Revolutionaries

72 Mensheviks

14 United Internationalists⁵⁶

7 Ukrainian socialists

6 Mensheviks-Internationalists⁵⁷

The Socialist-Revolutionaries included both the Right SR and Left SR factions. Some works claim “about 100” of the SR deputies were with the Left SR.

While it is certain that the Second Congress would approve the Bolshevik coup, this event split the congress. The Mensheviks and the right Socialist-Revolutionaries denounced the Bolshevik action as an illegal seizure of power and walked out of the congress.

The Second Congress also determined the initial structure of the Soviet government, which is covered in more detail [later](#). Of the 116 seats in the resulting All-Russian Central Executive Committee, the Bolsheviks had 67 (a majority), the Left SR had 29, and other minor groups had 20. Bolshevik control of the Soviet of People’s Commissars (Sovnarkom), which was in day-to-day charge of government operations, was even more overwhelming.

The Bolsheviks soon met some resistance to their takeover, but it initially was mostly neither well organized nor very effective. After walking out of the Congress, Mensheviks and

55 Some English-language works claim that the Second Congress had 670 deputies of which only 300 were Bolsheviks, but this is not supported by other English-language works or by Russian-language works. Some sources also say the Menshevik-Internationalists had 14 deputies (not 6) and the United Internationalists had 6 (not 14), but this seems in error.

56 This was the Organization of the United Social Democrats-Internationalists, a group that formed in 1917. They were internationalist socialist favorable to the Bolsheviks’ goals of creating a Soviet socialist state but critical of the Bolsheviks’ violent means of accomplishing this end.

57 The Mensheviks-Internationalists were not the Mezhrayontsy aka the RSDRP (Internationalists), which had earlier merged with Bolsheviks. Instead, they were the left-wing faction of the Menshevik Party. The Mensheviks supported the Russian participation in the war but the Mensheviks-Internationalists did not.

Right Socialist-Revolutionaries agitated against the Bolsheviks without much effect, except in Georgia where the Mensheviks had control of the region and refused to recognize the Soviet government. Kerenskiy, the at-large leader of the Provisional Government, gathered some troops and attempted to regain control of Petrograd, but he failed. This was the final end for the Provisional Government, which passed into irrelevance.

The Bolsheviks were strongest in the cities, where the factories and thus the Red Guards were located. This meant many cities quickly went over to the Bolsheviks. They were weakest in the rural countryside, although they did have some support among the peasants due to Bolsheviks promising land (without ownership rights, however) to the peasants. Over the next few weeks from 7 November, the more militant Red Guards took the field with other revolutionary forces to help the Bolsheviks and the Soviet government gain control of many areas.

The Bolsheviks were concerned that counter-revolutionaries might try to restore the monarchy under a Romanov. They placed former Grand Prince Mikhail under house arrest in Petrograd when it was discovered he was preparing to flee to Finland. When the Soviets took control of Tobolsk, they continued the house arrest of the former Tsar and his family. The Soviet guards watching the former royal family gradually restricted their activities and subjected them to various (albeit mostly mild) indignities. Far worse was to come for the Romanovs.

As Soviet forces were taking control many areas of the country, the Bolshevik leaders were also busy establishing their socialist government. They quickly began to implement parts of their socialist agenda. How well did the Bolsheviks live up to their 1917 “Peace, Bread, and Land” slogan? They acted on peace and land almost immediately.

On 8 November 1917 they issued a **Decree on Peace**, calling for “all warring peoples and their governments to begin at once negotiations leading to a just democratic peace”. They ostensibly wanted warring governments to agree to an immediate truce and negotiate a peace. This peace would then be ratified by “by plenipotentiary assemblies of the people’s deputies of all countries and all nations”, which no doubt the Bolsheviks hoped would be controlled by socialists. The warring countries simply ignored the decree, but this was no surprise. The decree was a propaganda move that many Bolsheviks hoped would help start proletarian revolutions. This did not occur⁵⁸. The Decree on Peace did have an important effect inside Russia. The Bolsheviks widely publicized the decree to show they were working

58 When World War I finally ended about a year later in 1918, revolutions did break out in parts of some of the defeated countries, but these were not directly caused by the Decree on Peace.

for peace, which helped increase their popularity. They followed this up by agreeing to a ceasefire with the Central Powers on 15 December.

The Bolsheviks also quickly acted on land, issuing a **Decree on Land** on 9 November 1917. This categorically abolished private ownership of land, without compensation for the former owners. Land was now owned by the people collectively, under the supervision of the Soviet government. Peasants were given tenure (not ownership) to the land they farmed. This, however, was only conditional, “to guide the implementation of the great land reforms until a final decision on the latter is taken by the Constituent Assembly”. This phrasing was likely deliberately and vaguely worded to avoid mentioning that the Bolsheviks wanted to collectivize agriculture in the future. (On 9 November, elections for the Assembly had not occurred and the Bolsheviks had high hopes that the body would create a socialist state on Marxist lines.) Like the Decree on Peace, the Decree on Land was widely publicized and temporarily gained the Bolsheviks some support from the peasants.

***Spotlight:* The Start of State Farms**

The Decree on Land meant the Soviet state seized all landholdings from large landlord estates. Rather than parceling this land out as tenured holdings to landless peasants, the Soviets decided to organize this land into state farms under the People’s Commissariat of Agriculture. The farms were to serve as models of Soviet plans for large-scale socialist agriculture. A state farm was known as a *sovkhos*, a contraction of the phrase *sovetskoe khozyaystvo*, soviet farm. The first state farms were organized in early 1918, and many became specialized farms, such as stud farms, livestock breeding operations, and farms for industrial crops (cotton, flax, sugar beets, tobacco, etc.), although some were general farms. Landless peasants were hired as workers for the state farms⁵⁹. They became state employees with their wages paid by the state. The output of the farms went to the state for distribution. State farms comprised about 2,090,000 hectares (5,165,000 acres) in 1918–1919, rising to about 3,324,000 hectares (8,214,000 acres) in 1922 as the Soviet won the civil war and consolidated their power.

⁵⁹ Likely many of the initial workers at state farms came from the peasants who had been employees or tenants of the landlords’ estates, but I have not researched this in any detail.



A painting on Lenin with the peasants of Shushenskoe, during his sentence of internal exile to Siberia, 1897–1900⁶⁰

Spotlight: The Start of Collective Farms

([See above](#) for the development of the cooperative movement in Russia.)

Before they came to power, the Bolsheviks had envisioned a socialist transformation of Russian agriculture through the creation of “comradely farms” or communes, voluntary associations of peasants farming the land in common without private property and sharing the fruits of their labor among themselves. When the Bolsheviks came to power as the Soviets in November 1917, they encouraged the creation of communes. These were different than the existing agricultural cooperatives, which were not socialist agriculture since they utilized private property and sought profits for their members. Many Bolsheviks at first, particularly Lenin, believed communes should supplant agricultural cooperatives.

The Soviets did not just disapprove of agricultural cooperatives but regarded all types of cooperatives as bourgeois and part of the capitalist system they were overthrowing. However, the cooperative movement in Russia was extensive, popular, and thriving despite (or because of) world war, revolution, and civil war. The Soviets had to come to terms with them and began to assimilate the entire cooperative movement. In April 1918, a Soviet decree regulated cooperatives, giving them the task of distributing goods in the Soviet state but prohibiting owners of “enterprises having a private capitalist character” from the management of cooperatives⁶¹. Lenin that month published an essay in *Pravda*, the Party newspaper, explaining how this development was taming the

⁶⁰ Painting: V.N. Basov; *V.I. Lenin sredi Krestyan Sela Shushenskogo (V.I. Lenin among the Peasants of the Village of Shushenskoe)*; 1954.

“bourgeois cooperatives” that “capitalism has bequeathed to us”, using them to build socialism “slower than we originally anticipated, but at the same time more sustainable”⁶².

Based on cooperatives and communes, the Soviet created three types of collective farming organizations. The most popular was the TOZ (for *Tovarishchestvo po Sovmestnoy Obrabotke Zemli*, sometimes abbreviated TSOZ, the Partnership for the Joint Cultivation of the Land). The TOZ evolved in the early years of the NEP, and the Soviets regulated and standardized it in 1924⁶³. Peasants in a TOZ pooled their farmland and labor but continued to own their own property like buildings, agricultural equipment, and livestock (hence the popularity of this organization). They shared the proceeds of the TOZ based on contributions of both their labor and their property.

The second most popular organization was the agricultural *artel*, which pooled farmland, labor, and the means of production (equipment, draft animals, farm buildings needed for the operations of the *artel*). Members of the *artel* continued to own their residences, personal farms, and some livestock. Members shared the proceeds of the *artel* based on the amount and quality of the labor they provided.

The least favorite organization was the agricultural commune, in which all land, livestock, equipment, and farm buildings were pooled. Commune members did not even have personal plots to farm. The members shared the proceeds of the commune based on need (larger families receiving proportionally more), not on the labor they provided. The unpopularity of communes is shown in Soviet statistics: in June 1929, communes accounted for 6.2% of all collective farms in the country, compared to TOZes at 60.2% and agricultural *artels* at 33.6%.

61 The Soviets had considered banning all “bourgeois elements” from the manage of cooperatives but changed their minds. I have not researched the reason for this much, but the timing of the decree (April 1918) was around the same time that the Soviets realized they needed expert assistance in their government, military forces, and enterprises. The bourgeoisie and other class enemies had earlier been purged from these organizations, removing many experienced people. The organizations then functioned so inefficiently that many of these people had to be brought back as “experts” and “specialists”. I think it thus likely that the Soviets now realized a more-massive purging of bourgeois elements from the cooperatives would harm them.

62 Patrick Le Tréhondat; “*La révolution russe et les coopératives*” (“The Russian Revolution and the Cooperatives”); 2016; <https://autogestion.asso.fr/la-revolution-russe-et-les-cooperatives/> (in French).

63 This standardization was undertaken by the People’s Commissariat of Agriculture of the Russian SFSR, as at that time each union republic had its own agricultural commissariat with there being no agricultural commissariat at the all-union level. (One was organized in 1929.) I do not know if the agricultural commissariats of the other union republics regulated the TOZ organization, but I suspect they did. The Ukrainian SSR certainly had TOZes, which were even more popular there than in other places.

By or before 1921, the term **kolkhoz** for any type of collective farm came into use. Kolkhoz was a contraction of the phrase *kollektivnoe khozyaystvo* (collective farm).

Many peasants who prospered with their own tenured farmland were not interested in becoming collective farmers. Even many peasants with inadequate farms or no farm at all would have preferred to receive their own adequate allotment of land. Lenin attributed this peasant reluctance to form collective farms as ignorance of their benefits. Although joining a collective farm was voluntary at the time, Lenin in 1918 made clear that the future of Soviet agriculture was socialist farming. The peasants would be gradually, persistently, “mainly by force of example”, reorganized into collective farms: “we shall have to fight for collective farming”⁶⁴. Stalin would take up the fight in the late 1920s and force collectivization on almost all of the peasants.

The third promise, bread (food for everyone), simply could not be realized. There were already major food shortages in Russia when the Bolsheviks took power. In fact, the Soviet government itself would adopt policies that increased food shortages. They continued the previous grain monopoly and turned the existing Ministry of Food into the People’s Commissariat of Food. As the Russian Civil War became widespread in 1918, food shortages would worsen, not lessen. The Bolsheviks would resort to very repressive measures to procure food so that their cities could eat and their troops be fed well enough to fight the civil war. Unlike the Tsarist state and Provisional Government, the Bolsheviks were willing to inflict extreme penalties on the peasant to get their food, so their policies in the short term worked. The overall food shortage continued to worsen, but the Bolsheviks would publicly blame their enemies for the shortages rather than their own policies:

“The famine is not because there is no grain in Russia, but because the bourgeoisie and all the rich are fighting the last, decisive battle against the rule of the working people, the state of the workers, the Soviet power on the most important and acute question, on the question of bread.”

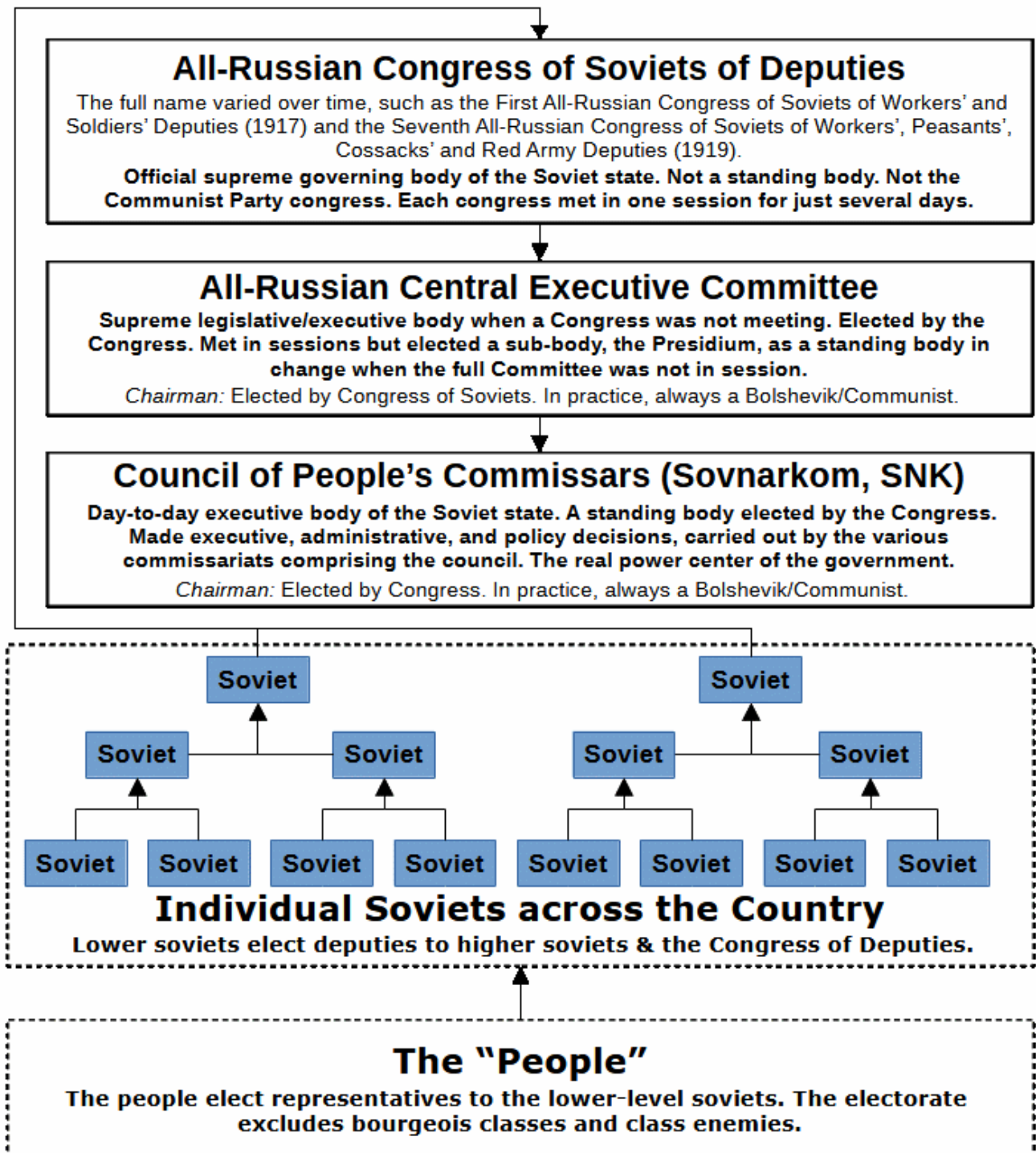
— V.I. Lenin, “On the Famine”, a letter to Petrograd workers; 22 May 1918⁶⁵

64 From a speech by V.I. Lenin at the First All-Russia Congress of Land Departments, Poor Peasants’ Committees and Communes; 11 December 1918.

65 <https://istmat.org/node/45433> (in Russian).

6 Soviet Russia, 1917 to early 1918

Spotlight: Summary of Soviet Government Organization, 1917–1922



There were **soviets** at various governmental levels throughout the Soviet state. The electorate directly elected deputies to the lowest-level, local soviets. For a

short time, these elections were conducted fairly, albeit with a reduced electorate. However, the Soviets disenfranchised people considered to be class enemies, in the bourgeois classes, or beholden to the former regimes:

Those who employ others for profit; those who live on incomes not derived from their own work – interest on capital, industrial enterprises or landed property; private business men, agents, middlemen; monks and priests of all denominations; ex-employees of the old police services and members of the Romanov dynasty; lunatics and criminals.⁶⁶

The effect of this meant socialist groups dominated many of the local soviets. As the Soviet state grew in power, it progressively limited who could run for election until the Communist Party had a monopoly on elective office.

The lowest soviets elected delegates to the next-higher soviets (such as district soviets), which in turn elected delegates to the next-higher ones (such as regional soviets). The apex of this system was the election of deputies to the **All-Russian Congress of Deputies**. The voters themselves did not directly elect any deputies to the higher soviets or the Congress of Deputies, until the constitution of 1936 went into force.

The All-Russian Congress of Deputies was the officially highest government authority and met in a single session for a few days. These congresses voted on changes to the constitution, ratified peace treaties, and elected deputies to the All-Russian Executive Committee (see below). As the Communists established their monopoly of political power, they gain full control of these congresses, which increasingly became rubber-stamp meetings to approve policies the Communist leaders had already decided on.

The **All-Russian Executive Committee** was one step below the Congress and had legislative, administrative, and executive authority when a congress was not in session. These committees met intermittently, although more often than the congresses. The Committee had a sub-body, the **Presidium**, that handled matters when the Committee itself was not in session. Over time, the committees and the presidiums also mostly became rubber-stamp bodies.

⁶⁶ The March 1918 election rules, as given in the "Soviet" entry in *The Encyclopedia Americana*; 1920; [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Encyclopedia_Americana_\(1920\)/Soviet](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Encyclopedia_Americana_(1920)/Soviet). A different phrasing but with no significant change in meaning can be found in Paul P. Gronsky; "The Zemstvo System and Local Government in Russia, 1917-1922"; *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 4; 1923; <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2142478.pdf>.

The **Council of People's Commissars**, (often abbreviated **Sovnarkom** or **SNK**), from **Sovet Narodnykh Kommissarov**) was the executive body of the Soviet state, although it also had some legislative ability. It consisted of a chairman (always Lenin, until his death), the heads of each people's commissariat, and selected other top government officials, such as Sovnarkom's head of administration during 1917–1920. Despite officially being lower rung of the government under the congresses, executive committees, and presidiums, Sovnarkom was in practice the real governmental power center. Accordingly, the Communists always dominated Sovnarkom. For a brief period, they allowed the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries to head a few minor commissariats, but the Communists always held all the important commissariats and always had an overwhelming majority in Sovnarkom. Since the Communists on Sovnarkom were almost always in the Communist Party's Central Committee or Politburo, this meant that the same small group of Communists effectively controlled both Party and state.

This was the government structure of the Soviet state, which assumed the name the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic in 1918. In late 1922, the USSR was formed with the Russian SFSR and three other socialist soviet republics. This government structure then went through a transitional period until 1924 when the first constitution of the USSR was enacted.

The beginnings of the **Russian Civil War** began soon after the Bolsheviks seized power. Ukraine was an early flash point. The Ukrainian Central Rada had gained autonomy for part of Ukraine from the Provisional Government in August 1917. After the Bolsheviks came to power in November, the Central Rada proclaimed the **Ukrainian People's Republic** (UNR, for *Ukrainska Narodna Respublika*) as an autonomous entity within Russia. The UNR was mostly social democratic and socialist but relations with the intolerant Bolsheviks and the Soviet state quickly broke down. The Soviets in December started military operations against the UNR and set up in Kharkov the Ukrainian People's Republic of Soviets ("Soviet Ukraine"⁶⁷), supposedly an autonomous state that chose to be federated with Soviet Russia. It was really a puppet state controlled by Soviet Russia, and allowed the Soviets to pretend that Ukraine would keep its autonomy under the Soviets. (Direct rule from Soviet Russia would have alienated some Ukrainians who would otherwise be pro-Soviet.) Soviet Russia also pretended the civil war in Ukraine was an internal conflict between the UNR and Soviet Ukraine. In actuality Soviet Russia sent substantial (for that time) forces to fight in Ukraine.

⁶⁷ In Russian, *Ukrainskaya Narodnaya Respublika Sovetov*. It was often known as the UNRS or the Soviet UNRS, but since these cause too much confusion with the UNR, I do not use them. Instead, I use "Soviet Ukraine".

In response, the UNR converted the Free Cossack movement, which had formed in 1917 as an organization of local self-defense militias, into a territorial army.



The borders of Ukraine were a contentious issue, due to history, language, and ethnic identity. In the Russian Empire, Ukraine was not a single political entity. Instead, nine provinces of the Russian Empire were traditionally considered to make up Ukraine, although only the northern part of the Taurida Governorate was considered part of Ukraine. The Crimea, the southern part, was at the time considered part of Russia until 1954, when the USSR transferred it from the Russian SFSR to the Ukrainian SSR.

These nine provinces, minus the Crimean part of the Taurida Governorate comprised the territory the Ukrainian Central Rada claimed in 1917 for an autonomous Ukraine. The Russian Provisional Government in August only granted the Ukrainians autonomy in five of these provinces. In many

parts of Ukraine, like in many other parts of the Russian Empire and eastern Europe in general, large areas contained a mixture of several ethnolinguistic groups. The nine provinces of Ukraine thus not only had Ukrainian speakers but also many Russian speakers in the west and south, many Belarusian speakers in the north, some Polish speakers in the northwest, and many other smaller groups. In turn, many Ukrainian speakers lived outside the nine provinces: the western regions of Southern Russia and the North Caucasus, what is now northern Kazakhstan, and places in Siberia. Not all areas near Ukraine had significant numbers of Ukrainian speakers. In particular, in the Crimea, Ukrainian speakers were less than 12% of the population.

A further complication was that language was not always a guide to ethnic identity. There were, for example, Russian speakers in Ukraine who identified as Ukrainian rather than Russian, as well as bilingual people who spoke Ukrainian at home but Russian in public, who might consider themselves either Ukrainian or Russian.

Bessarabia, a western province of the empire, had a diverse population of Moldavians/Romanians, Ukrainians, and many other ethnic groups.

There were also Ukrainian speakers in places outside the Russian Empire: a small region in northern Romania and a large region in eastern Austria-Hungary. The Austro-Hungarian province of Galicia in particular in its east was majority Ukrainian and minority Polish, while its west was majority Polish and minority Ukrainian. For historical reasons, Ukrainians in some places in eastern Europe were called Ruthenians, although this term in places could include people speaking other east Slavic languages. The Rusyns also inhabited eastern Europe; they spoke a language some countries considered its own east Slavic language while others considered it to be a dialect of Ukrainian.

This complicated situation would lead the Ukrainian People's Republic to claim a large state at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, as shown on the map.



Election posters in Petrograd, 12 November 1917

Although the Bolsheviks controlled the Soviet government and had no intention of ceding power, officially they claimed to embrace democracy. In November 1917, they allowed the

already-scheduled elections for the All-Russian Constituent Assembly to occur. The commission in charge of these elections was not controlled by the Bolsheviks and allowed all adult citizens to vote. Due to the chaos of the revolution throughout Russia, some places were unable to hold the elections until December or early 1918.



1917 election poster of the Party of Socialist-Revolutionaries
Partiya Sots.-Rev. / V borbe obretesh ty pravo svoye. / Zemlya i Volya
Party Soc.-Rev. / In struggle you will gain your rights / Land and Freedom

The Bolsheviks interfered with the Constituent Assembly elections, such as prohibiting some former members of the Tsar government to vote (in defiance of the election commission's rules), destroying printing presses of anti-Bolshevik groups to limit the ability to appeal for votes, and using Soviet paramilitary forces to try to intimidate people into voting for the Bolsheviks. Nonetheless, the election results were disappointing for the Bolsheviks. The Socialist-Revolutionary Party came in first with 39.5% of the vote (38% is also often claimed) and about 46% of the deputies actually elected. The Bolsheviks second at 22.5% of the vote (24% is also often claimed) and about 23% of the deputies. The elections were chaotic and incomplete due to the situation in Russia, and only 766 deputies out of a planned 808 were actually elected. The vote was not completely counted, so the vote totals are disputed. The results generally accepted by many historians are as follows.

*Composition of the Constituent Assembly (766 deputies)*⁶⁸

<i>Hard Left</i>	<i>Moderate Left</i>	<i>Moderate Right</i>	<i>Hard Right</i>
<i>Other: Ethnic, religious, special-interest, or other parties that did not necessarily fit on the left-right political spectrum.</i>			

<i>Group</i>	<i>Number of Deputies</i>	<i>Political Stance and/or Major Issues</i>
SR, – Right SR – Left SR Party of Socialist-Revolutionaries See main text below	374 ~336 ~40	The SR was riven by two factions. Right SR faction: moderate left and anti-Bolshevik. Left SR faction (about 40 deputies ⁶⁹): radical left for a democratic Marxist state; mostly pro-Bolshevik.
Bolsheviks, Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party (B)	180	Radical left; for a highly centralized Marxist-Leninist state with Bolsheviks in control.
Ukrainian Party of Socialist-Revolutionaries	81	Moderate left; for a federal Russian state with considerable autonomy for Ukrainian and other minorities.
Kadets, Constitutional-Democratic Party ⁷⁰	24	Moderate right. Before the February Revolution of 1917, they were for Russia as a constitutional monarchy. Afterwards, they were for Russia as a democratic parliamentary republic.
Mensheviks, Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party (United) ⁷¹	22	Moderate-to-radical left but anti-Bolshevik. Mostly for a democratic socialist state.
Alash	12	For Kazakh-Kyrgyz autonomy within Russia; mostly centrists.

68 Lev Grigorievich Protasov; *“Predvybornaya Kampaniya, Itogi i Uroki Vyborov Uchreditelnogo Sobraniya”* (“Election Campaign, Results and Lessons of the Constituent Assembly Elections”); https://www.rcoit.ru/lib/history/constituent_assembly/16993/ (in Russian). Note that other sources, especially English-language ones, give different figures, such as 183 deputies for the Bolsheviks.

69 Per https://www.1000dokumente.de/index.html?c=dokument_ru&dokument=0004_ese&object=context&l=ru (in Russian) or https://www.1000dokumente.de/index.html?c=dokument_ru&dokument=0004_ese&object=context&trefferanzeige=&suchmodus=&suchbegriff=&t=&l=de (in German).

70 In Russian, the *Konstitutsionno-Demokraticeskaya Partiya*. Their popular name, Kadet, came from the Russian pronunciation of their initials, KD (“Ka-Det”). The similarity of “Kadet” to “cadet” in English meant they were often called “Cadets” in English. This is misleading, as they were a middle-class liberal party with no connection to students officers at military schools. The Kadets received more votes than their deputy count suggests. They were strongest in the cities of western Russia, but the Bolsheviks won most of the elections in these cities at the expense of the Kadets. See <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13501670903016316?needAccess=true&journalCode=feej20>.

71 In August 1917, an attempt to unify various Menshevik factions and splinter parties with the main party resulted in the Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party (Menshevik) being renamed the Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party (United). However, the party popularly was still known as the Mensheviks.

Ukrainian Social Democratic Labor Party	11 Radical left; for Ukrainian autonomy.
Musavat (“Equality” in Azerbaijani)	10 For a Russian federal state with autonomy for Azerbaijanis and other minorities; centrists.
Armenian Revolutionary Federation, Dashnaktsutyun	9 For Armenian autonomy ⁷² ; moderate-to-radical left but mainly democratic.
People’s Socialists, “Enesy”, Labor People’s Socialist Party⁷³	5 Moderate left.
Zionists See note below	4 Cultural and religious autonomy for Jews in Russia; Zionists favored the creation of a Jewish homeland or state in Palestine.
Rightists	1 Hard right. (Most of the right-wing vote went to the Kadets as the practical rightish alternative to the Bolsheviks.)
Other socialists	8 Leftists of various sorts; not a unified voting block.
For autonomy or federalism	25 Autonomy or federation for various minorities; not a unified voting block.

Note: Jewish voters were not a monolithic block in favor of Zionists parties or even for non-Zionists Jewish parties. (Many Jewish parties sought cultural and religious autonomy for Jews in Russia while not being pro-Zionism, and some were explicitly anti-Zionist.) A number of Jews, particularly urban ones, were not strongly religious and some were not religious at all. These voted for a wide range of parties, mostly leftist ones. Rural Jews were much more traditional and religious and tended to vote for Jewish parties. However, even here many voted for other parties.

Although the Socialist-Revolutionaries were the big winners of the elections, there was a problem. The Left SRs had left Party of Socialist-Revolutionaries and formed their own party in November and December of 1917. This occurred after the candidate lists for Constituent Assembly elections had already been registered. There thus was just the Party of Socialist-Revolutionaries on the ballot, with many of its candidates being Right SR and some left SR. Since there was only one SR candidate per district, there was no way for voters to express their preference for the Right SR or Left SR. Thus, the vote for the SR elected many Right SRs (there were perhaps only 40 Left SR deputies out of the 374 SR deputies), but this reflected the popularity of the SR party over other parties and not necessarily a preference for the Right SR. Had there been time to have separate candidates for the Right SR and Left SR on

⁷² After the closure of the Constituent Assembly, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation would end up a separatist party promoting Armenian independence.

⁷³ The awkward name of the Labor People’s Socialist Party came about because the party was formed by merging the Trudoviks (*Trudovaya Gruppya*, Labor Group) with the Party of People’s Socialists (*Partiya Narodnykh Sotsialistov*, NS for short). Its “Enesy” name came from the Russian pronunciation of its NS initials.

the ballot, the Left SR likely would have received many votes at the expense of the Right SR⁷⁴. This allowed the Bolsheviks and Left SR to argue that the Constituent Assembly elections did not accurately reflect the electorate's preferences.

The support of the Left SR for the Bolsheviks allowed the Bolsheviks to make their government seem inclusive. The Left SR and some minor groups held seats on the All-Russian Executive Committee, although the Bolsheviks held a majority there. Sovnarkom, the true power center, only had Bolsheviks initially, but later in November the Left SR joined the Bolsheviks as part of the government. They were allowed to head five mostly-minor people's commissariats⁷⁵ plus have one people's commissar without portfolio, giving them a minority of votes on Sovnarkom. The Bolsheviks retained all the important commissariats and always ensured Sovnarkom would enact the Bolsheviks' policies. This would soon alienate the Left SR.

Although the Bolsheviks controlled the Soviet government, they faced substantial challenges throughout Russia. A perhaps incomplete list of major issues they faced is:

- End the war with the Central Powers.
- Deal with the Allied powers, who opposed Marxism and were alarmed that Russia might leave the war.
- Handle the freely-elected Constituent Assembly, which might select a form of government not to the Bolsheviks' liking.
- Implement their socialist program.
- Extend Soviet control over the rest of the country, including overcoming rebellious domestic opponents, quelling separatist movements, and attempting to defeat the growing forces of the civil war.
- Build a strong military force.

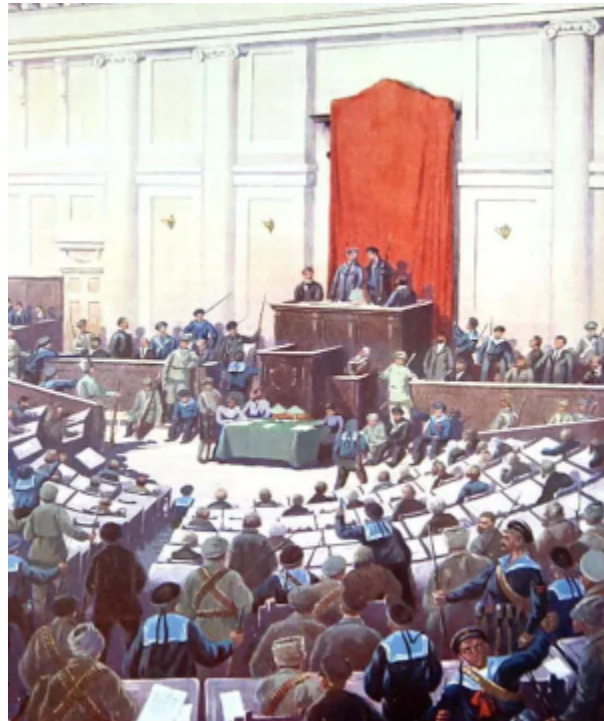
74 Some works claim that the Left SR would have taken about half the votes the Right SR received. This is speculative based on elections to soviets around the time of the Constituent Assembly elections. However, unlike the elections for the Assembly, the Bolsheviks controlled electoral process to the soviets. From December 1917 they excluded the bourgeoisies and other groups (see Paul P. Gronskey; "The Zemstvo System and Local Government in Russia, 1917-1922"; *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 4; 1923; <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2142478.pdf>). I suspect this suppressed votes for the Right SR and benefited the Left SR. If so, then Left SR likely would not have taken half the SR vote in the fairer Assembly elections.

75 The Left SR headed Agriculture, Property, Justice, Post and Telegraph, and Local Government. While Agriculture might sound important, there was a separate People's Commissariat for Food headed by a Bolshevik. Bolsheviks held all the crucial commissariats: War and Naval Affairs (military forces), Foreign Affairs, Trade and Industry (the economy), Finance, and Railways.

- Revitalize the Russian economy.

These were imposing tasks. On the other hand, the Bolsheviks had near-boundless confidence in their abilities coupled with Marxist belief that history was on their side. They were also violent and ruthless, willing resort to almost any means to achieve their ends. One of their newspapers would soon call for “floods of blood of the bourgeoisie”; the Soviet secret police and fanatical Communists would rise to the challenge.

The war with Central Powers was perhaps the easiest to deal with at first. The Central Powers were eager to have Russia quit the war, as it would allow them to send significant forces from Russia to try to defeat the Allies on the Western Front in 1918. In December 1917, both sides agreed to a conditional ceasefire⁷⁶ and began negotiations towards a peace treaty.



Painting depicting the meeting of the All-Russian Constituent Assembly, January 1918

The Constituent Assembly was a much bigger worry for the Bolsheviks. It could in theory undo all decrees the Soviets had adopted after coming to power and could delegitimize the Soviet government by adopting a constitution for a different form of government. In the period between the Assembly elections and the convocation of the Assembly, it became clear that the anti-Bolshevik Right SR with support of other parties would control the Assembly

⁷⁶ The front lines were mostly inactive at this time. Limited ceasefires were arranged in early December followed by a general armistice that would keep renewing unless a party gave notice that it intended to resume hostilities. Romania, an Allied country on the southernmost sector of the Eastern Front, was not part of the ceasefire. With the Soviets arranging a ceasefire, however, Romania had no chance of holding out by itself and quickly negotiated its own ceasefire.

and would likely prevent the Bolsheviks from creating a Marxist socialist constitution. The Bolsheviks accordingly began publicly agitating against the Assembly's legitimacy while secretly preparing to move against it. The Right SR was certainly over-represented in the assembly at the expense of the Left SR, a fact that Bolshevik propaganda exploited to the fullest.

The Constituent Assembly began its first session on 18 on January 1918. Its initial actions proved that an anti-Bolshevik majority would indeed control the Assembly: a Right SR member was elected as chair over a pro-Bolshevik Left SR member. The Assembly then rejected the decrees of the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets, which had endorsed the Bolshevik's creation of the Soviet government in November. During a recess, the Bolsheviks and Left SR agreed to closed down the Assembly after its first meeting and then walked out.

The Assembly continued without these groups and passed a land reform law that invalidated the Bolshevik's November Decree on Land. It also appealed to the Allies in World War I to make peace and declared that Russia was a democratic federal republic⁷⁷, in effect confirming the earlier declaration of the now-defunct Provisional Government. This ended former Grand Prince Mikhail's chance of taking the throne through legal means. The Soviets had released Mikhail from house arrest before the Assembly met but would now soon arrest him again and sent him to Perm in the Urals.

The Assembly's first session had seen momentous decisions. There would be no second session. When the deputies returned to the assembly hall on 19 January, they found they were locked out, with Soviet propaganda declaring the enemies of the people were using the Right SR as a tool to undo the revolution and enslave the country. The Soviet government quickly proclaimed the Assembly was dissolved and all of its resolutions were voided. The closure of the Assembly did not spark major protests from the public, so the Soviets avoided any immediate consequences from this action.

⁷⁷ The Assembly adopted the name "Russian Democratic Federative Republic" (*Rossiyskaya Demokraticheskaya Federativnaya Respublika*) for the country on 18 January 1918. This name did not come into widespread use since the Soviets shut down the Assembly before it could adopt a constitution. The Soviets then on 25 January adopted an official name for the country, the Russian Soviet Republic. The timing is suggestive that the Soviets may have done this in part to suppress Russian Democratic Federative Republic, but my sources do not go into this.

The Soviets later that year renamed the country the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic. I do not know if this renaming was some reaction to the Russian Democratic Federative Republic name.

When the Whites formed a nominally country-wide government later in 1918, they did not use Russian Democratic Federative Republic but instead adopted Provisional All-Russian Government.

Sidetrip: No Major Protests to the Closure of the Assembly?

There were no major public protests to the Soviets closing down the Assembly. Several historians argue that the Assembly had not mattered much to the peasants, but this explanation ignores the fact that there were no major protests in the cities. Others point out that in the cities most workers supported the Soviets rather than the Assembly. These explanations are somewhat less than satisfying, as many peasants and workers had earlier voted in the elections for the Assembly. Also, the cities had many people who were not workers, and they did vote in the elections in great numbers.

Oliver Henry Radkey (in *The Election to the Russian Constituent Assembly of 1917*; 1950) attempts to explain the lack of major protests with "... while the democratic parties heaped opprobrium upon him [Lenin] for this act of despotism, their following showed little inclination to defend an institution which the Russian people had ceased to regard as necessary to the fulfillment of its cherished desires. For the Constituent Assembly, even before it had come into existence, had been caught in a back-eddy of the swiftly flowing stream of revolutionary developments and no longer commanded the interest and allegiance of the general population which alone could have secured it against a violent death."

If Radkey is correct, then why was the opening day of the Assembly in Petrograd celebrated by a large crowd and by a march in that city? The march was indeed smaller than the organizers had hoped, consisting mostly of the urban middle class without many workers, but it was still a major show of support. What I think is telling is that the Soviets used violence against supporters of the Assembly, as they shot at and dispersed the crowd. At least 50 were killed and at least 200 more were wounded, with the event becoming known as "Bloody Friday". When the Assembly was closed down, its supporters already knew the Soviets would use violence to suppress any public protest.

With the Bolsheviks in charge of the government, the Constituent Assembly really had no chance of success. I think hindsight strongly suggests that the Russian Provisional Government of 1917 should have concentrated on holding elections to the Assembly and the convoking the Assembly as soon as practical in 1917. Instead, the government concentrated on launching a new offensive on the Eastern Front, and when that failed events were set in motion leading to the Bolshevik's revolution. Had the Assembly been able to meet before the

Bolshevik coup, it might have been able to establish a new Russian constitution and government that could have gain wide support. This was not inevitable and might not have prevented a Bolshevik take-over, but it may have been Russia's best chance.

The Bolsheviks in late 1917 and early 1918 were busy implementing many of their Marxist policies. Since their goals included state control of all significant industries and economic activities, further confiscation of property like factories without compensation to their owners, the eventual collectivization of agriculture, and the suppression of class enemies, opposition to the Soviets grew considerably and increasingly turned violent. The early stages of what would become the Russian Civil War were now underway.

Sidetrip: When Did the Russian Civil War Start and End?

Some wars have definite starting and ending dates. The Russian Civil War was not one of these. Various works state that it began in 1917 or 1918 and ended in 1920, 1922, 1923, or 1924! This is because there was no defining event for either the start or end of this war.

It is possible to claim that the civil war started on 7 November 1917, when the Soviets seized power in Petrograd and other parts of Russia. Violent opposition to this takeover was immediate but was sporadic and unorganized. The war can also be thought to begin in December 1917, when more widespread revolts, resistance, and fighting broke out, such as between the Soviets and the separatist Ukrainian People's Republic and between the Soviets and the Don Cossacks. The civil war can also be considered to have started in early 1918 when the Soviets realized they were facing major, prolonged resistance and created the Red Army.

Determining the end of the civil was also messy. The last major White Army force was decisively defeated in November 1920, which thus can be considered the end of the civil war. However, there were considerable mopping up operations to do against minor White forces, rebel groups, separatists, revolting peasants, and so on. Some works put the end of the war on 25 October 1922, when the Soviets captured Vladivostok on the Pacific Ocean coast, the last White holdout on Soviet soil. There was yet mopping up to do after this, and thus 16 June 1923 is sometimes given as the end of civil war, when the Yakut revolt in northeastern Siberia was finally stamped out. However, Muslim Basmachi rebels were still holding out in Soviet Central Asia, and it took into 1924 until the Soviets gained effective control of all rebel areas in this region.

For convenience, I consider the civil war to have begun in December 1917 and to have ended in 1922, when the Soviets were confident enough to form the USSR by consolidating all their puppet states with their main state, the Russian SFSR.

There were many different groups and forces involved in the Russian Civil War, including:

- The Soviets, who were known as the **Reds** and had the **Red Guards** and then a **Red Army**. In the 19th Century, red had become the worldwide color representing socialism and communism. Red Guards were voluntary militias mainly of working-class men. Lacking uniforms, most would often wear red armbands to show their allegiance.
- The Soviets' main opponents came to be called the **Whites** and had the **White Army**. (also called the **White Guards** and **White Guardsmen**). The White movement was riven with many factions, including anti-Soviet socialists, socialist democrats, liberal republicans, monarchists, and ultra-nationalist reactionaries. This made it very difficult for the Whites to unify behind a single, stable White government.

The term "White Army" is somewhat misleading as it conjures an image of military force under a central command. Instead, regional White groups usually operated on their own, and their forces in the field often did not coordinate or cooperate well. As you might guess, this limited their effectiveness, especially against the high-centralized Soviet state and Red Army. Regional White governments and armies went by a variety of names, which they changed frequently. For simplicity, I use the following:

Eastern Whites: These were based in Siberia, the Russian Far East, the Urals, and parts of Central Asia (particularly in the north, what is now Kazakhstan). They were one of the major White groups. After a coup installed Admiral Kolchak as Supreme Ruler, I sometimes refer to this group as **Kolchak's Whites**.

Southern Whites: These were based in southern Russia and the North Caucasus; at times they expanded into the Crimea, Ukraine, the western region of Central Asia, and central Russia. They were the other of the major White groups.

Northern Whites: These were based in the far north region of European Russia. They were a small group mainly dependent upon Allied interventionist forces in the region and did not survive long after the Allies departed.

Northwestern Whites: These were based in northwestern Russia at first and then in Estonia. They were assisted by the Germans at first, as Germany was occupying the

Baltic region in 1918. When the Germans lost World War I, the Northwestern Whites cooperated with the Estonians and Allies. They were a small group but managed to threaten Petrograd, a major Soviet city, for a time.

Western Whites: These were based in Lithuania and regions near the German territory of East Prussia, as they were supported by Germany. Many of their troops were actually German citizens. They claimed to be fighting the Soviets but actually were a tool of Germany to try to control Lithuania, Latvia, and nearby areas, even after Germany lost World War I.

Transbaykal Whites: These were based at times in the Transbaykal region of Russia or in nearby areas in China and Mongolia. Their leader, G.M. Semyonov, was a Transbaykal Cossack of mixed Russian and Buryat parentage (the Buryats being a Mongolic ethnic group) who at times hoped to create a Great Mongol State out of traditional Mongol lands in the Transbaykal, Mongolia, parts of Siberia, and parts of China. The Transbaykal Whites mostly went their own way often with no regard for the Eastern Whites and essentially became allies of the Japanese interventionist forces in the Russian Far East and Siberia.

- Many people in the Slavic parts of Russia, particularly peasants and some Cossacks, wanted control over their own lives and land. They often opposed the Reds and Whites, as both groups tried to control them, take their crops, and conscript them. They became known as the **Greens** and the **Green People**. Their forces were sometimes called the **Green Army**, but this is very misleading as they were local militias with no unifying organization. Since they often fought as guerrillas, they were also called the **Green Partisans** and **Green Rebels**, often more accurate terms.

The Greens comprised a wide variety of political views, with right-wing ones more willing to cooperate with the Whites (the “white-greens”). Left-wing ones were more willing to cooperate with the socialists (the “red-greens”), although they could favor socialist groups other than the Bolsheviks. As the Soviets won the civil war, they increasingly called the Greens the **Green Bandits**, to discredit them in the eyes of general populace.

Ukrainian nationalists were also called the Greens. However, non-Slavic ethnic or religious groups fighting for independence like the Azerbaijanis, Georgians, and Muslims of Central Asia were **not** called Greens. (Some English-language works can give a wrong impression on this point.)

- Anarchists in two Russian revolutions of 1917 became called the **Black Guard**⁷⁸. The color black and the black flag were associated with anarchism since the 19th Century (although the red flag was also an anarchist symbol until the association with socialism and communism became overwhelming). This black connotation meant that, during the Russian Civil War, Ukrainian anarchists led by Nestor Makhno were often called the **Black Army**⁷⁹.

Makhno and the Ukrainian anarchists wanted to establish a stateless socialist society for peasants and workers. They worked towards this goal from 1917 and would fight, both conventionally and as partisans (guerrillas), against Ukrainian socialist-nationalists (the Ukrainian People's Republic), the Central Powers occupiers of Ukraine, Ukrainian authoritarians (the Ukrainian Hetmanate), the Don Cossacks, the Whites, and the Soviets. They supported a proletarian revolution against the bourgeoisie and private property and so would at times ally with the Soviets and fight alongside the Red Army. This Black-Red alliance was unstable, as the anarchists intensely disagreed with many aspects of the Soviets: their highly centralized state, their anti-democratic policies, and their use of a brutal secret police forces and other extremely repressive measures. To the Red Army, the anarchists were almost as big a problem as an ally as they were as an enemy. Many Red Army conscripts were peasants who disliked the Communists and found the anarchists far more attractive, so the Red Army experienced many desertions to the anarchists, whether fighting with them or against them.

The Ukrainian anarchists regarded the Soviets as misguided rather than a true enemy. The Blacks' true enemy was the White Movement, whom the Blacks believed were class enemies intent on restoring a bourgeois state that would oppress the proletariat and peasants. The Black Army would refuse White attempts to negotiate with them, even to the point of murdering White envoys seeking to open negotiations.

- The forces of the widespread Tambov peasant rebellion of 1920–1921 were sometimes called the **Blue Army**,⁸⁰ even though in the palette of the civil war they should have

78 Earlier, Russia also had a Black Hundreds movement of monarchist, Russian ultra-nationalists, unrelated to the Black Army anarchists of the civil war. The Black Hundreds movement was officially dissolved in 1917 after the February Revolution. Many former Black Hundreds members would join the Whites in the civil war.

79 Earlier, Russia also had a Black Hundreds movement of monarchist, Russian ultra-nationalists, unrelated to the Black Army anarchists of the civil war. The Black Hundreds movement was officially dissolved in 1917 after the February Revolution. Many former Black Hundreds members would join the Whites in the civil war.

80 This Blue Army had nothing to do with the Polish Blue Army, which originated during World War I from Poles fighting in France against the Central Powers. Their name came from the blue uniformed the French gave them. The Polish Blue Army

been Greens. Like the Green Army, the Blue Army was mostly not a centralized, unified military force. Instead, it has some regular soldiers and many peasant militias, which often operated as partisans against the Soviets.

- Many non-Slavic ethnic and religious groups in Russia sought independence, including Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Bashkirs, Buryats, Central Asian Muslims, Estonians, Finns, Georgians, Karelians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Moldavians, Mongols, Poles, and many more groups. These groups were not a united movement and were not associated with an overall color. Most groups went their own ways, a few cooperated with one another, and a few fought one another over control of land they had in common. Since the Reds and most of the Whites wanted a unified Russian state, these groups mostly opposed both these sides in the civil war.
- Until their defeat in late 1918, the Central Powers were active in the civil war. The Germans and Austro-Hungarians occupied Ukraine and drove out pro-Soviet forces there. Despite the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with the Soviets, German forces also entered regions of Russia outside the treaty's limits, like the Crimea, the North Caucasus, and Georgia in pursuit of objectives sometimes at odds with the Soviets or the Whites or other groups. Forces of the Ottoman Empire also fought to gain control of parts of the Transcaucasus, although they operated primarily against local nationalist movements rather than the Soviets or the Whites.

The Central Powers lost World War I in late 1918. German troops stayed in the Baltic region and Lithuania in 1919 trying to exert German control over this area. Ottoman troops withdrew home in 1918 but troops of the Turkish National Movement (which would be the Republic of Turkey and replace the Ottoman Empire) advanced back into the Transcaucasus in 1919–1920.

- Forces from many countries of the Allied Powers of World War I intervened in the civil war, ostensibly for limited objectives but overall in hopes of helping the Whites defeat the Soviets.

went to Poland after World War I and merged with newly-created Polish Army. Polish units originated from France were still sometimes called the Blue Army, so in 1920 the Soviets ended up fighting the Tambov Blue Army units in central Russia and Polish Blue Army units in Ukraine and Poland! The Russian Civil War was never tidy.

Sidetrip: Why White?

The Soviets were the first to call their main opponents the Whites, as an attempt to discredit them. The White movement at first did not call itself the Whites but came to be associated with white for lack of an alternative simple term.

The color white was partially associated with the Russian monarchy: Ivan III was the “White King” or “White Tsar” who had freed Russia from Tatar tribute⁸¹, Ivan IV was also the “White Tsar” (he often wore a white skullcap), and the Russian Imperial Guard had white dress uniforms.

Starting in the early 20th Century, ultra-conservatives and reactionaries embarked on a wave of pogroms in Ukraine and southern Russia, against people they blamed for Russia’s problems. They became known as the “White Guards” and mainly attacked Jews, although socialists were sometimes targeted.

During the Bolsheviks’ 1917 October Revolution, some volunteers fighting the Bolsheviks and the Red Guards wore white armbands to distinguish themselves and were thus called White Guards.

In Finland, a different White Guard movement arose, of moderates supporting Finnish autonomy or separatism. Like most empires, the Russian Empire did not look favorably on separatist movements. In World War I, the Finnish White Guards were further tarred in Russian eyes by a small group of Finns and Swedes from Finland fighting for Germany against Russia in hopes of Finnish independence. These were the “Jägers” (from their service in the Royal Prussian 27th *Jäger* Battalion), with their supporters in Finland known as the *Jääkär* Movement (Finnish) or *Jägar* Movement (Swedish). The Finnish White Guards became associated with the Jägers, and during the Finnish Civil War of 1918 the Jägers provided key veteran troops and officers for the Finnish White Army.

To the Soviets, calling their opponents the Whites or White Guards was a way to associate them with pogromists, the German enemy, separatists, and the old regime.

81 White in Russia had a context of being free from taxation or tribute. Ivan III freed Russia from Tatar tribute and thus came to be called the White King via the Latin “*Albus Rex*”. Although the Russians did not use Latin much, it was popular in Ivan’s time to promote the idea that Ivan’s domain was the Third Rome, the successor to the Roman Empire. (The first or western Roman Empire had fallen to the barbarians in the 5th Century and the second or eastern Roman Empire having fallen to the Turks in the 15th Century.) The idea of Third Rome led Ivan to informally call himself “tsar”, the Russian word for “emperor”, hence “White Tsar”. Tsar became the official title of the ruler of Russia with his successor, Ivan IV.



Notes: The Ural Cossacks were originally named the Yaik Cossacks, named for the Yaik River in the area, with Yaitsk as their headquarters. After Pugachyov's Rebellion of 1773–1775, a massive revolt of peasants and Cossacks in the Yaik River region, the Russians eradicated this name, renaming the river the Ural, the town Uralsk (now Oral, Kazakhstan), and the Yaik Cossacks the Ural Cossacks.

The Transbaykal Cossacks as sometimes called the Baykal Cossacks in English-language works.

Spotlight: The Cossacks

The Cossacks arose in the Middle Ages, in the sparsely-populated Wild Fields southeast of Poland-Lithuania and south of the Grand Principality of Moskva. At the time, this steppe region, which is now part of central and southern Ukraine, was dominated by horse empires like the Golden Horde and Crimean Khanate. These were military states of the steppes that frequently raided nearby lands for tribute and slaves. The region was called the Wild Fields because the frequent raids made it virtually impossible for towns or cities to exist and even made it difficult for farmers to settle these steppes.

The Cossacks start showing up in written histories of Poland and Russia around the 14th and 15th Centuries. The word "Cossack" (*Kazak* in Ukrainian; *Kozak* in Russian) ultimately derived from a Turkic language word meaning "free person" but also "raider", "adventurer", and "nomad". The early Cossacks themselves had no written histories, so the time of their actual origins is unclear. Their ethnic origins have been highly disputed since the 19th Century by various ethnic or

nationalist groups wishing to claim a connection to them for various reasons. Whatever their early origins or languages, the Cossacks under the Russian Empire were considered Slavs, spoke Russian or Ukrainian⁸², and were members of the Russian Orthodox Church. Many non-Cossack Slavic individuals joined the Cossacks over time, especially Russian and Ukrainian run-away serfs seeking freedom. Later, the Russian Empire would have some non-Slavic individuals and groups join the Cossacks.



19th Century illustration of Ural Cossacks' horse-riding skills

The early Cossacks lived in a loose federation of independent communities with no central government. They supported themselves by raiding, herding, hunting, and fishing, but avoided farming. They considered themselves independent of Poland, Russia, and the Crimean Khanate, even though all these states laid claim to Cossack lands. As the Cossacks came into view of recorded history, they were known as skilled horse warriors, often in conflict with the Crimean Khanate. Both sides were notorious for raiding the other, often resulting in a long series of tit-for-tat retaliatory raids after some initial raid. Although the Cossacks were legendary as horsemen, poorer Cossacks could not afford to maintain horses and fought as “foot Cossacks”. Cossacks from the Wild Lands also often built boats

82 The Kuban Cossacks of southern Russia, for example, mostly spoke Balachka, a Ukrainian dialect.

and sailed the rivers and Black Sea to raid lands and cities to their south, as far as the gates of Kostantiniyye (“Constantinople”)⁸³, capital of the Ottoman Empire.

Poland’s claim of sovereignty over the lands of the Zaporozhian Cossacks made these Cossacks nominal subjects of this state, although they remaining fiercely protective of their autonomy. In 1648, Bohdan Khmelnytsky, hetman (leader) of the Zaporozhian Cossacks, began a set of uprisings against Poland that created a mostly-independent Cossack Hetmanate in what is now north-central Ukraine. The Hetmanate did achieve independence from Poland, but only at the cost of becoming a vassal of Tsar of Russia in 1654. Under Russian rule, Cossacks partially began to take up farming, but this remained a distinctly secondary activity until the 19th Century.

The Russians over time reduced the freedoms of these Cossacks, abolished the Hetmanate, and then forcibly disbanded the often-contentious Zaporozhian Host in 1775. Many Zaporozhian Cossacks went into exile. Those remaining in Russian military service were eventually settled as Cossacks in the Kuban region of the North Caucasus and in other places. Zaporozhians unwilling to go into exile and determined to stay on their traditional land were made into serfs.

The Russian state did not like the Cossacks’ independent inclinations and, up through the end of the 18th Century, their proclivity to rebel. The state, however, greatly appreciated the Cossacks’ militarized lifestyle and their willingness to fight for Russia. Russia and the Cossacks evolved a system where male Cossacks served in the Russian military from ages 18 to 38 (36 from 1909). This included a period of active service followed by a period of reserve service. Active-service Cossack units could be stationed anywhere in the Russian Empire or be abroad during wars. A Cossack at the end of active service became a reservist and was awarded land in his homeland area and freedom from taxes. Cossacks on reserve service were required to patrol and provided security for their homelands and nearby areas. Reservists could be recalled to active service in times of war and crisis.

A Cossack region was known as a Cossack Host (*Kazache Voysko*⁸⁴). The region containing a host was never just populated by Cossacks. In the countryside, there

83 Kostantiniyye attracted Cossack raids as it was by far the richest city within their reach. Centuries earlier, for the same reason, the Rus raided this same area, with the city, the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, then named Konstantinoupolis.

84 *Voysko* also can mean “army” or “troops” but is traditionally translated into English as “host” when referring to the Cossacks.

would be many non-Cossack farming communities as well as Cossack ones, once the Cossacks began farming in earnest. For example, the Don Cossack region had many non-Cossack Ukrainian and Russian peasants in the rural areas. Since the Cossacks were mainly rural, most of the population in the cities in the region of a host were not Cossacks. The population of Rostov-na-Donu, the major city in the Don Cossack region had Russians (81.3%), Jews (9.6%), Ukrainians (4.8%), Poles (1.2%), Armenians (1.0%), Germans (1.0%), and Tatars (1.0%), per the 1897 census.

Besides the actual Cossacks, the Russians sometimes used “Cossack” to mean free commoners in the countryside, as opposed to the serfs who were bound to the land or otherwise restricted. Once the Russians started to conquer and settle Siberia⁸⁵, for a long time many Russian settlers in Siberia were called “cossacks”. They weren’t actual Cossacks but were free people rather than serfs.

Along these lines, in 1917 a “Free Cossack” militia movement arose in Ukraine for local self-defense against the growing number of bandits, deserters from the Russian Army. The “free” meant this was a voluntary organization. While some actual Cossacks were in the Free Cossacks, most members were typically peasants and urban workers who had earlier served in the Russian Army. Officers of the militia typically were former Russian Army NCOs. After Ukraine declare it was an autonomous Ukrainian People’s Republic within the Russian state in June 1917, one stated mission of the Free Cossacks became the “protection of the freedom of the Ukrainian people”.

In the Russian Army, Cossacks were formed into regiments, battalions, and smaller units. For much of their history they were classified as irregulars, unlike the regular cavalry regiments of the Imperial Russian Army. They were, however, used like regulars as needed. In World War I, many regular Russian cavalry divisions had a Cossack regiment. They were also used as raiders, patrollers, scouts, occupation troops, military police, and so on. The Russian Empire counted on their reputation for fierceness and brutality to intimidate enemies and cow conquered peoples. Individual Cossacks did not necessarily live up to their stereotypes, and once Napoleon was defeated in 1814, Cossacks in the Russian army that occupied Paris gained considerable civilian attention and admiration.

85 The conquest of Siberia was started by an actual Cossack leader, Ermak Timofeevich of the Don Cossacks.



A Cossack in Paris, 1814
(Painting by Georg Emanuel Opiz; circa 1814)

In addition to the standard Cossacks, there were a few elite Guards Cossack regiments, such as His Majesty's Regiment of Life-Guards Cossacks.

Cossacks viewed their service as personal allegiance to the Tsar of Russia rather than to the Russian state. This gave them a reputation of loyalty to the Tsar, and Cossack units were stationed as part of the garrison of Sankt-Peterburg, the capital city where the Tsar frequently resided. In Sankt-Peterburg, they were used as security forces alongside the police and the regular military garrison of the city. On Bloody Sunday in January 1905, Cossacks were part of the forces that fired on and charged the unarmed marchers attempting to present a petition to the Tsar, an event that started the Revolution of 1905.

The Russian Empire actively managed the Cossack hosts to protect its frontiers and to be a force ready to conquer nearby areas. As the empire expanded, old hosts now in the interior would be disbanded and new hosts would be organized in the border regions. Since newly-conquered peoples were often restive under Russian rule, the Cossacks not only protected the border from outsiders but also helped maintain Russian control over the new territories. For example, as Russia expanded down the Volga River towards the Caspian Sea, some Don Cossacks were moved to the Tsaritsyn Line on the frontier, becoming the Volga Cossacks.

They not only guarded the border there but were on hand to suppress any rebellions among the conquered peoples. Later, when this area was no longer the frontier, the Volga Cossacks were moved to the North Caucasus and merged into the Terek Cossacks there.

The “line” in Tsaritsyn Line meant the Cossacks were settled in a defensive line, often fortified, along the frontier. There were several lines in Russian history, such as the Caucasus Line Cossack Host or the Siberian Line in western Siberia.

Various non-Slavic peoples with military traditions similar to the Cossacks were allowed to serve the Russian Empire similar to the Cossacks when the Russians conquered their homelands. For example, some Bashkirs, a Turkic Muslim group, were organized into a Bashkir Host and performed military service similar to the Cossacks. This included moving these groups to new border regions. During the second half of the 19th Century, these non-Cossack hosts were either disbanded or merged into the Cossack hosts.

The Russian Empire’s policy of settling Cossacks in newly-conquered border areas meant that Cossack communities were often in non-Slavic minority areas. Various members of ethnic minorities would join these communities over time and become Cossacks. For example, local Tatars in the Yaik region joined the Yaik Cossacks, as did members of the Turkic Nogay Horde and Volga River raiders. For minorities that had militarized lifestyles similar to the Cossacks, sometimes the Russian state itself required members of these minorities to join the Cossacks.

The state also sometimes sent foreign soldiers to become Cossacks. This especially happened in the War of 1812. Captured Polish troops from Napoleon’s army of invasion were sent to the Siberian Cossacks. This was the origin of numerous of Polish-style surnames in this host. Some French prisoners were sent to the Orenburg Cossacks. Many of the prisoners were better educated than the local Cossacks, and they and their children often rose to positions of authority. For example, Desiree d’Andeville, a French prisoner, had to join the Orenburg Cossacks and had his surname russianized as Dandevil. His son, V.D. Dandevil, grew up as a Cossack, became a Russian general.

The Russian census of 1897 counted about 3 million Cossacks (2,928,842), about 2.3% of the total population of about 125.6 million (125,640,021). However, the

census missed many members of hard-to-count groups, including the Cossacks. Their true numbers were estimated to be about 4.5–5 million around the start of the 20th Century. Grants of land for military service in earlier centuries had been relatively generous, making most Cossacks quite well off, comparable to the kulaks (relatively prosperous peasants). Rapid population growth and other changes had eroded the economic status of many Cossacks, with less farmland available. Many of the Cossacks struggled with poverty in the early 20th Century, while the Cossack elite remained well off.

Poverty would allow the Soviets to use their Marxist class warfare ideology to exploit divisions among the Cossacks. The Soviets called poorer Cossacks “working Cossacks” (*trudovye Kazaki*), meaning Cossacks who worked to support themselves like the proletariat and the peasants. The Soviets would organize Working Cossack organizations and attract poorer Cossacks by promising land equalization. This meant reallocating Cossack farmland from those with larger holdings to those with smaller holdings, a proposal unappealing to those Cossacks with more land⁸⁶. Land equalization was a cynical tactic to divide the Cossacks, as the Soviets’ actual goal was collective agriculture. Another disingenuous tactic was the Soviets promising the Cossacks autonomy, which appealed to their independent natures and seemed to preserve many of the privileges the hosts had been granted. The Soviets liked to offer the appearance of autonomy but were set against granting true autonomy.

In the Soviets’ class-based ideology, there were more categories of Cossacks besides working Cossacks. “Middle” Cossacks were one step above Working Cossacks, being somewhat better-off. The Soviets mistrusted them as likely class enemies and repressed them. They did at times tried to get them to join the ranks of the Working Cossacks. Richer Cossacks were equated with kulaks, petty bourgeois class enemies. The Cossack elite and leadership were equivalent to the bourgeoisie or aristocracy and were considered the worse class enemies. While the Soviets engaged in a degree of rationalizing in order to fit the Cossacks into Marxist classes, they also exploited actual divisions in the Cossacks. In some hosts in 1918, for example, there was considerable tensions between “Old Cossacks” who wanted to maintain their status and privileges and “New Cossacks” who wanted a more egalitarian social order. However, almost all

86 The state would actually own the land, per the Soviets abolition of private property, but the Cossacks would have the right to use the land for farming.

members of some hosts, particularly the Ural Host, were relatively prosperous and less vulnerable to Soviet class warfare.

World War I put a strain on the Cossacks, with mobilization sending the reservists to fight for years alongside the active service members against the Central Powers. The Imperial Russian Army had 38 Cossack regiments at the start of the war in August 1914, plus smaller Cossack foot infantry and horse artillery units. This force grew to 160 regiments by 1916. The regiments were used as cavalry initially, but after trench warfare dominated the Eastern Front later in 1915, many Cossack units were dismounted and fought as infantry.

Like most Russian civilians and soldiers, many Cossacks, both in the army and back in the homelands, became war weary and disillusioned with Russia's many defeats and loss of territory. In the February Revolution of 1917, mass protests in Petrograd, the capital, led to violent confrontation with the capital's security forces and military garrison. Many Cossacks there sympathized with the protesters and refused to disperse the crowds. Since Cossacks were regarded as extremely loyal to the Tsar, their dereliction of duty was seen by many that the Tsar had become very unpopular. While the Cossacks' refusal to attack the crowds was not the main reason the Tsar abdicated, it was a factor.

The Russian Provisional Government resulting from the February Revolution authorized military and political reforms for the Cossacks. This resulted in a Union of Cossack Hosts in Petrograd that advocated for all the Cossack hosts. It was dominated by the Cossack elite and accordingly supported the war effort, the Provisional Government, and the Constituent Assembly. Regional Cossack assemblies formed, and the administrations of local Cossack hosts were revitalized. As might have been expected given the Cossacks' origins as fiercely independent communities, these regional and local governments were quite willing to ignore the authority of the Provisional Government and to squabble for control with other regional and local bodies.

The Soviets seized power in the October Revolution of 1917 and begin to confiscate private property, demonize the bourgeoisie and kulaks, and destroy religion, Marxist-Leninist goals that many Cossacks abhorred. The Soviets in turn viewed many Cossacks as class enemies, although they attempted to win over poorer Cossacks through class warfare ideology. The Soviets dissolved the Union of Cossack Hosts soon after taking power as well as the Guards Cossack

regiments. Many Cossacks in turn forcibly resisted attempts to establish Soviet control over their lands, although war weariness from WW1 and class warfare almost meant many Cossacks were politically apathetic and some were pro-Soviet. Nonetheless, the many anti-Soviet Cossacks gave the Soviets serious resistance. The Cossack military traditions and the fact that very many (male) Cossacks were veterans of World War I meant they were strong opponents to the Soviets. These “White Cossacks” became the core of the White Army.

The Don Cossacks reformed two of the disbanded Guards Cossacks regiments during the civil war, to carry on the traditions of these elite troops. The Soviets in turn repressed Cossack autonomy and formed some “Red Cossack” units for the Red Army. This will be covered more in the section on the Russian Civil War.



ZA RUS!
FOR RUSSIA!

(1919 White Army poster depicting a Ural Cossack)⁸⁷

In addition to the Red Guards and Red Army, the Soviets also controlled the Russian Army of the former Russian Provisional Government. These troops were facing the forces of the Central Powers on the Eastern and Caucasus Fronts.

In the old army, posts of command were held almost exclusively by members of the propertied classes, so that the majority of the old officer corps were hostile to the power of the workers and peasants.

—Lev Trotskiy, 1918⁸⁸

This Army had rotted from the inside. Soldiers were demoralized, rebellious, and very unreliable, due to factors like their many defeats in the war, unrest and revolutions in the

⁸⁷ The poster uses *Rus* rather than *Rossiya* (Russia) but means all of Russia, not the ancient Kievan Rus state.

⁸⁸ <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1918/military/ch28.htm>.

rear areas, and Bolshevik subversion earlier in 1917. Most common soldiers were unwilling to fight and prone to indiscipline; many were eager to desert. The vast bulk of the common soldiers (on the order of 85%) were conscripted peasants who simply wanted to go home to their farms and families. The Soviets disdained the regular Army as “peasant junk” and knew it was too fragile to use against domestic foes. Further, they mistrusted most of the Russian Army’s officers, especially the upper ranks, as being class enemies and inherently hostile to socialism. Nevertheless, the Russian Army was needed to hold the front lines against the Central Powers. Its fighting value was also low, but this would not be tested as long as the ceasefire with the enemy held.

Civil war was already underway in Ukraine from December 1917, between the Ukrainian People’s Republic and the Soviets. Other areas were restive or going into revolt, especially Cossack regions like the Don, Kuban, Orenburg, and Ural Hosts. Overall, the Cossacks resented attempts to reduce their privileges and take control of their territory. This did not just apply to the Soviets, although they were the largest threat. The Don Cossack territory, for example, had competing Cossack, Soviet, Menshevik, anti-Soviet Russian military (what would become the Whites), and other organizations vying for control and claiming to be the legitimate government of all or parts of the region. The Don Cossacks and anti-Soviet Russian generals would ally.

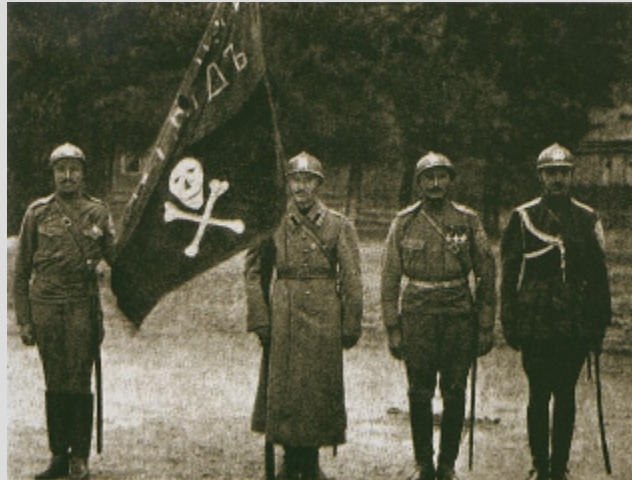


Sidetrip: Leaders of the Southern Whites

After the Soviets came to power in November 1917, **A.M. Kaledin**, the Military Ataman of the Don Cossacks, organized anti-Soviet Don Cossacks to fight the Reds and invited members of the deposed Russian Provisional Government to join him. The Don Cossack region accordingly became a magnet for anti-Soviet officers and some soldiers. **M.V. Alekseev**, the former Stavka Chief of Staff for the Russian Empire and Russian Provisional Government, joined with Kaledin and organized what became the **Southern Whites** (at first, the Alekseev Movement, then the Volunteer Army, then other names).

L.G. Kornilov, who had attempted a military coup against the Provisional Government in 1917, arrived in December. Alekseev actually had personally arrested Kornilov after the coup attempt collapsed and had him imprisoned, but at a location guarded by officers and soldiers friendly to Kornilov. In the Don Cossack region, relations between Alekseev and Kornilov were not exactly

cordial, but Kornilov was a renowned field commander of World War I and popular among soldiers. Alekseev, Kornilov, and Kaledin formed a triumvirate divided duties among them. Kornilov became the commander of the Southern White forces. Alekseev was at first the equivalent of head of state for the Southern Whites, in charge of finances, the civil administration, and foreign affairs. He later also took the field as a general. Kaledin remained in charge of the Don Cossacks as ataman.



Kornilov Shock Detachment in 1917 with its death's head flag

Kornilov's presence in the Southern Whites attracted some soldiers to the cause. In 1917 in WW1, Kornilov had raised a volunteer shock detachment, which had then expanded into the Kornilov Shock Regiment. Russian shock troops were like assault troops meant to break through enemy trench lines but were also selected for the patriotism and used to suppress mutinies and prevent unauthorized retreats in the Russian Army. Since in 1917 the Bolsheviks were actively subverting the Army into indiscipline and mutiny, these shock troops by their nature became very anti-Soviet. The Soviets disbanded the shock units when they came to power in November 1917, but many soldiers of the Kornilov Shock Regiment made their way to the Don Cossack region and reformed the regiment under the Southern Whites. This regiment became the first of several Kornilov shock regiments the White raised, eventually forming the Kornilov Shock Division. Officer uniforms had death's head patches and those who distinguished themselves in combat were allowed to wear a black uniform. (The WW1 Germans had their own *Totenkopf* (death's head) tradition, which evolved into post-WW1 Freikorps and then the Nazi SS. After the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, the anti-Soviet Kornilovites and the Nazi *Totenkopf* became partially

conflated in Russian neo-Nazi movements, and at least one neo-Nazi “Kornilovtsy” battalion has operated in the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022.)

Unlike the triumvirates that ended the Roman Republic and began the Roman Empire, the men of this Southern White triumvirate did not fall out with each other. Instead, events swept them all away in 1918. During a period of Southern Whites setbacks at the hands of the Soviets in the winter of 1917/18, Kaledin committed suicide in February. Kornilov fell in April, killed by a Soviet shell during White operations in the Kuban. Alekseev suffered a fatal heart attack in September. The result was the rise of **A.I. Denikin** to leadership of the Southern Whites. Denikin was a Russian general who had supported Kornilov’s coup attempt in 1917. He had been arrested, imprisoned with Kornilov, escaped with him, and also made his way to the Don Cossack region. Denikin became deputy commander to the Southern White forces, became commander when Kornilov died, and became head of the Southern Whites when Alekseev died. By chance of fate, Denikin entered history as the famed and feared Southern White commander, rather than Alekseev or Kornilov.



Anton Ivanovich Denikin

Besides the Don Cossacks, many Kuban Cossacks and other Cossacks elsewhere resisted the Soviets with increasing violence. Soviet promises of Cossack autonomy were soon revealed to be hollow as local Soviet and Party organizations tried to exert control over Cossack territories, prompting more Cossacks to take up arms. Cossack resistance meant other anti-Soviet groups would make common cause with the Cossacks to fight the Soviets, and these forces would grow into some of the White armies in the civil war.

Sidetrip: Guerrillas, Partisans, and Bandits



Siberian partisans during the civil war

Many accounts of the Russian Civil War can give the impression that the war was a series of conventional-warfare battles and campaigns between rival organized armies. These were indeed crucial components of the war, but unconventional warfare was widespread. This was guerrilla warfare, also called partisan warfare. (In Russia, a guerrilla was called a *partizan*, partisan.)

Russia had considerable areas of forests, swamps, mountains, and deserts, places where conventional forces found it difficult operate. These areas were havens for partisans. However, partisans could flourish even in open terrain like the steppes of Ukraine, as long as the local population supported and sheltered them. The Black Army anarchists, for example, operated for years in Ukraine with the support of the peasants. There were many partisan groups in the civil war besides anarchists: Soviet, White, Cossack, Green, ethnic separatists, and others.

When convention forces occupied an area, partisan groups often were not strong enough to wrest back control in conventional warfare. Instead, they engaged in ambushes, raids, sabotage, and other actions designed to wear down the occupiers. They tried to avoid direct battle with superior enemy forces: retreating or going into hiding against enemy advances, and harassing enemy retreats.

The partisans did not just operate against conventional forces. Opposing partisan groups in a region fought each other bitterly.

Partisan forces would operate like conventional forces whenever practical, seizing and holding territory. In Ukraine, the Black Army excelled at this,

operating as guerrillas, a conventional force, and a mix of the two as circumstances demanded.

Partisans were often poorly armed and supplied, often had few or no heavier weapons like machineguns and light artillery, and almost never had things like armorers cars, tanks, heavy artillery, or aircraft. In most conflicts like World War II, this placed partisans as a distinct disadvantage when confronting conventional forces. The Russian Civil War mostly was different, as most conventional forces in the civil war were also under-equipped and poorly supplied. For example, the Red Army was short of all types of artillery. Soviet factories also lacked access to sufficient raw materials and energy resources, so ammunition was often in very short supply. The White Army was usually even worse off than the Red Army in equipment and supplies.

All sides in the civil war were short of soldiers, which also made partisans more effective. For example, the Eastern Whites in 1919 had at most about 500,000 soldiers operating across a huge region, and this number included many rear area troops, service troops, and troops in training. The forces at the front many have numbered only about 100,000–150,000. The contending sides often had few troops to spare to adequately occupy conquered territory and fight partisans. For example, the Southern Whites in 1919 had perhaps no more than 20,000 troops occupying eastern and southern Ukraine, which turned out to be grossly insufficient to keep the anarchist Black Army in check.



Siberian partisans in 1919 — or perhaps a peasant self-defense militia?

In addition to conventional forces and partisans, many localities organized self-defense forces (militias). Peasants often banded together to try to defend their

farms and families. These militias often straddled the line between conventional forces and partisans.

One side's partisan was another side's rebel, traitor, or criminal. A side would often call enemy partisan "bandits" in hopes that this would scare the general population into opposing them. Since many partisans were not above taking what they needed, this tactic was effective. It was even more effective in areas infested by actual bandits. As the Russian Army facing the Central Powers fell apart in 1917–1918, for example, hundreds of thousands of deserters ended up in bands of bandits stealing from and terrorizing the peasants in Ukraine.



Basmachi insurgents in Central Asia

The Soviets tried to build politically-motivated military forces based on their ideological principles. On 16 December 1917, all officer ranks "starting from corporal, and ending with general" were abolished, since these were part of the old, oppressive class system. In their place, the armed forces would only have "commanders" like brigade commanders (*komandiry brigad*, *kombrig*) and division commanders (*komandiry diviziy*, *komdiv*), elected by the troops themselves.

Instead of a regular army, the Soviets wanted a mass militia, "the armed people themselves"⁸⁹. The Soviets soon began calling this force the People's Socialist Guard, to distinguish it from the old regular Army. This socialist guard, also called the new socialist army, was to consist of soldiers and sailors together with volunteers from the Red Guards and the workers in general. Many soldiers and sailors had joined the Bolsheviks' revolution in November, and these together with new volunteers from the regular Army were to be the trained core of the socialist guard. Once peace was secured with the Central Powers, the

89 V.I. Lenin; *State and Revolution*; 1917.

Soviets planned to demobilize the rest of the regular Army, which was full of demoralized conscripted peasants: “The old army must be disbanded to the last man, so that there are no traces of this peasant junk”⁹⁰.



Red Guards of the Vulcan Factory, 1917

The Soviets also planned on extensive civilian recruitment for the socialist guard. In practice, this meant the proletariat but not the peasantry. Marxist ideology led the Soviets to believe that revolutionary fervor would prompt many volunteers to step forth from a working class grateful for their liberation. This turned out to be quite unrealistic, and the Soviets got far fewer volunteers than what they wanted. The great majority of workers who had not been Red Guards were not eager to go fight. Even among the Red Guards, which perhaps numbered on the order of 200,000, there were few volunteers for the new force. The Red Guards were paramilitary forces of ordinary factory workers who wanted to defend their homes and places of work, but only a very few were willing to leave their families and jobs.

The terms of enlistment were neither generous nor stingy, with only a six-month term of service⁹¹ (although the Soviets expected many to re-enlist) and with a daily pay rate at least equal to that of an unskilled laborer. A number of the volunteers were destitute or unemployed men, attracted only to the pay. There were enough of these men that some Red Army detachments in the field were dominated by them and became little more than bandit groups robbing the peasants⁹².

90 There were several conflicting plans and proposals about the regular Army in the confusion of the time, but demobilization seems the most likely option. The quote is supposedly the words of N.V. Krylenko, one of the Bolsheviks in charge of the military, per http://militera.lib.ru/memo/russian/denikin_ai2/2_18.html (in Russian).

91 Some works claim the term of service was “at least” six months while others claim it was only six months. I have not researched this enough to fully determine which is correct, but it seems just six months is. When the Soviets introduced conscription, for example, the term of service was initially set at six months.

92 Red Army bandit units are mostly little known in English sources but several Russian and Ukrainian sources cover them. See, for example, <https://babel.ua/ru/texts/69941-96-let-nazad-v-sssr-uzakonili-obyazatelnyuyu-voennuyu-sluzhbu-a-eshche-ranshe-privdumali-voenkomy-oni-rabotayut-do-sih-por-kak-menyalis-voznrast-sroki-i-lgoty-dlya-prizyvnikov-v-arhivnyh-foto> (in Russian).

As units of socialist guards went into action, other problems quickly became apparent. They were poorly trained, poorly organized, poorly led, and were mostly incapable of effective offensive operations. The Soviets decided to use these forces for rear-area security:

The new socialist army should not wage war on the external front against the enemy army... it will stand guard over Soviet power as the basis of its existence, and, at the same time, the main task of the army will also be to crush our bourgeoisie.⁹³

The terms people's socialist guard, new socialist army, and their like went into eclipse soon after the sidelining of this force.

The lack of volunteers sparked a vehement debate within the Bolshevik leadership. One faction wanted to continue trying to build a volunteer, politically-motivated force. Another faction, headed by Lev Trotskiy, wanted to raise a standing mass army, sacrificing revolutionary fervor for numbers. Trotskiy's side would gradually win the argument. Despite the Bolsheviks' policy of democratic centralism that was supposed to ensure obedience to Party resolutions, the losing faction for months would unsuccessfully seek to discredit Trotskiy in hopes of undoing the decision for a mass army.

A major step to creating a standing army was taken in January 1918, although this new force was still to be recruited from ideologically-motivated volunteers. On 28 January, Sovnarkom created the **Workers' and Peasants' Red Army**⁹⁴:

I

The Soviet of People's Commissars hereby resolves to organize on the following principles a new army to be known as the Worker-Peasant Red Army:

1. The Worker-Peasant Army is to be made up of the more class-conscious and organized elements of the toiling masses.
2. Admission to the army is open to all Russian citizens of eighteen years and over. Admission is by recommendation of the army committees or democratic organizations, standing on the platform of the Soviet Government, party and labor organizations, or at least by two members of such organizations...

II

1. Soldiers of the Worker-Peasant Army are fully provided for by the state and receive in addition fifty rubles a month.

⁹³ http://militera.lib.ru/memo/russian/denikin_ai2/2_27.html (in Russian).

⁹⁴ In Russian, *Raboche-Krestyanskaya Krasnaya Armiya* (RKKA). For short, it was often called just the *Krasnaya Armiya* (KA). "Raboche-Krestyanskaya Krasnaya Armiya" is usually translated into English as "the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army", although some works use a more literal translation, "Worker-Peasant Red Army".

2. Dependents of Red Army soldiers will be provided for according to the local standards as worked out by the local organs of the Soviet Government.

III

The Supreme Commanding organ of the Worker-Peasant Army is the Soviet of People's Commissars. The direct command and administration of the army is concentrated in the Commissariat of War and its specially created All-Russian Collegium.

V. ULANOV (LENIN)

President of Sovnarkom

N. KRYLENKO

Supreme Commander-in-Chief

DYBENKO, PODVOISKY

People's Commissars of War and Navy

(Sovnarkom Decree on Formation of the Worker-Peasant Red Army; composed 15 January 1918; proclaimed 28 January 1918⁹⁵)



Torzhestvennoye Obeshchaniye
Solemn Promise

Recruits to the Red Army were required to take an oath that, among other things, had the recruit promise “to direct all my thoughts and actions to the great cause of liberating the laboring masses”. See the [Red Army Oath](#) in the appendices for the full text.

⁹⁵ English text of the decree is from <https://www.marxists.org/history/ussr/events/revolution/documents/1918/01/15c.htm>.

The Soviets were now actively recruiting the peasantry, by far the largest segment of the population. The Soviets did not trust the peasants in general. Despite trying to co-opt them to the revolution with promises of tenure land (without ownership rights), they believed most peasants would want to own their own land. However, the fact that the Red Army was a volunteer force meant that peasants who did not favor the Soviets would not volunteer. This may have been correct, but the Soviets would soon discover, like with the socialist guard, they could not get enough volunteers.

The Red Army spelled the end of the Red Guards. Some Red Guards became soldiers and commanders in the Red Army, while the rest faded into insignificance in the rear areas. The Soviets formally abolished the Red Guards in April 1918.

The Whites were far more disorganized than the Soviets. This was partly due to their nature, as the Whites were a coalition of many anti-Soviet groups with very differing agendas, from Russian nationalists, monarchists seeking to restore the monarchy, conservatives, military authoritarians seeking a dictatorship, moderates and liberals seeking a republic, and social democrats seeking a democracy. The Whites even attracted a number of outright socialists, such as Mensheviks and some Socialist-Revolutionaries, who opposed the dictatorial powers the Soviets gave themselves. Other anti-Soviet socialists, however, were leery of the Whites as wanting a bourgeois state rather than a socialist one.

Besides wanting to get rid of the Soviets, the Whites desired to keep Russia as a unified country or a federation of some form. This meant that anti-Soviet separatist groups would typically not ally with the Whites, such the Whites in general were as much opposed to independence movements as were the Soviets. Most anarchists also did not want to work with the Whites, since they wanted a strong government. This state of affairs meant that the Soviets could use divide-and-conquer tactics by playing off White and anti-White groups. For example, they were willing to ally with the anarchist Black Army in Ukraine against the Whites but would later attack the anarchists once the Whites were defeated. They could also exploit the divisions within the White Movement itself, with disaffected Whites sometimes rebelling in face of major White setbacks.

At first, the Whites had no central organization or a country-wide alternative government to the Soviet government. Instead, the White Movement grew as separate White regional groups fighting the Soviets in various parts of the country. These White groups had headquarters and governments in their regions. Only later did the Whites try to form an overall government and partially coordinate their efforts.

Many White forces were led by Tsarist-era officers who were opposed to the Soviets, with the high command levels full of former Tsarist generals and admirals. This gave the White Army a reservoir of professional military experience lacking in the Red Army. Since many (not all) of the White generals and admirals were aristocrats, Soviet propaganda hammered away that they planned to bring back the old regime of the Tsars. In truth, these White generals ranged from conservative would-be dictators like L.G. Kornilov to reformists like M.V. Alekseev, who had advised the Tsar to abdicate in early 1917. However, the overall cast of the officers was conservative, and it helped Soviet propaganda when when a coup installed A.V. Kolchak, a Tsarist admiral, as supposed in Supreme Ruler (*Verkhovnyy Pravitel*) of the Whites.

Various ethnic and religious groups sought autonomy within Russia following the February Revolution of 1917. Once the Bolsheviks took over in the October Revolution of late 1917, some groups sought outright independence. Before rising to power, the Bolsheviks had officially embraced the principle of autonomy, partly as a tactic to cause problems for the Russian government and to try to gain support in Russia's many groups. After they took power, on 15 November 1917 they issued a **Declaration of the Rights of the People of Russia**, which was popularly known as the **Decree on Nationalities**. It proclaimed:

1. The equality and sovereignty of the peoples of Russia.
2. The right of the peoples of Russia to free self-determination, even to the point of separation and the formation of an independent state.
3. The abolition of any and all national and national-religious privileges and disabilities.
4. The free development of national minorities and ethnographic groups inhabiting the territory of Russia.

—From the text of the Declaration of the Rights of the People of Russia⁹⁶

Much of this stemmed back to Stalin's *Marxism and the National Question* of 1913 and the Bolsheviks' subsequent policies. Although the declaration made these principles sound inviolable, it concluded with "The concrete decrees that follow from these principles will be immediately elaborated after the setting up of a Commission of Nationality Affairs". In other words, the Bolsheviks themselves and not the allegedly sovereign peoples of Russia would make the decisions concerning autonomy. The Commission mentioned in the text became the People's Commissariat for Nationalities. It was headed by Stalin and was in charge of

⁹⁶ English text from <https://www.marxists.org/history/ussr/government/1917/11/02.htm>.

“ensuring peaceful coexistence and fraternal cooperation of all nationalities” with “assistance to their material and spiritual development”⁹⁷.

Finland had been promised autonomy when it took the Tsar of Russia and the Grand Prince of Finland in the 19th Century. Although Finland’s actual autonomy had often been under attack, the promise and tradition of autonomy made the region almost unique within the Russian Empire⁹⁸. Finland, for example, gained a legislature and a renewed promise of autonomy, not faithfully kept, after the abortive Russian Revolution of 1905. The day the Decree on Nationalities was proclaimed, 15 November, was also the day the Finnish legislature declared itself the supreme authority in Finland. It followed up on this by declaring independence on 6 December.

Foreign states refused to recognize Finland as an independent national unless Russia first did so. The Finns had not wanted to deal with the Soviet government but now reluctantly approached the Soviets. With the Decree on Nationalities recently proclaimed and given the fact that Finnish socialists had voted for independence⁹⁹, the Soviet government in late December officially recognized Finnish independence. However, Lenin expected the Finnish socialists would take over Finland and would then decide join the Soviet state.

Finland soon did descend into a somewhat short but vicious civil war between the socialist Finnish Reds and conservative Finnish Whites. The Soviets assisted the Reds, while the Germans (and the Swedes to a limited extent) helped the Whites. While civil war raged in Finland, the ceasefire between the Soviets and Central Powers was unraveling.

Finland was special, given its history of autonomy, peripheral location in Russia, and relative unimportance to the Russian economy. Ukraine was a completely different case, with a large population, abundant agriculture, major coal and iron ore resources, and heavy industries. The Soviet leadership had no intention of allowing the Ukrainian People’s Republic (UNR), which claimed to be autonomous from Soviet Russia, from controlling Ukraine. Civil war had broken out in December 1917, with the UNR then declaring outright independence in January 1918. The UNR was politically and militarily weak, and much of eastern and southern Ukraine quickly fell to Soviet forces, pro-Soviet uprisings, and anarchist forces. Kiev, the capital, was lost on 8 February.

97 Stalin left the commissariat in 1923, and it was closed down in 1924.

98 Other territories that had been promised some degree of autonomy, like the Russian part of Poland or the Baltic region, had lost their autonomy in the 19th Century.

99 Other Finnish groups had also endorsed independence. The Soviets considered these groups bourgeois and would have ignored them had the Finnish socialists not joined in.



The UNR, however, had a plan for survival. The government had entered into negotiations with the Central Powers in January and signed a peace treaty with them on 9 February¹⁰⁰. The Central Powers recognized Ukraine as an independent, neutral state¹⁰¹. They promised military protection for Ukraine in return for a share of Ukraine's grain harvests. They also required the UNR to disband the Free Cossacks. Ukraine accepted the treaty as the best way to rid the country of the Soviets and as a first step in gaining wider international recognition.

The Central Powers' deal with Ukraine was just part of a larger plan to force the Soviets to accept their peace terms. The ceasefire of December 1917 had required both sides to keep their forces on the Eastern Front, but the Germans wanted to withdraw many troops to the Western Front. Peace negotiations with the Soviets, however, had foundered due to the Central Powers' harsh terms. The Soviets did not want to accept them but could not risk the

¹⁰⁰ The negotiations occurred in Brest-Litovsk, where the Soviets were also negotiating for peace with the Central Powers. Each of the resulting treaties is confusingly often just called the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. I use this term only for the second, more famous one between the Soviets and the Central Powers in March 1918.

¹⁰¹ The treaty only specified approximate borders and had provisions for creating a detailed set of borders later. Separately, Ukraine still disputed its northern border, wanting all of the territory of the nine Ukrainian provinces.

Central Powers resuming the war if they were rejected. Trotsky tried to prolong the ceasefire indefinitely without a peace treaty through a “No War – No Peace” policy. This failed in February once the UNR made it deal with the Central Powers.



**SOTSIALISTICHESKOE OTECHESTVO V OPASNOSTI!
THE SOCIALIST FATHERLAND IN DANGER!**

On 17 February the Germans notified the Soviets they were resuming hostilities the next day¹⁰². On 18 February, German and Austro-Hungarian forces launches offensives across the length of the Eastern Front. The regular Russian Army was just a ghost of itself due to desertions and indiscipline and offered little resistance, with the soldiers falling back, surrendering, or deserting. This was an existential crisis for the Soviets, prompting them on 21 February to issue their **Socialist Fatherland in Danger!** decree. With the regular Army disintegrating, the decree called on local soviets and revolutionary organizations to “defend every position to the last drop of blood”. It also ordered a scorched earth policy to prevent food and the railroads from being captured, and for the workers and peasants to be mobilized to dig trenches and build defenses. Men and women of the “bourgeois classes” were ordered to dig trenches under Red Guards supervision, with “those who resist are to be

¹⁰² The terms of the ceasefire specified each side could end it by giving a 7-day notification to the other side. After the Ukrainians agree to peace on 9 February, the Germans issued an ultimatum to the Soviet delegation on the 10th to either immediately accept peace terms or see the ceasefire lapse in seven days. The Germans thus stayed within the letter of the ceasefire. Many histories (inadvertently) make it seem like the Germans just gave a 1-day notification, violating the terms of the ceasefire.

shot". This was perhaps the first time the Soviets resorted to mass forced labor. It would not be their last.

The decree also stated: "Enemy agents, speculators, thugs, hooligans, counter-revolutionary agitators, German spies are shot at the scene of the crime". This decree thus brought back the death penalty, which the Soviets had abolished¹⁰³. The Soviets entrusted this mission to the Cheka, their secret police force, which on 23 February publicly announced that counter-revolutionaries would be "mercilessly shot". Note that the Soviet government and the Cheka did not hesitate to publicize their willingness to execute people without judicial review. This was a deliberate campaign of state terror, to frighten people in submission. Before long, the Soviets would expand this effort into the Red Terror.

The repressive measures of the Socialist Fatherland in Danger decree greatly upset the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries, the Bolsheviks' junior partners in government. Left SR leaders argued with the Bolsheviks against extra-judicial measures and state terrorism but were unable to restrain them. Further disillusionment for the Left SR would soon occur.

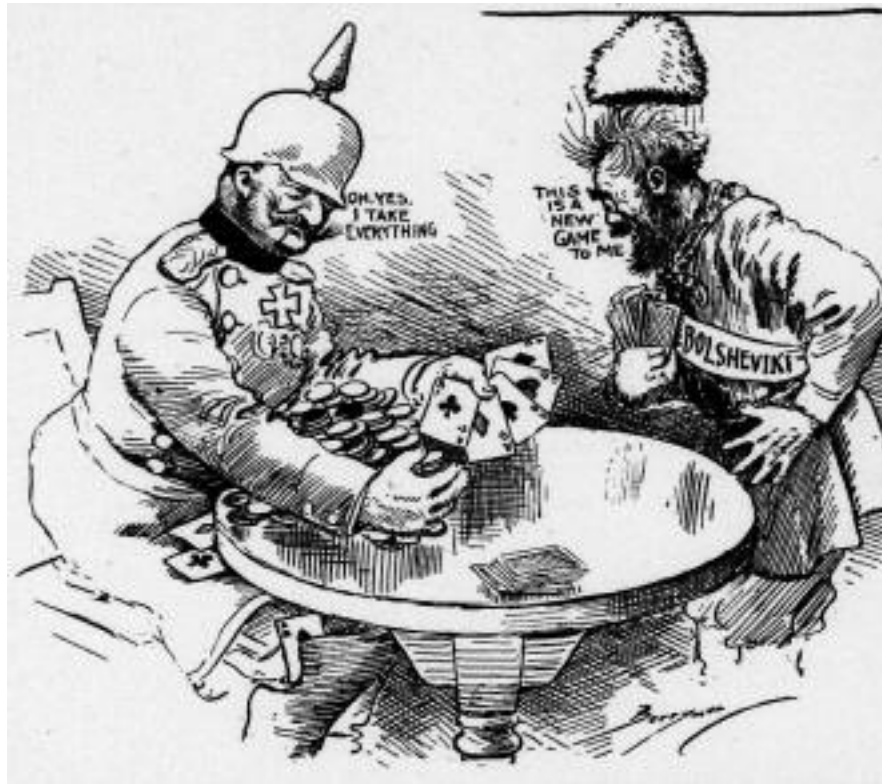
Sidetrip: Echos of Socialist Fatherland in Danger in World War II

When German invaded the USSR in 1941, the Soviets resorted to measures similar to those of the Socialist Fatherland in Danger decree. This included scorched earth tactics, sending civilians to dig trenches, and summary executions of suspected enemy agents, spies, and saboteurs. The Russian bourgeoisie had been destroyed, so they could not be made to do forced labor during WW2. There still was an echo of this, as the Soviets WW2 required many members of "traitorous" Soviet ethnic groups like the Volga Germans to do forced labor.

The fatherland decree did little to halt the Central Powers. German and Austro-Hungarian troops moved rapidly across the entire front. German troops sometimes captured territory just by taking Russian trains from a recently captured train station to the next station deeper in enemy territory. The cities of Narva, Minsk, Kiev, and Odessa all fell. Narva was only about 135 km (85 miles) from Petrograd, the Soviet capital. With little hope the Russian Army or any other Soviet forces could halt the Germans should they advance further, the

103 The Provisional Government had outlawed capital punishment after coming to power in early 1917, only to reinstate it as attempt to maintain discipline in the Russian Army. The Soviets then outlawed capital punishment after coming to power. According to notes in Robert A. Kushen ("The Death Penalty and the Crisis of Criminal Justice in Russia"; *Brooklyn Journal of International Law*, Vol. 19 No. 2; 1993; <https://brooklynworks.brooklaw.edu/bjil/vol19/iss2/4>) the Soviets progressively expanded the scope of the death penalty in 1918, using it in the justice system for many crimes and allowing the Cheka to extra-judicially impose it at its discretion.

Soviets evacuated most of their government to Moskva during February and March 1918¹⁰⁴. Facing near-certain defeat if they continued the war, the majority of the Soviet leadership faced reality and agreed to peace, signing the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on 3 March 1918.



1918 American political cartoon on the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk

Spotlight: The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, 3 March 1918¹⁰⁵

The treaty stripped Soviet Russia of its western provinces. The Soviets ceded Lithuania, the Russian part of Poland, and the western Baltic region, which the Germans planned to turn into puppet states ruled by German nobles. The rest of the Baltic region was placed under temporary German occupation until a “general peace” (the end of World War I) was concluded. The Soviets were required to recognize Ukraine as an independent, neutral country that would allow the entry of German and Austro-Hungarian forces for its “protection”. The Ottomans got territory they had lost to Russia in the late 19th Century. Belorussia

104 The move to Moskva was presented as temporary, but the logic of having the capital in a safer place made the decision permanent. See <http://www.itogi.ru/archive/2001/32/107203.html> for some interesting details.

105 This was the second treaty of Brest-Litovsk, between the Soviets and the Central Powers. The first treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed in February 1918 between the Ukrainian People’s Republic and the Central Powers. For an English text of the March treaty, see <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjRsrvOv4v7AhVrEFkFHVa7A2cQFnoECA8QAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.untahbasintah.org%2Fdocuments%2Fdoc46.pdf&usg=AOvVaw1eNwYUW04o0wFSpGa0e5LT>

was also occupied by Germany, supposed only until a general peace was arranged.

Outside the treaty but somewhat related to it, Bessarabia was occupied by Romania, Russia's erstwhile ally in World War I. The Central Powers and Romania were officially at war, but Romania had agreed to its own ceasefire with these powers once Soviet Russia did. The Romanians wanted Bessarabia, since a large part of the province was inhabited by Moldavians, who were closely related to Romanians. Germany and Romania secretly came to an agreement in which the Germans would not interfere with Romania taking Bessarabia. In return, the Romanians would allow troops of the Central Powers to transit Bessarabia on their way to Ukraine. Since all this was outside the scope of the treaty, the Soviets were not required to cede Bessarabia.

Brest-Litovsk also required Soviet Russia to carry out the "full demobilization" of its army, "inclusive of those units recently organized by the present Government". This meant the regular Russian Army on the Eastern and Caucasus Fronts as well as the forces the Soviets were raising like the socialist guards and Red Army. The Soviets basically ignored the demobilization provision, since they needed troops to fight the civil war. However, almost all of the regular Russian Army in essence self-demobilized once the treaty was signed, with the troops going home. A few detachments of pro-Soviet regulars remained in the field¹⁰⁶. These were used in the early part of the civil war until they were subsumed into the Red Army.



106 N.E. Kakurin; *Strategicheskiy Ocherk Grazhdanskoy Voyny (Strategic Outline of the Civil War)*; 1926; http://militera.lib.ru/science/kakurin_ne/01.html (in Russian).

The treaty required Soviet forces to stay out all regions that Soviet Russia ceded, recognized as independent, and allowed the Central Powers to occupy. The Soviets would attempt to avoid this restriction in Ukraine via the Ukrainian People's Republic of Soviets. This was a Soviet puppet state that pretended to be autonomous and federated with Soviet Russia. Now, the Soviet transformed it into the Ukrainian Soviet Republic¹⁰⁷, which proclaimed it was a fully independent state. It of course remained a Soviet puppet state. Central Powers forces would soon expel all Soviet troops from Ukraine. The government of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic retreated to Soviet Russia, where it was disbanded in April 1918¹⁰⁸.

The treaty did not explicitly require German forces to stay out of Russia, although it require all signatories to "refrain from all agitation or propaganda against the governments or all state and military institutions of the other side" During 1918, German forces would enter Russian territory to occupy the Crimea, parts of southern Russia and the North Caucasus, and Georgia, where the Germans helped the region become independent of Russia.

Germany mostly did not challenge Soviet control of Russia's heartland. German forces in the Baltic region did prepare a plan to occupy Petrograd should the need arise but did not execute the plan. They also helped organize a White force in northwestern Russia near Estonia as another potential threat to Petrograd. Overall, however, Germany actually preferred that Russia be controlled by the Soviets rather than the Whites. A White victory in the civil war might have resulted in a restored Russian state rejoining World War I on the side of the Allies, a stated goal of some White groups. The Germans and Soviets even cooperated together when their interest aligned. For example, they both needed oil. The Soviets had controlled of Baku, a major oil center, but lost it in the summer of 1918¹⁰⁹. The Germans were already in Georgia, fairly close to Baku, and came to an agreement with the Soviets over Baku. The Germans were to reinforce their troops in Georgia and launch a campaign to take Baku. They would then return it to Soviet control, receiving in return one quarter of Baku's

107 This paralleled the official name of Soviet Russia at this time, the Russian Soviet Republic.

108 Officially, it was transformed from a government to the "Ukrainian Bureau" in charge of organizing partisan warfare in Ukraine.

109 Stalin had a role in the loss of Baku, as he diverted food and Soviet troops intended for Baku to Tsaritsyn, where he had taken command.

oil output. Events in the field, however, prevented this plan from being carried out.

The Allied Powers soon drove the Germans and Soviets closer together by intervening in Russia. In the Russian far north, Allied troops landed at Murmansk and Arkhangelsk and began taking control of the region. The Germans feared the Allies at least planned to take over Finland and possibly sought to reopen the Eastern Front against Germany. The Soviets of course feared that the Allies planned to overthrow the Soviet state. The two sides agreed in August to joint German-Soviet military operations against the Allies in the north, with Germany to send a 50,000-soldier force. Part of the agreement had the Soviets cede the rest of the Baltic region, raising German hopes of creating a German-dominated puppet state across this entire area. The German expedition to the far north did not materialize when, in September, Germany's increasingly poor situation on the Western Front meant no German troops were available for this adventure¹¹⁰.

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk placed Finland in the German sphere of interest. Soviet support for the Finnish Reds in the ongoing Finnish Civil War declined until the Soviets were mostly just guarding the approaches to Petrograd from Finland. German support for the Finnish Whites increased, and the Whites triumphed. The price of German assistance was that Finland agreed to become a kingdom with a German noble as monarch. These plans collapsed when the Germans lost World War I in November 1918, and Finland became a republic.

Besides Finland, Poland became the other Russian territory that achieved actual independence in 1918. At the start of World War I, Poland did not exist as an independent country, with Austria-Hungary, Germany, and Russia all ruling parts of Polish territory. Russia lost its part of Poland during the war, and then the defeat of the Central Powers in 1918 allowed the Poles form a Polish state out of the Polish-inhabited lands of their three former masters. The Soviets unofficially acknowledge Poland's right to existence, but this was not sincere. They regarded the Polish government as bourgeois and thus illegitimate. They expected the Polish proletariat would come to power in Poland, either on its own or by Soviet intervention, and the resulting socialist Poland would choose to unite with the Soviet state. In the meantime, the actual Polish state and Soviet Russia were increasingly at odds.

¹¹⁰ For details on this situation including German plans to occupy Petrograd if the Soviets did not agree to joint operations, see Holger H. Herwig; "German Policy in the Eastern Baltic Sea in 1918: Expansion or Anti-Bolshevik Crusade?"; *Slavic Review*, Vol. 32, No. 2; 1973; <https://doi.org/10.2307/2495967>.

The Paris Peace Conference brought Allied recognition of Polish independence and settled Poland's western borders but not its eastern ones. Polish-Soviet border disputes and clashes would grow into all-out war in 1919–1920.

Eastern Borders of Poland

- Russian SFSR, 1921
- Poland, 1686
- Poland, 1772
- Poland, 1921
- Curzon Line
- Curzon Line "B"



Polish-Soviet border disputes were almost inevitable given the centuries of conflict between Poland and Russia under their kings and tsars. Poland (the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth) had expanded in the largest country in Europe in the 16th Century but progressively lost territory to Russia starting in the 17th Century. Starting in 1772, a series of partitions dismantled the country until Poland was completely annexed out was partitioned out of existence in 1795 by Russia, Austria-Hungary, and Prussia (later, Germany).

When an independent Poland arose from the ruins of the Russian, Austro-Hungarian, and German empires in 1918, one burning issue was what should be Poland's eastern border. Many Polish nationalists wanted to reclaim the Polish-Lithuanian borders that existed before the First Partition in 1772. (There was little support, however, to try to reclaim the borders of 1686.)

Another concept, popular among some Allied countries just after World War I, was that the new Polish state should consist of territories with an ethnic Polish majority. The Curzon Line (named after British Foreign Minister George Curzon) was an attempt to establish a "temporary" eastern border for Poland based on this concept. The Curzon Line "B" was an alternative that placed the city of Lwow (Lvov in Russian; Lviv in Ukrainian) in Poland. (The territory included within the "B" line had an overall Ukrainian majority but Lwow had a Polish majority. There was no line that could divide the ethnic groups cleanly, as Poles, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Lithuanians, and Jews were intermixed over large areas of eastern Europe.) The Poles and Soviets would fight over the eastern border of Poland in 1919–1920, which would end up between the Curzon Line and the borders of 1772.

Other than the Finns and Poles, the many ethnic and religious groups in Russia did not fare as well. Many declared their independence, but the Soviets were determined to keep these

groups in the Soviet state if at all possible. All would be caught up in one way or another in the fighting of the civil war.

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk did require the Soviets to recognize Ukraine's independence. Soviet proxy forces did try to hold onto parts of Ukraine, but German, Austro-Hungarian, and UNR forces drove them out of the country during March and April 1918. The Central Powers "protectors" of Ukraine mostly treated the region as occupied territory and tried to extract resources, particularly food, for their war effort against the Allied Powers. Their occupation policies quickly alienated most Ukrainians.

Although the UNR opposed the Soviets, the UNR government overall leaned left and contained many socialists. This made the UNR a less-than-ideal partner for the conservative, imperialist German government. In late April 1917, the Germans accordingly backed a coup by a Ukrainian nobleman, Pavlo Skoropadskyy, against the left-leaning UNR government. Skoropadskyy declared himself Hetman (leader) of the Ukrainian State (which was also called the Ukrainian Hetmanate or the Second Hetmanate¹¹¹). This government did not have broad support from the people.

In May 1918, the Germans crossed the eastern border of Ukraine (as defined in their treaty with the UNR) and occupied nearby lands in southern Russia including the cities of Rostov-na-Donu, Taganrog, and Millerovo. They attached this region to Ukraine¹¹². The Soviets were in no position at this time to contest this move or risk war with Germany.



The German occupation of southern Russian territory included the western portion of the Don Cossack region, a contested area between the Soviets and Whites. Some Cossack leaders began cooperating with the Germans, with the result that the Germans allowed these leaders to recruit local Cossacks to go fight the Soviets and even helped equip them.

Although the Soviets had been expelled from Ukrainian territory, many parts of Ukraine remained in unrest or rebellion during 1918, filled with anti-German groups, anti-Hetmanate groups, anarchists, separatists, and Soviet agitators. Many members of the disbanded Free Cossacks would form new units and fight the occupiers, the Hetmanate, the Whites, and the

¹¹¹ Hetman was a traditional Cossack term for the general of a Cossack host. The Second Hetmanate was an attempt to recall memories of the Cossack Hetmanate in 17th Century Ukraine.

¹¹² I have not researched the reason why the Germans occupied this region, but the most likely explanation is that they were trying to capture more agricultural resources for German use.

Reds in 1918–1919. As the Soviets conquered Ukraine, they disbanded the Free Cossacks and repressed Ukrainians who had opposed the Soviets.



German photo recon of a burning brickyard west of Rostov-na-Donu, May 1918¹¹³

Days after the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed, the Bolsheviks renamed their party the **Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks)**. This treaty, however, deepened the rift between the now-Communists and the Left SR, whose leaders strongly opposed its provisions. They thought Russia should have remained at war with the Central Powers. They believed that proletarian revolutions were about to sweep European countries, and the German revolution would remove the threat from imperial Germany. The Left SR was also upset with the Communists' goals on agricultural land as well as their decrees allowing for extrajudicial measures, state terrorism, and requisition of grain (without fair compensation) from the peasants. The Left SR accordingly left the government coalition and withdrew from Sovnarkom, although they remained in the Central Executive Committee. (The CEC was officially over Sovnarkom but only met occasionally and was completely controlled by its Communist majority.) They did not end all cooperation with the Communists and SR members continued to work in government organizations. Left SR members in the Cheka would refuse to participate in extra-judicial executions.

113 Photograph is from a German aerial recon unit operating in Ukraine in May 1918. Source: <https://digitalcollections.smu.edu/digital/collection/ea/id/501/rec/17>.

Besides political problems with the Left SR, the Soviets had another problem with their government: inexperience and incompetence. Some government officials and workers of the Russian Provisional Government had quit when the Bolsheviks took over in the October Revolution. The Bolsheviks then discharged most of the rest as being part of the bourgeoisie and thus enemies of socialism. The Bolsheviks believed they could do a better job themselves through ideological fervor, but their inexperience in government soon showed, contributing to the chaos occurring throughout the country. During 1918, the Bolsheviks somewhat reluctantly had to turn to “specialists” to help them govern. These typically were former government officials and workers recalled to their jobs. This move was highly controversial within the Party, and they were often called “bourgeois specialists” (*burzhuaznye spetsialisty*) to make clear they came from the despised class enemies. Many Party members would harass the specialists through “specialist baiting” (*spetseedstvo*) when they encountered them. Even Communists in favor of using specialists did not trust them. Security forces monitored the specialists for counter-revolutionary activity and sabotage.

The Russian economy had been in very bad shape when the Soviets took over, and it worsened afterwards, due to disruption of production and rail transportation. The black market, which had grown immensely in 1916–1917, flourished even more, as desperate people bought essential goods not available elsewhere. Speculators held back goods and tried to manipulate prices in hopes of making huge profits.

Factory production was disrupted by Marxist ideology as well as the chaos of the times. The Soviets rid the factories of their bourgeois owners and managers. The workers themselves were placed in charge of running their factories. Lack of managerial experience quickly caused problems, resulting in falling rates of production. Like with the government, the Soviets had to bring back many former managers to run the factories more efficiently, with security forces watching them for counter-revolution and sabotage.

The Soviets created several security forces to fight counter-revolution, sabotage, and speculation. The most important one was the **Cheka**¹¹⁴, the secret police run by the ruthless Feliks Dzerzhinskiy (“Iron Feliks”). The Cheka was created in December 1917 and soon began using brutal means to quash real and suspected foes of the Soviets, including arbitrary

114 “Cheka” was the Russian pronunciation of the abbreviation ChK (and (also “*Vecheka*” from VChK), for the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage (*Vserossouskaya Chrezvychaynaya Komissiya po Borbe s Kontrrevolyutsiy i Sabotazhem*). In 1918, its official name was changed to the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution, Profiteering, and Corruption, but its abbreviation and common name remained unchanged. Members of the Cheka were called **Chekists**, a term the public used for secret police members long after the Cheka itself had changed its name.

arrest, torture, imprisonment in forced-labor camps, and extrajudicial executions. These tools would be used off and on for decades by the Soviet secret police forces.

As opposition to the Soviets and civil war grew, the Soviets resorted to state terror operations and indiscriminate massacres of real or suspected opponents to scare the population in acquiescence. For example, after Lenin was wounded in an assassination attempt in 1918, the Soviet launched an official Red Terror campaign. Soviet media publicized this campaign as part of the effort to terrorize opponents and encourage supporters. The Red Terror is covered in more detail in the companion guidebook, *Soviet Military Command and State Security*. In brief, the Red Terror is thought to be responsible for the deaths of at least 1,200,000 people, with some estimates placing it at 2,000,000 deaths.

Many sides in the civil war resorted to acts of terror, extra-judicial executions, and war crimes. For example, tiny Estonia in 1919 arbitrarily executed several crew members of captured Soviet destroyers. The Whites, as the main opponents of the Soviets, were second only to the Soviets themselves in state terror. They conducted a White Terror against Communist Party members, Soviets officials, and Soviet supporters. Unlike the Red Terror, the White Terror was not an official policy of the White government(s), nor did the Whites create a secret police force to implement the terror. Instead, the White Terror occurred on the initiative of various White leaders or spontaneously in the field by White forces. It is estimated the White Terror caused 300,000 deaths and perhaps more than 500,000, although that latter number included victims killed by all anti-Soviet forces and not just the Whites¹¹⁵.

115 In Ukraine, for example, Ukrainian nationalists conducted many programs against Jews, but these Ukrainians were not under control of the Whites.

7 Civil War: Rise of the Whites, 1918

The peace with the Central Powers in March 1918 allowed the Soviets to concentrate on fighting their domestic opponents. Newly-formed Red Army units took the field after short training courses and overcame armed resistance in many areas, extending Soviet control over much of the country. The militarization of the Soviet state also continued. In March, the Soviets required civilian workers to undergo universal (compulsory) military training, as it was “the duty of all citizens of the Republic to come to the defense of their socialist fatherland”¹¹⁶. This did not mean conscription, and the Red Army remained a volunteer military force. The training was not actually universal, as it was only compulsory for men but voluntary for women and for adolescents aged 16–17. It also applied to “workers” (*trudyashchiyesya*) meaning people who toil for a living and thus included both the proletariat and peasants, but not the middle classes, the former nobility, and (likely) other class enemies. As far as I can tell, rebellious groups like Central Asian Muslims seem also to have been excluded.



Lev Trotsky in the Russian Civil War, 1920

Trotsky is standing atop an armored train speaking to Red Army forces. The machinegun projecting from the armored car is a water-cooled Maksim, very likely a Russian-made Maksim Machinegun Model 1910. The lettering on the armored carriage, “сторож револ” in full was “сторож революции” (*storozh revolyutsii*) and meant “GUARDIAN OF THE REVOLUTION”.

¹¹⁶ The quote is from the July 1918 Soviet constitution.

Also in March 1918, Lev Trotskiy, the foremost proponent for building a professional standing army, became People's Commissar for Military and Naval Affairs. This put him in charge of the Red Army. Even though Trotskiy had no military experience at all until the Soviet took power in November 1917, he proved to be the correct choice.

Trotsky was often in the field and at the front lines. He was highly energetic, inspiring, capable, and ruthless. (The character Strelnikov in Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* is based on Trotskiy.) Trotskiy was not a general or military strategist. Instead, he was adept at organization, enforcing ruthless discipline, and instilling morale among the troops. Trotskiy more than anyone else was most responsible for the Red Army's victory in the civil war.



Geographical Overview of the Russian Civil War

The Soviets defined several theaters of operations for fighting the Russian Civil War. The Central Theater, with its Central Industrial Region, was the key region. Fortunately for the Soviets, the Whites rarely controlled much of this theater. This put the Soviets in control of the country's most-developed rail network, especially the rail hub of Moskva. The Soviets could easily transfer troops among the main theaters. In contrast, the Whites rarely had rail connections between their theaters.

Control of the Central Industrial Region also meant the Soviets were in charge of many factories. While this was a definite advantage, it was not overwhelming. Russian industry in the civil war suffered from economic disruption and material shortages, resulting in low output. Even maintenance of existing production machinery was problematic, due to lack of parts and money. Soviet industrial problems were further compounded because enemy forces often controlled key coal and oil centers, creating energy shortages for the factories. The factories could not make enough supplied for the Red Army, which had to get by with less once World War I stockpiles ran out. This was especially the case with ammunition. Fortunately for the Soviets, the supply problems for the Whites were often worse.

The Northwestern Theater was created mainly for political reasons, because of Petrograd. This city had been the traditional capital the Russian Empire and was also the Soviet capital until February-March 1918. Petrograd was also "the cradle of the revolution", since the Bolsheviks' rise to power started in this city in November 1917. Loss of Petrograd would thus have been a symbolic blow to the regime, so the Northwestern Theater was created to defend the city.

Ukraine would be assigned to the Southern Theater or the Western Theater based on the military situation, such as whether the main threat was in the southeast from the Whites or in the west from the Poles.

In contrast to the highly centralized Soviet state, the Whites were disunited and did not even form an all-Russia government until September 1918, with Omsk in Siberia becoming the White capital. Regional White groups in other parts of the country mostly ignored this White government until 1919 and even then effectively remained separate. For example, the Whites in southern Russia ran their own government. Their capital was Ekaterinodar (renamed Krasnodar after the Soviets captured it), then Novorossiysk and finally Sevastopol.

All theaters including the minor ones saw combat operations during the civil war¹¹⁷.

Note the single rail line running into Central Asia from the rest of Russia. The Soviets controlled parts of Central Asia throughout the civil war, but in 1917–1919 White forces in the Urals often blocked the rail line to Central Asia for long periods. This meant supplies and food often could not reach the Soviets in Central Asia, nor could Central Asia's cotton be sent out of the region.

Trotsky's influence quickly extended throughout the Red Army. The practice of common soldiers electing their commanders was not working well, resulting in commanders who

117 Soviet theaters are taken per N.E. Kakurin; *Strategicheskiy Oчерk Grazhdanskoй Voynы (Strategic Outline of the Civil War)*; 1926; http://militera.lib.ru/science/kakurin_ne/01.html (in Russian).

were popular with the troops but who might have no experience or ability in leading the unit. Accordingly, in April, Trotskiy ended the election of military commanders¹¹⁸. This allowed the Red Army high command to get rid of incompetent commanders.

This reform did not solve the problem that most Red Army commanders had neither experience nor professional training in command. Trotskiy wanted to utilize former Tsarist officers as **military specialists**¹¹⁹ (*voyennyi spetsialist*, frequently abbreviated as *voyenspets*) in the Red Army. Unsurprisingly, the Communist faction that had wanted a revolutionary volunteer force instead of a standing army was also bitterly opposed to using military specialists. They could not stop Trotskiy's faction from convincing the Soviet leadership to use these specialists.

The old Army had had about 250,000–300,000 officers, and about 60,000–100,000 served in the civil war as Red Army military specialists. (The Soviets so mistrusted the remainder as class enemies that they would not use them.) The *voyenspets* included former Tsarist generals who in effect became a general staff and advised the Soviet government itself on how to conduct the war. The Soviets tried to select former officers who had not displayed hostility to the Soviets or preference for the Whites. Some histories claim many of these officers disliked the Soviets but thought the Soviets rather than the Whites would be able to hold the country together.

Even Trotskiy's faction was highly suspicious of the loyalty of these specialists. Further, the Soviets worried about the loyalties of some of the Red Army commanders, who might prefer the Mensheviks, Socialist-Revolutionaries, anarchists, or other left-wing political groups more than the Communists. So, also in April 1918¹²⁰, the Soviets introduced a **dual command** system of **military commissars** to watch over the Red Army. Every unit of division size or larger had a military council consisting of the unit commander and two military commissars. The council voted on command and administrative decisions, so the two commissars could overrule a commander. Smaller units down to battalion size had a single military commissar who could countermand or change any orders of the unit's commander. (Even smaller units, below battalion size, did not have military commissars, so their unit commanders had unity of command.)

118 This was enacted on 22 April. Commanders for larger units were appointed by the People's Commissar for Military and Naval Affairs. Commanders for smaller units were appointed by lesser military officials.

119 Some English-language works call them "military experts".

120 One source claims Trotskiy announced this on 6 April 1918 for implementation in the Red Army, with Sovnarkom passing a decree on it on 8 April.

The military commissars were also responsible for punishing any real or imagined instances of disloyalty, including by immediate summary execution. They and their assistants were also in charge of **political education**: indoctrinating the troops in Communist ideology. The commissars were also backed up by the Communist Party members in Red Army units. The Communists were formed into cells and were expected to take action if they detected problems in the unit, including with its commander.

This system of military commissars had its own organization and an official name that changed frequently over the years (see [Organization Names of Political Control of the Military](#) in the appendices.) Its personnel were selected from Communists and other people loyal to the Soviet system. The military commissars helped ensure the Red Army stayed under Soviet control. There is little historical evidence, however, that the military specialists were prone to be treasonous or disloyal. Ex-Tsarist officers were not forced to become specialists, and few if any of those who did become specialists did so hoping to betray they Soviets.

Dual command had some serious negative effects. The need for commissars to approve the orders of commanders sometimes slowed the military decision-making process. Delays could be costly when the tactical situation required fast decisions. Most commissars had little or no military experience, so they sometimes mistakenly prevented necessary orders from being carried out. For example, a commander might order a withdrawal due to tactical reasons, which the commissars might not understand and might overrule. The commissars were also ideologically motivated, which meant the orders they did issue could be unrealistic.

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on 3 March 1918 ended the foreign threat from the Central Powers. The next day, 4 March, a new foreign threat manifested itself: British troops landed at the port of Murmansk in the far north. This was the start of intervention in Russia by the Allied Powers of World War I. The Allied countries were very upset with the Soviets' ceasefire and peace negotiations with the Central Powers. The Eastern Front had tied down considerable numbers of German troops, and the Allies did not want them freed up and sent to the Western Front. The Allies also did not like the Marxist Soviets for political reasons. Several Allied countries accordingly decided to send ground and naval forces to intervene in Russia against the Soviets.

Question: Did the Soviets Know the Allies Were Planning to Intervene?

The Soviets from the 1920s through into the 1950s often had excellent intelligence on foreign intentions, plans, and policies regarding the Soviet state. This was not only the work of the Soviet civilian and military spy agencies but also because of volunteer efforts of many pro-Soviet foreign citizens working in their own governments and militaries. However, in 1918–1919 the Soviets mainly concentrated the intelligence assets on domestic opponents in the civil war.

The Soviets had to build their foreign espionage networks almost from scratch once they came to power. The previous Russian networks mostly collapsed as their intelligence officers were anti-Soviet or were shut down as the Soviets themselves did not trust these intelligence officers. Further, the Soviets during the civil war had very little financial resources to fund foreign intelligence operations.

On the other hand, many people in foreign countries, particularly in Europe were pro-Soviet or at least pro-socialist and willing to help the socialist cause. They would have volunteered information for the Soviets, and some would have been in positions to know that various Allied countries were discussing and then planning intervention in Russia. My sources on Soviet intelligence do not go into this area in any detail. It is unclear if information about Allied intentions reached the Soviet leadership before the intervention actually began.

More British troops arrived in Russia after the initial landing on 4 March. By April, several Allied countries were sending forces to intervene in Russia. Officially, the Allied intervention was to secure stockpiled supplies the Allies had earlier sent to help Russia fight the Central Powers, and the Allies now wanted to prevent their use by the Soviets. Britain alone had sent over 3,000,000 tons of supplies to Russia, and in 1917 the admiral of the British naval detachment guarding the northern ports had reported the supplies were mainly just piling up at the ports rather than transported inland¹²¹. The Allies thus believed

121 Clifford Kinvig; *Churchill's Crusade: The British Invasion of Russia 1918–1920*; 2006. However, this British assessment may have missed the larger picture. For example, the Allies at times had been sending supplies to Arkhangelsk faster than the existing railroad could haul them south, especially since over 320 km (200 miles) of the railroad was just a single-track, narrow gauge line with restricted capacity. The Russians were working on a project to upgrade the entire route to a double-track, broad gauge line, but this took them years to accomplish. See my "Russian and Soviet Northern Ports, 1915-1945" at <http://classiceuropa.org/articles/nports/RsnSvtNorthernPorts.pdf> for more details.

there were major stockpiles at Arkhangelsk and Murmansk in northern Russia and at Vladivostok in the Russian Far East¹²².

Although the Allies did want to secure these supplies, this was also a convenient excuse to intervene. In actuality, many Allied governments hoped intervention would help bring down the Soviets. This is shown by the fact that the intervention did not end once the Allies discovered there were no supply stockpiles at the ports; they had already been shipped inland. Instead of withdrawing, Allied forces fanned out from the ports, allying with the local White forces, and taking control of the countryside from the Soviets.

Fighting between Allied and Soviet forces broke out in several places in the far north, but the Allies in 1918 were not willing to advance on major cities controlled by the Soviets or to otherwise engage in full war against the Red Army. In the east, the Allies marched west from Vladivostok along the Trans-Siberian Railroad. Japan dispatched what would become a large contingent to this operation, raising fears among the other Allies that the Japanese intended to incorporate large parts of eastern Siberia into the Japanese Empire. These fears were not calmed by the fact that the Japanese required their troops to be in an independent Japanese command rather than in a joint Allied command. Later, the fears were increased when Japanese conglomerates began exploiting Siberian resources and brought in up to 50,000 Japanese civilian settlers as workers.



American soldiers arriving in northern Russia, 1918 (unknown photographer)

Happy to Be in Northern Russia, 1918

American soldiers intended for the Western Front were diverted to northern Russia in 1918. The Americans joined British, French, Italian, and other Allied troops there. The Americans troops had initially been ordered to only protect the supply warehouses. When the supplies proved to be gone, they were then sent to secure the countryside and on occasion fought military actions against the Soviets.

¹²² Many German and Austro-Hungarian soldiers taken prisoner by the Russians were in Siberian camps along the Trans-Siberian Railroad. Many had been left minimally guarded following the Bolsheviks' 1917 revolution, and some Allies, the USA in particular, claimed the Vladivostok intervention was in part to protect the supplies there from capture by rampaging "Austro-German" prisoners. See https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/siberian_intervention_1918-1922.



American soldiers in the field in northern Russia, 1919 (unknown photographer)

Not So Happy Now, 1919

Allied intervention forces operated on the peripheries of Russia and included forces from Australia, Britain, Canada, France, Greece, Italy, Japan, Serbia, South Africa, and the USA. This intervention reinforced the Soviet belief that the capitalist, bourgeois countries of the world would always seek to overthrow their state.

The Allies unofficially but effectively blockaded the Soviet state from importing or exporting goods by sea. While the Soviets at this time had extremely limited financial means to pay for imports, they might have imported critically-needed goods to help them fight the war.



Vstunayte do chervonoy kinnoti!
Join the red cavalry!

World War I had been a war of massed infantry and artillery. It was also a war of technology, with rapid progress in military aircraft plus the adoption of tanks and chemical warfare. The Russian Civil War was partially a throwback to 19th Century warfare. Most

operations were conducted with relatively small infantry and cavalry forces maneuvering across Russia with their flanks exposed, more like the days of Napoleonic warfare.

Neither the Red nor the Whites had many tanks or other motorized forces. Most of their weapons had been inherited from the earlier Russian Army, which by 1917 had very few tanks, only a few hundreds of armored cars, several thousand trucks, and barely a thousand aircraft. The Red Army used whatever advanced weapons were left but mainly relied on horses for mobile operations. They raised two cavalry armies during the civil war. The 1st Cavalry Army in particular became a highly-effective force that entered Soviet mythology of the civil war. Three of Stalin's later cronies came from this army.

Spotlight: Stalin's Cronies and Henchmen from the 1st Cavalry Army

S.M. Budyonnyy founded the Red Cavalry during the Russian Civil War. This move was controversial at first among the Soviets, as cavalry and horsemen were mostly associated with class enemies like nobles, Tsarist military officers, and monarchist Cossacks. The mobility and success of the Red Cavalry, however, soon made it a key force in the Red Army. Some Cossacks did favored the Soviets and became known as the Red Cossacks in Red Army service. The Red Cavalry force grew until there were two cavalry armies, with Budyonnyy leading the 1st.



S.M. Budyonnyy in 1943

Budyonnyy became an important supporter of Stalin in the 1920s, and in return for his loyalty Stalin made him a Marshal of the Soviet Union. Budyonnyy remained a staunch proponent of cavalry and strongly opposed the development of tanks and mechanized warfare, although the Red Army developed mechanized forces despite his opposition. In 1941 during the Great Patriotic War, he was in command of the Soviet southern theater, which suffered tremendous losses during German encirclements at Uman and Kiev. He was relieved of command during the Kiev operation and never allowed to command troops in the field again. His loyalty to Stalin possibly saved his life, as he had lost more troops than D.G. Pavlov, the commander of the Western Front who was executed in 1941 for having his command smashed in the initial German invasion.

K.E. Voroshilov was the top military commissar for the 1st Cavalry Army. Like Budyonnyy, he became an important supporter of Stalin in the 1920s and in return became a Marshal of the Soviet Union. Voroshilov headed the People's Commissariat of Defense, which administered the Red Army. Unlike Budyonnyy, Voroshilov believed that tanks and mechanized warfare were necessary for the Red Army. He also played a leading role in Stalin's purge of the Red Army in the late 1930s, denouncing officers that Stalin wanted to be rid of, even though he personally believed few of his victims were actually saboteurs, spies, or traitors.



Portrait of K.E. Voroshilov, circa 1937

Voroshilov was dismissed from his post in January 1940 because of the Red Army's dismal performance at the start of the Winter War with Finland. He refused to accept fault and blamed Stalin to his face for purging the Red Army's best generals. He became a field commander after Germany invaded in 1941 but was removed from command in September when the Germans cut off his Leningrad Front and the city of Leningrad from the rest of the USSR.

G.I. Kulik was the artillery commander in the 1st Cavalry Army. Kulik came from a peasant family, joined the Bolsheviks in November 1917, and became an artillery commander, even though supposedly he had no prior artillery experience and did not even know how to lay a gun for firing. He eventually became chief of the entire branch of Red Army artillery and a Marshal of the Soviet Union.



G.I. Kulik, late 1930s or early 1940s

Kulik had married during the Russian Civil War but was ordered to divorce his wife because her family members were class enemies of the Soviet state. (They were kulaks, well-off peasants.) In 1930, Kulik married again, to Kira Ivanovna Simonich. On 5 May 1940, two days before Kulik was promoted to marshal, Simonich disappeared. Simonich also had class enemy connections, as her father had been an officer in the Imperial Russian Army. Simonich was also in contact with foreigners visiting the USSR, which almost inevitably led Stalin to believe she was a spy. Kulik had early refused Stalin's order to divorce Simonich. Kulik reported Simonich as missing, and a massive

official search was mounted for her with no success. In actuality, the NKVD had secretly taken Simonich, interrogated her, and then executed her. All this was almost certainly on Stalin's orders.

Kulik like Budyonnyy opposed the development of tanks. Kulik attempted, unsuccessfully, to block the development of the T-34 and KV-1. He also required the two tanks at first to use an inferior 76.2-mm gun even though a one was available. He interfered with 76.2-mm ammunition production, causing shortages. Most of the T-34 and KV-1 tanks started the war short of ammunition, and most had high-explosive rounds good only soft targets rather than antitank rounds. Kulik also opposed the "Katyusha" rocket artillery, but an energetic subordinate managed to get the Katyushas adopted for military service.

During 1941, Kulik was given several commands, which he incompetently managed. He mishandled an army near Leningrad, evacuated the Crimea against orders, and gave up the city of Rostov-na-Donu. He was recalled in late 1941 and in early 1942 was court-martialled and demoted. His loyalty to Stalin perhaps saved him from execution. He was given another chance in 1943 with the command of the 4th Guards Army. He was unable to lead this army effectively, was relieved, and was kept in the rear area, where he managed to get demoted again for drunkenness.

Note: Many distinguished Soviet generals in WW2 had served in the 1st Cavalry Army: S.K. Timoshenko (front commander and Stavka representative), A.I. Eryomenko (front commander), K.A. Meretskov (front commander), A.V. Khrulyov (head of Red Army logistics), D.D. Lelyushenko (army commander), K.S. Moskalenko (army commander), P.L. Romanenko (army commander), and P.S. Rybalko (army commander).

The Red Army was mainly a foot and horse force by necessity. Many Soviet civilian and military leaders were modernists and wanted to use the most advanced military technologies and equipment, including trucks, tanks, military aircraft, and chemical weapons. The industrial economy that the Soviets inherited from the previous Russian state simply wasn't able to produce many of these items. For example, the Soviets wanted factories to make a Soviet version of the French FT-17 tank, but they were not able to produce it. Instead, engineers managed to hand-craft about two dozen copies.

World War I saw the introduction of widespread use of chemical weapons, first by Germany and then by almost all major combatants. The Russian Empire created a chemical warfare industry almost from scratch, and the Soviets inherited this chemical arsenal when they took over Russia. These weapons were most effective when used in static warfare. For example, chlorine gas was dispensed from large cylinders that had to be carefully emplaced ahead of time. Since most of the Russian Civil War was a highly-mobile conflict, the Soviets' chemical weapons sat in storage, often degrading due to improper facilities and poor maintenance. With little military demand for chemical weapons, the Soviet chemical agent factories were repurposed to make ammunition and other goods the Red Army needed. The chemical weapons were used on a few occasions, but their largest use was for civilian use: the People's Commissariat of Agriculture had decided to use chemical weapons as pesticides! By the early spring of 1918, the Soviets were making excellent progress fighting the Whites, suppressing revolts, and pacifying the country. Armed resistance to the Soviets was mostly confined to several pockets. Allied intervention was in its earliest stages and not yet a serious threat. It seemed likely the Soviets would soon establish control over the entire country. However, May 1918 would see fortunes turn for the worse for the Soviets.

On the domestic front, ongoing food shortages caused the Communists to increase their repressive food policies in May. They had continued the grain monopoly of the Provisional Government when they took over. They issued decrees that (9 May) formally confirmed their use of the monopoly and (13 May) gave the People's Commissariat of Food emergency powers to "combat the rural bourgeoisie", whom the Soviets claimed were hiding their grain and speculating with it on the black market. The rural bourgeoisie meant the kulaks and other well-off peasants but in practice most peasants with sufficient crops could be accused of being part of the rural bourgeoisie. While some peasants were certainly hiding grain and speculating, they were also being used as scapegoats. The economic mismanagement and self-defeating food policies by the previous Russian governments and the current Soviet one were largely to blame for the food shortages.

Sidetrip: The Soviets and the Kulaks in the Civil War

Kulaks were well-off peasants, many of whom owned large, prosperous farms compared to other peasants. Kulaks often hired poorer peasants to work for them. Some kulaks had owned wooded land and thus sold firewood to other peasants. Since profiting from private property and exploiting the labor of others

were serious Marxist transgressions, the Soviets considered the kulaks to be petty bourgeois and thus class enemies¹²³.



Soviet poster vilifying the clergy, kulaks, and the White Guards

Many other peasants resented the relative wealth of the kulaks, and the poor image of kulaks was reinforced by stereotypes of kulaks as being greedy or cruel. Some, by no means all, kulaks certainly treated the peasants they hired badly, exacting heavy labor for little compensation. Others sought excessive profits by selling necessities like firewood to neighboring peasants. In fact, the word “*kulak*” itself meant “fist” and became associated with these peasants for the reputation of being tight-fisted, stingy. Soviet propaganda exploited kulak stereotypes to further incite poorer peasants to wage class warfare against the kulaks. During the civil war, this resulted in some peasant attacks the kulaks, resulting in massacres.

The Soviets themselves heavily repressed the kulaks during the civil war, including confiscating their livestock and crops as well as arbitrarily executing some in order to terrorize the rest. The Soviets would continue to vilify and repress the kulaks after the civil war. Once in power, Stalin would start a campaign whose public goal was the “liquidation of the kulaks as a class”. This would indeed destroy the remaining kulaks, through exile to labor colonies, imprisonment in the GULag, and execution.

On 20 May the Soviet began creating armed “food detachments” that were to enforce the food monopoly. The next day, the Soviets appealed for volunteers to staff these detachments,

¹²³ The Soviets also called Kuliks the rural bourgeoisie or, in some of Lenin’s writings, the “village bourgeoisie”, as Russian farming was mostly organized around small farming villages.

in language that people interpreted as allowing them to use the death penalty against opponents:

Bread must be obtained at all costs. If it is impossible to take grain from the rural bourgeoisie by ordinary means, then it must be taken by force. We must fight for bread! And we call you to this fight. Join the ranks of the food detachments organized by the Commissariat of Food! Weapons and the necessary means will be given to you. There are no other measures against the outstretched bony hand of hunger that would give immediate positive results. You have won a victory over the landowners and the big bourgeoisie. In order to carry this victory through to the end, we must also win a victory over the middle and petty bourgeoisie, over the rural kulaks. This victory can come to you only after great and persistent efforts. But no matter what difficulties stand in the way of a new struggle, the latter cannot be abandoned. The struggle for bread now means the struggle against the counter-revolution, already triumphant in Finland, the Baltic region and the Ukraine, the struggle for Soviet power, for socialism! Do not forget this, workers of Red Peterburg, and do not hesitate to immediately open a merciless struggle against the kulaks, marauders, speculators and disorganizers for bread!

—Appeal to the Peterburg Workers on the Organization of Food Detachments by Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars V. Ulyanov (Lenin); May 21, 1918¹²⁴ (highlighting and bold text added)

To most of the peasantry, the Communists had turned out to be worse than the Tsarist state or the Russian Provisional Government, so rural unrest increased. These food policies were part of what came to be called **War Communism**, in which the state not only confiscated factories and other enterprises from their owners without compensation but also in essence took anything it needed, usually with grossly inadequate payment. The Soviets also forbade workers to go on strike, conscripted citizens into labor units, and used the forced labor of military and civilian prisoners. The Soviets' goals were to feed the cities and towns and to provision and arm the Red Army. War Communism worked in the short term but caused economic collapse. For example, war communism appropriated "surplus" food, whether or not it was really surplus, at nominal compensation rates. This impoverished peasants and led to many planting fewer crops or just growing enough to feed their families.

The Left SR, whose socialist goals favored the peasants, were further alienated from the Communists by these food policies. Left SR leaders denounced their policies. They also called for the Ukrainians to rebel against the Central Powers, which would have endangered the peace treaty with the Central Powers, and accused the Communists of abandoning

124 <http://www.hist.msu.ru/ER/Text/DEKRET/18-05-21.htm> (in Russian). The text used "Peterburg" and "Red Peterburg" instead of "Petrograd", likely because the people of the city informally called their city "Peterburg".

revolutionary socialism and obstructing the working class. The Communists, who never liked criticism or sharing power, turned against the Left SR on 14 June. They declared the Left SR, as well as the Right SR and Mensheviks, were in alliance with counter-revolutionaries. The Left SR and Mensheviks were expelled from the All-Russian Central Executive Committee¹²⁵. Since the Left SR had earlier left Sovnarkom, this was another major step in turning the Soviet state into a single-party system.

The Communists also urged the various soviets throughout the country to expel the Left SR and Mensheviks¹²⁶. The Left SR was not banned as a party and would have deputies present at the next Congress of Soviets, to meet on 4 July.



125 The Left SR had earlier left Sovnarkom, the Soviet executive body, but had remained in the Executive Committee.

126 For the text of the decree, see <http://www.hist.msu.ru/ER/Text/DEKRET/18-06-14.htm> (in Russian).

Soviet allies, White allies: Various groups would ally or cooperate with either the Soviets or the Whites, sometimes switching sides as the war progressed. (For example, Kazakhs seeking autonomy within Russia switched sides and then were conquered.) The territory these groups controlled is accordingly shown as Soviet/Soviet allies and White/White allies.

Be aware that “control” of territory sometimes was quite tenuous, with raiders, partisan forces, and rebel groups sometimes present. Also, large parts of Russia were remote, sparsely inhabited places, particularly northern Russia, Siberia, and the deserts of Central Asia. There often was little centralized control over these areas except at population centers, along rail lines, and along navigable waterways. Most of the Russian islands in the Arctic Ocean were uninhabited and had no significance in the civil war, so which side claimed to “controlled” them was inconsequential. Indeed, Wrangel (*Vrangelya*) Island off the northeastern coast of Siberia as late as the early 1920s was subjected to attempts to claim it for Canada, the USA, and the Soviet state until the Soviets finally established firm control over the island.



Czechoslovak Legionnaires in Siberia on the Trans-Siberian Railroad

The Soviets made a serious mistake in May 1918 when they tried to disarm the Czechoslovak Legion. The Russian Empire had formed this legion of nationalist Czechs and Slovaks from Austria-Hungary during World War I. The legion fought for Russia in hopes that defeat of Austria-Hungary would result in an independent Czechoslovakian state. After the October Revolution in 1917, the members of the Czechoslovak Legion, perhaps on the order of 45,000–50,000 strong, wanted to leave Russia and continue the fight in France. The only practical route out was across the length of Russia to the Pacific Ocean port of Vladivostok. This journey took considerable time due to the chaos following the revolution, and by spring 1918 the legionnaires were strung out along the Trans-Siberian Railroad heading east.

***Sidetrip:* Strength of the Czechoslovak Legion in Soviet Russia**

Various works claim different sizes for the Czechoslovak Legion in Soviet Russia, from a low of 40,000 to a high of 100,000. A Czechoslovakian organization in 1932

claimed the Legion during its entire time in Russia (including World War I under the Russian Empire and Russian Provisional Government) had about 60,000 legionnaires (60,109), of which 4,000 (4,120) were known losses and another 11,000 (10,913) were unaccounted for. It seems like that many of the losses occurred while the Legion was on the Eastern Front fighting the Central Powers up through March 1918.

Kakurin's 1926 work on the civil war claims 40,000 for the Legion, although it is unclear how accurate this figure is (Soviet wartime intelligence?) and it is clearly a round figure. It seems likely Kakurin's figure is the basis for many later works that claim the Legion had 40,000 in Russia during the civil war. It is also unclear if Kakurin's total excludes the legionnaires who managed to leave Russia before May 1918. Various sources state 2,000 managed to evacuate from Arkhangelsk and Murmansk. The main evacuation route was east to Vladivostok on the Pacific Ocean, and Kakurin can be read to imply some legionnaires left via Vladivostok before the revolt.

Complicating this numbers game is the existence of the "Serbian Legions" in Russia, 40,000 soldiers from prisoners of war taken by the Russians. Could the higher claims of 100,000 for Czechoslovak Legion include the Serbians?

Although Serbia was allied with Russia in WW1, these prisoners were conscripted southern Slavs (Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes) from the lands of the enemy Austro-Hungarian Empire. Many of these Serbs and a very few of the other southern Slavs saw Serbia as their actual homeland and wanted to fight for Serbia. Two "Serbian" divisions ended up being formed in Russia. These forces were known by many names: the Serbian Divisions; the Serbian Volunteer Corps; the Volunteer Corps of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes; the Serbian Regiments; the Yugoslav Legion; the Serbian Legion. Their total strength was about 40,000, with about 20,000 left in Russia by the time the Soviets came to power. Many of these soldiers joined the Red Army but some did not. On the order of 6,000 were disarmed by the Soviets and imprisoned at Kazan in the central Volga region. (The imprisonment of these Serbs was known to the Czechoslovak legionnaires and one of the reasons they did not trust the Soviets.) After the Legion's revolt, the legionnaires freed these prisoners. Many then fought with the Whites (and likely with the Czechoslovak Legion although I have not confirmed this). Many if

not most of these Serbs seem to have traveled east to Vladivostok for evacuation along with the Czechoslovakians.

The Soviets greatly mistrusted the intentions of the Legion. After the Allied intervention started in March 1918, the Soviets came to believe the Legion was a tool of the Allies and a danger to the Soviet state. In May, they attempted to disarm the Legion. The legionnaires resisted and joined the civil war against the Soviets.

Unlike many of the forces in civil war at this time, the Czechoslovak Legion was well trained, highly motivated, and had many battle-hardened veterans. The Red Army was no match against them and quickly lost ground in many areas. In the Far East in June, the Legion seized Vladivostok, the terminus of the Trans-Siberian Railroad and Russia's only important port on the Pacific Ocean.

Sidetrip: Control of Vladivostok



US troops in Vladivostok, August 1918

Vladivostok had passed into Soviet control in November 1917 when mutinying sailors of the Russian Pacific Fleet seized the city. Vladivostok was not a major industrial city and only had a small population of pro-Soviet workers, while much of the remaining population was anti-Soviet. The Allies (Britain, Japan, and the USA) sent warships carrying troops into the port's harbor in late 1917 and early 1918 without landing them, apparently hoping that a show of force would spark a counter-revolution in the city, but this did not happen.

In April 1918, an attack on a Japanese business in the city prompted the Japanese to finally land troops, with the British then following. These troops, however, were for the protection of their nationals and did not attempt to take control of the city. On 29 June, the Czechoslovak Legion seized the city from the Soviets.

The Allies that summer began landing intervention forces including American, British, Canadian, Chinese¹²⁷, French, Italian, Japanese, Polish, Romanian, and Serbian soldiers.

To further justify their intervention in Russia, the Allied powers would claim they needed to rescue the Czechoslovak Legion from the Soviets. In mid-1918, however, it was the Legion that rescued the Whites. The collapse of the Red Army at the hands of the Legion reinvigorated the White forces across most of Russia.

The Legion's revolt immediately thrust the Urals region into contention. Many Orenburg Cossacks in the area had been in revolt since the Soviets came to power in 1917, and they together with other Cossack and White groups in the Urals and Siberia participated in the Legion's offensive operations. The Urals had been a Soviet stronghold¹²⁸, which is why the Romanovs were being held there at Perm and Ekaterinburg¹²⁹. The Soviets now feared the Whites would free the Romanovs and announce the restoration of the monarchy, which might rally many Russians to their side. To prevent this, the Soviets in June murdered former Grand Prince Mikhail in Perm, followed in July by murdering the former Tsar Nikolay II and his family in Ekaterinburg. The murder of the former Tsar was announced as a "necessary execution" in the Soviet press, but disinformation campaigns attempted to hide or muddle information on the murders of his family and of Mikhail.

The Czechoslovak Legion pushed into the central Volga region, capturing the city of Samara in June. Anti-Soviet deputies from the Constituent Assembly that the Soviets had broken up in January gathered there and attempted to create an all-Russia government in opposition to the Soviet state. Their goal was to form a temporary government and then reconvene the Assembly, which would then finish its business of creating a constitution and legitimate government for Russia. This group became known as Komuch (from **Kom**itet Chlenov Vserossiyskogo **Uch**reditelnogo Sobraniya; Committee of the Members of the All-Russian Constituent Assembly). Komuch, however, had few members and was dominated by Socialist-Revolutionaries, so despite claiming authority over all of Russia many Whites simply ignored it. It did gain limited allegiance from a few regional White groups.

127 My sources do not specify whether the Chinese troops were sent by sea or marched in from neighboring Manchuria.

128 The southern Urals had coal and iron resources resulting in the creation of heavy industries there. The region's industry underwent strong growth in the years just before World War I. During the war, the region continued to grow to support the war effort, until economic and political chaos set in. Like elsewhere in Russia, living and working conditions for the mining and industrial workers was quite poor, leading to worker radicalization and support for revolutionary socialists.

129 Former Grand Prince Mikhail had been sent to Perm once the Soviets arrested him after the closure of the Russian Constituent Assembly. Former Tsar Nikolay II and his family had been under house arrest in Tobolsk in western Siberia, but they were then moved to Ekaterinburg.

With the Soviets suffering setbacks from the Czechoslovak Legion in the Urals and central Volga, some regional White forces in other parts of the country went over to the attack. The Whites in the Southern Theater in particular, who had been facing defeat, staged a major comeback. They launched an offensive in June 1918 with no more than 9,000 troops and soon overran nearby areas. They reached areas of the North Caucasus, where many volunteers, especially Kuban Cossacks, soon swelled their ranks to perhaps 35,000, with more joining later. As the Southern Whites expanded in southern Russia, the Soviet industrial city of Tsaritsyn on the Volga River was seen as a serious threat on their northeastern flank. In July, they decided to take the city, beginning a months-long campaign of advances, sieges, and retreats. The city was held by Soviet troops under command of Stalin, bolstered by worker militias who built and manned many barricades. Tsaritsyn did not fall to the Whites in 1918. The last campaign of 1918, in October, saw 50,000 Whites battling 130,000 Soviets for the city. The stronger Red Army defeated the Whites and forced them to retreat.

Spotlight: Heroic Tsaritsyn



Comrades Stalin, Voroshilov and Shchadenko in the trenches near Tsaritsyn;
M.B. Grekov; 1933 or 1934.

Tsaritsyn was an important city in southern Russia, being an industrial center making civilian and military goods. It was also a transportation hub, on one of only two major railroads connecting the Caucasus region with the rest of Russia, and also being an important river port on the Volga River. Control of the city could block traffic on the Volga, which in good times carried oil and agricultural products north to central Russia and other products south. Much of the countryside in city's region was productive agricultural land.

The heroic defense of Tsaritsyn became a theme of Soviet propaganda. For its steadfast defense in 1918 and repulse of another White advance in early 1919, the city received a Revolutionary Red Banner award on 17 May 1919.

Embarrassingly, Tsaritsyn would then fall to the Whites in June 1919 with 40,000 soldiers surrendering. It would not be recaptured until 1920. Later Soviet propaganda about heroic Tsaritsyn simply neglected to mention events after May 1919.

In 1924, the proletariat of the city was awarded the Order of the Red Banner. The Soviets also renamed a district of the city and a factory “Red Barricades” in honor of the workers’ defenses on the barricades. In 1925, Tsaritsyn was renamed Stalingrad as part of this propaganda effort¹³⁰, glorifying Stalin’s role at the city in 1918.



Defense of Tsaritsyn; Detail from a panorama by M.B. Grekov; before 1934.

The summer of 1918 also saw White forces in north begin to cooperate with the Allied intervention forces at Murmansk and Arkhangelsk. These forces pushed the Soviets back in the north. In theory, the advance of these forces threatened Petrograd, the birthplace of the Soviet state. In 1918, however, the Whites were too weak to seriously threaten the city on their own, and the Allies were unwilling to intervene that extensively.

Petrograd would also be threatened from the west. From the summer of 1918, the Germans began assisting the creation of a White force in the area around Pskov, a Russian city just west of the German-occupied Baltic region. These Northwestern Whites were promised

¹³⁰ Despite the “Tsar” in Tsaritsyn, the name had nothing to do with Tsars or the Russian monarchy. The name likely was derived from a phrase for “yellow river” in the local Tatar dialect of the 16th Century or possibly from a Tatar name for an island in the Volga River in the area. Despite this etymology, the “Tsar” in the name bothered the Soviets and was one of reasons they decided to change the city’s name to Stalingrad. In 1961, the name was changed again, to Volgograd, as part of the Soviet’s program to de-Stalinize the USSR.

considerable German support and supplies, but this failed to materialize when Germany lost World War I later than year. These Whites then came to an arrangement with Estonia (for more details, see the appendix, [Estonia in the Russian Civil War](#)) and would become a threat to Petrograd in 1919. After the defeat of Germany, the British sent a naval force into the Baltic Sea in late 1918, which brought supplies to Estonia, forced the Soviet Baltic Fleet to shelter in port, and shelled Red Army troops and supply lines along the Baltic coast.

The turn of fortunes against the Soviets meant the Red Army needed to grow much larger, but as always insufficient volunteers were coming forward. Less than 125,000 had volunteered for the Red Army in its first six months (about 116,000 infantry and 7,900 cavalry¹³¹). Conscription was clearly necessary, even though the Soviets knew it would be unpopular and would fill the Red Army with soldiers who did not want to fight for the Soviets.

Sidetrip: The Start of Conscription

Many works on the Red Army and the Russian Civil War have contradictory or incorrect information on when the Soviets started conscription and who was affected by it. For example, both English-language and Russian-language works variously claim conscription began in May, June, or July. Much of this confusion because the Soviets rolled out conscription in stages: “In view of the complex problems involved in applying this decree over the whole territory of Russia, the All-Russia CEC [Central Executive Committee] decided to begin applying it in the most directly threatened regions and in the principal centers of the labor

131 N.E. Kakurin; *Strategicheskii Ocherk Grazhdanskoy Voyny (Strategic Outline of the Civil War)*; 1926;

http://militera.lib.ru/science/kakurin_ne/01.html (in Russian). Parts of it are seeped in Communist ideology and propaganda, such as the following about mid-1918: “A positive result of the intervention was an internal change in the mood of the Soviet country and the army, when for the first time everyone realized that the country was in mortal danger. This change of mood caused a mass movement to the front of conscious proletarian elements in the form of members of the trade unions and members of the Communist Party, who formed the strong backbone of the Red Army.” This makes it sound like many volunteers came forward, by in actuality, the mass movement was due to the Soviets resorting to conscription for the general public and party mobilization (a kind of conscription) for the Communist Party.

Caution also must be used with this work, as some items are incorrect or allow incorrect implications. For example, Kakurin covers the British landing in the far north in June 1918, giving the impression this was the start of Allied intervention there, when the British actually first landed in March. Nonetheless, this work was intended for the Red Army and goes into some interesting details. Although it often blames problems on the machinations of foreign intervention rather than misguided Soviet decisions and policies, it also acknowledges Soviet mistakes, such as the attempt to go on the offensive in all main theaters in late 1918 with insufficient forces. The text of the entire work is accessible at http://militera.lib.ru/science/kakurin_ne/index.html. (Unfortunately, the maps are not included.)

movement.”¹³² The following account is my attempt to untangle this story, but it could be wrong in some details.

On 29 May 1918, Sovnarkom issued a decree on “Compulsory Recruitment into the Workers’ and Peasants’ Red Army”. This only applied to the cities of Petrograd and Moscow and to the Don and Kuban regions¹³³, places of considerable resistance to the Soviets. The length of service was set at six months (the same as for volunteers) but in October was extended to a full year¹³⁴.

On 12 June, conscription was expanded to parts of the Volga, Urals, and western Siberian regions¹³⁵. During June, the Soviets also increased the age range of males subject to conscription. Conscription was limited to the “workers” of Petrograd and Moskva, which meant that the bourgeois classes would not be drafted, as the Soviets believed them traitorous. Similarly, in larger regions, conscription was limited to workers and the “poorest peasants”¹³⁶. This excluded the kulaks and likely the middle peasants, peasants who weren’t kulaks but were not impoverished like most peasants. It might seem that exemption from military service would be a benefit, but in the civilian economy the Soviets were heavily repressing the kulaks as well as confiscating much of the crops of the kulaks and middle peasants.

On 26 June, Trotskiy called on the Soviet leadership to start universal military service for the “working people” in general (meaning both the proletariat and peasantry) and for the bourgeois classes to serve in rear-area militias. On 29 July, Sovnarkom proclaimed universal military service for all males aged 18–40 across the entire Soviet state. (It is unclear from my sources if the Soviets kept bourgeois conscripts in the rear areas as Trotskiy had proposed.)

Conscription was also accompanied by **Communist Party mobilization**. The Party’s Central Committee could draft Party members across the country and send them to perform critical tasks wherever needed¹³⁷. Party members were rightly regarded as the most loyal and most ideologically-motivated segment of the Soviet state. The first party mobilization occurred in July 1918 when Central Committee mobilized Party members to serve as military commissars and their assistants to watch over the expanding Red Army. Party members

132 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1918/military/ch28.htm>.

133 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1918/military/ch28.htm>. Other sources just imply conscription started in general on 29 May or list the Volga, Urals, and western Siberian regions instead of the Don and Kuban regions.

134 <https://tass.ru/info/684378> (in Russian).

135 Some sources just imply conscription started in general on 12 June.

136 Other sources use “peasants who do not exploit the labor of others” instead of “poorest peasants”, but this meant the same thing.

137 Local party organizations could do the same using local Party members for local purposes.

were also be sent to serve as soldiers and commanders in the Red Army, stiffening units with loyal Communists. Some sources state about half the membership of the Communist Party was subjected to party mobilization during the civil war.

Although the Soviets proclaimed the emancipation of women and gender equality, women were not subject to conscription. Female volunteers were accepted, and some women served in combat roles, including the publicized “Women’s Battalion of Death”. Most were in service positions. Women made up about 2% of Red Army personnel in 1920. It is unclear from my sources whether female Communist Party members were subject to party mobilization. Women comprised about 9–10% of the Party (in 1921¹³⁸). If they were not subject to mobilization, some certainly volunteered and served in the field as military commissars or their assistants during the civil war.

Conscription caused the Red Army to grow quickly, outpacing the ability of the Soviets to provide enough commanders for the new units. In August, the Soviets being drafting former non-commissioned officers¹³⁹ who had served in the WW1 Russian Army to become commanders. Since they already had lower-level command experience, they could be trained in higher-level commanders faster than other recruits.

On the domestic front, the 5th All-Russian Congress of Soviets convened on 4 July in Moskva. The presence of a suspiciously large number of Communist deputies led to the impression that the Communists had packed the congress with people who had not been legitimately elected, to have an overwhelming majority: out of 1,164 total deputies, the Communists had 773 Communists and the Left SR had 353¹⁴⁰. The congress saw the Left SR speak out against many government policies introduced by the Communists including the treatment of the peasants, the re-introduction of the death penalty, the humiliating peace treaty with the Central Powers, and the occupation of Ukraine by Germany and Austria-Hungary. During the congress, two members of the Left SR assassinated the German ambassador to the Russian SFSR. The leadership of the Left SR had planned the assassination and hoped it would cause Germany to break the peace treaty, thereby ending the Soviets’ “shameful policy of conciliation” with the Central Powers. The leadership, however, had not planned for the subsequent event: Left SR members in Moskva revolted and even briefly captured F.E. Dzerzhinskiy, the head of the Cheka. In response, the

138 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/kollonta/1921/peasant.htm>.

139 These were called “under-officers” (*unter-ofitsery*) in Russia but are equivalent to US NCOs.

140 There were also 17 Socialist-Revolutionaries-Maximalists, 4 Menshevik-Internationalists, 4 anarchists, 1 Right SR, 1 Armenian Federationist, 1 Zionist, and 10 non-partisan deputies. As usual for this period, other sources give different figures, such as 1,132 total deputies (vice 1,164), 745 Communists (vice 773), and 352 Left SR (vice 353).

Communists crushed the revolt and arrested all Left SR deputies at the congress. The Soviets banned the Left SR, the last major party in the Soviet state other than the Communists¹⁴¹. This was the the last major step in making the country a Communist one-party state, as the remaining parties had insignificant representation in the Soviet government¹⁴². The Soviets would demonize the Left SR in their propaganda in hopes of destroying popular support for the party.



*Osteregaytes Menshevikov i Eserov:
Za nimi idut tsarskiye generaly popy i nomeshchiki.*

Beware Mensheviks and SRs:
Behind them follow Tsarist generals, priests and noblemen.

The poster shows a Socialist-Revolutionary with a banner proclaiming “Land and Freedom for the People”, but he is actually leading back the oppressors of the people and death itself.

The numerous defeats by the Czechoslovak Legion and the revitalized Whites were shaking the morale of the Red Army. Trotskiy responded by instituting draconian punishments for insubordination and desertion, problems they knew had gravely weakened the Russian Army of the Provisional Government in 1917. Also, many civilians were illegally trying to avoid conscription, so this was now counted as considered desertion.

141 Small splinter parties from the Left SR were allowed to form and work with the Communists in the government for a time.

Left SR members who were not involved in the assassination or revolt were later allowed to join the Communist Party.

142 The Soviets would official give their Party a monopoly of power later.

Another serious problem caused by the many reverses in the field was that many Red Army soldiers began retreating without being ordered to do so. To prevent unauthorized retreats, Trotskiy and the Cheka created retreat-blocking detachments. These were stationed behind the troops and were authorized to fire on soldiers who spontaneously tried to withdraw. The Soviets in World War II would resort to similar retreat-blocking detachments.

The top Soviet leadership was fine with the harsh new punishments and the retreat-blocking detachments. Stalin and other Soviet leaders extensively used them in the field. Many in the leadership, however, found another of Trotskiy's mid-1918 measures far more controversial: giving more authority to the military specialists. Combat actions with the Czechoslovak Legion and the Whites in the spring of 1918 clearly demonstrated that many Red Army commanders were not particularly effective, lacking both training and experience. Trotskiy allowed the specialists, who were trained and experienced Tsarist-era officers, to take more direct control of military operations, although under dual command in the commissar system. This improved military performance, and most of the Soviet leadership reluctantly came to accept this change. Some did not, particularly Stalin, who outright refused to use two former Tsarist generals sent to assist him by Trotskiy.

Stalin could not otherwise prevent the use of military specialists in his own command. He would, however, use any excuse to arrest them and execute them for treason. He also strongly opposed Trotskiy on many other issues besides the specialists and tried to have him dismissed. Stalin's refusal to use the second ex-Tsarist general Trotskiy sent led to Lenin recalling Stalin from his command in October 1918, but he would return to the field in 1919. His dispute with Trotskiy would fester and become monumental rivalry between the two after Lenin's death in 1924.

Spotlight: Stalin's Brutality in the Civil War

The top Soviet leadership including Lenin knew Stalin was executing military specialists for no good reason. Even ones he just had arrested were confined to a floating jail on the Volga River, that was known as the "death barge" due to its dire living conditions. The leadership also knew he was grossly exceeding his authority at times and causing problems for others, such as diverting food and troops needed at Baku for use his own command. Stalin got away with it because he was one of the top Communists and his methods got things done.

Stalin's brutality extended far beyond the specialists. During the civil war, many Red Army soldiers deserted and some defected to the Whites. Stalin would

organize mass public executions of any soldiers caught trying to desert or defect or even suspected of planning to do so. Stalin also terrorized the countryside by burning farming villages believed to be rebellious or to be withholding food from the Soviets, in order to terrorize the peasants. Stalin's later brutality during the 1930s and the Great Patriotic War was not a new development.

The civil war continued to go badly for the Soviets in the summer of 1918, both militarily and economically. The Battle of Kazan in early August illustrates this. About 3,300 Eastern White troops, including Czechoslovak Legion forces who perhaps were the best fighters, attacked about 10,000 Red Army troops, whose best troops were Red Latvian Rifles and Red Serbs. The Serbs changed sides, compromising the Reds' defenses. Complicating the defense was the hostility of much of the local population to the Soviets. The Soviets had earlier begun a terror campaign in the city of mass arrests and arbitrary execution. Military-aged men fled to the country and formed White partisan units that ambushed Red Army troops. During the battle, one partisan band advanced on the Red defenses but were mistaken as Red reinforcements. Their attack surprised the Soviet troops and helped break the defense. As White forces entered the city, many people there rose up against the Soviets. The city was quickly captured, and the Whites then unleashed a wave of terror in Kazan against the Soviets and their supporters, in retaliation for the Soviet terror.



Gold reserves at Omsk, the White capital, captured at Kazan in August 1918

This White victory at Kazan was significant, as in World War I the Russian Empire had moved its gold reserves there for safekeeping. The White captured gold worth about 650 million Imperial Russian rubles¹⁴³ as well as 110 million rubles in bank notes plus various amounts of foreign currency including British sovereigns (a gold coin worth one pound),

¹⁴³ Sources are inconsistent on how much gold was captured. Some claim 645.4 million rubles-worth while others, including Kakurin, claim 651.5 million rubles-worth.

American dollars, German marks, and French francs. Not only did this deprive the Soviet of these financial resources, the Eastern Whites used them to fund their government and forces, with some of the gold used to buy foreign supplies and weapons¹⁴⁴. This would make the Eastern Whites stronger in 1919 than they otherwise would have been.

Kazan's fall cost the Soviets in other ways as well. The Soviets had considered the city secure and had stored considerable amounts of weapons, ammunition, uniforms, and medical supplies there, all of which the Whites captured. The Whites also took some WW1-era military aircraft and put a few into service. The Military Academy of the Red Army was lost at Kazan, too. This academy had earlier been the Nikolaev Academy of the General Staff in Sankt-Peterburg and had trained General Staff officers for the Imperial Russian Army. It had come under Soviet control when the Soviets came to power and continued its functions for the Soviets. It had just been evacuated to Kazan in July¹⁴⁵. Upon White capture of the city, the entire Academy defected to the Whites and trained General Staff officers for the Eastern White forces. The Red Army had to build a new academy from scratch.

The Battle of Kazan also illustrates the fortunes of war and the characteristics of the Russian Civil War. Kazan was just one of three offensive options for the Eastern Whites in the summer of 1918, and they decided against this operation. White commanders in favor of the attack, however, simply ignored their orders and attacked anyway. They might have failed had not the Serbians changed sides or had the inexperienced Soviet not mistaken White partisans for Red reinforcements.

The Soviets regarded the loss of Kazan as a disaster and dispatched considerable forces to retake the city, under the personal supervision of Trotskiy. Red Army aircraft began bombing Kazan, and this city became the location of the first air battle between the Reds and the Whites. Allegedly, the pilot of a White biplane recognized Trotskiy's special train and tried to bomb the carriage Trotskiy was in, but missed. The Red Army in late August went over to the offensive and recaptured Kazan in early September.¹⁴⁶

144 Technically, this gold was not spent but sent overseas as collateral against loans that the Whites used to buy supplies and weapons. Presumably if the Whites won the civil war, they would have paid off the loans from proceeds of Russia's future international trade and redeemed the gold. Instead, the Whites were defeated and the collateral gold was used to settle these debts.

145 The Academy had originally be in Sankt-Peterburg but was evacuate to Ekaterinburg in the Urals in the spring of 1918, as Sankt-Peterburg had become vulnerable following the German offensive of early 1918. The revolt of the Czechoslovakian Legion and the resulting White surge prompted the Soviets to evacuate the Academy to Kazan, a presumed safer location, in July 1918.

146 Details of the Battle of Kazan can be found at (in Russian): <https://kazan.aif.ru/society/details/85255> and <https://mikhael-mark.livejournal.com/779214.html>.

Despite the reverses, conscription held out hope for the Soviets. Red Army strength rose to about 550,000 (about 95,000 of which were rear-area troops or auxiliaries¹⁴⁷) during September 1918, with numbers climbing further throughout the autumn. The Whites were unable to recruit soldiers at the same rate, and increasing numbers began to turn to the Soviets' advantage in the autumn. The larger Red Army also allowed the Soviets to take most advantage of Germany's defeat in World War I in November 1918. The Allies nullified the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, thrusting Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belorussia, and Ukraine into the civil war. The Red Army quickly began operations to try to conquer all these lands while also going on offensives against the Whites in all major theaters. This was a mistake, as the Red Army had insufficient forces to achieve all these goals. Troops to invade the new regions came from new forces of poorly-trained, sometimes unwilling conscripts as well as from experienced forces sent from the Northern, Eastern, and Southern Theaters. The result was that the Red Army soon bogged down in most theaters and failed to secure a decisive victory in any. Had the Soviets held off attacking in its Northwestern and Western Theaters, the forces these operations required could have been concentrated elsewhere. For example, the Soviets would achieve considerable success against the Whites in the Southern Theater during the winter of 1918/19 but would not have sufficient force to destroy these White forces and conquer all of southern Russia and the North Caucasus¹⁴⁸. Instead, the Southern Whites would hold and then recover in the spring of 1919.

Spotlight: History Repeats Itself, 1941/42

Soviet unrealistic ambitions caused them to spread their forces too thin in the winter of 1918/19, resulting in them failing to achieve a victory in any theater of the civil war that winter. A similar dynamic would see history repeat itself in the winter of 1941/42 against the Axis. In December 1941, the Soviets launched a winter counteroffensive against the exhausted German Army Group Center in front of Moskva. The offensive made significant progress at first, causing Stalin to believe the Germans were on the verge of total defeat. He ordered winter offensives to be launched across the length of the German-Soviet front, plus a winter attack on the Finns. As in late 1918, this dispersed the Red Army across too many objectives and failed to secure a decisive victory in any sector. The top military commanders of the Red Army were well aware that Stalin was

147 N.E. Kakurin; *Strategicheskii Ocherk Grazhdanskoy Voyny (Strategic Outline of the Civil War)*; 1926; http://militera.lib.ru/science/kakurin_ne/01.html (in Russian).

148 This view of a missed opportunity is not just speculation but a conclusion of the Red Army itself in its analysis of the civil war. See for example N.E. Kakurin; *Strategicheskii Ocherk Grazhdanskoy Voyny (Strategic Outline of the Civil War)*; 1926; http://militera.lib.ru/science/kakurin_ne/01.html (in Russian).

dissipating Soviet forces but could not convince him to concentrate them just on defeating Army Group Center.

The autumn draft began the conscription of another 300,000 for the Red Army, and the Soviets intended to have an army of about one million soldiers in early 1919¹⁴⁹. These new troops would sustained Red Army offensives throughout the winter, which saw the Whites pushed back in many places.

While a million-soldier Red Army on paper was by far the largest force so far in the civil war, actual field strength was lower. New conscripts first had to be assembled and trained, and even an expedited training schedule required 2–3 months. Conscription was very unpopular among segments of the population, but the Soviets had anticipated this and had their security services harshly repress protests. Most peasants were particularly opposed to conscription, but the Soviets overcame this by taking hostages from their families or villages and executing them if resistance to conscription continued¹⁵⁰. The draft thus brought many unwilling soldiers into the Red Army. Once in the field, many of these peasant soldiers would desert, surrender, or defect to the other sides, so the Red Army was constantly losing many soldiers throughout the rest of the civil war. As we will see, the Soviets resorted to repressive measures to keep the Red Army from hollowing out.

Although the Soviets had proclaimed universal male conscription, for practical and political reasons they did not draft certain groups, particularly the Muslims of Central Asia. These Muslims had traditionally been exempt from military service in the Russian Empire, and many revolted in 1916 when Russia began drafting them as laborers. In 1918, repressive policies of the Tashkent Soviet in Central Asia alienated many Muslims, starting a renewed revolt. Muslim conscription would have only fueled the revolt even more.

The growth of the Red Army necessitated changes to the command structure. Prior to September 1918, the largest field headquarters had been army HQs. Starting that month, the Red Army created front HQs, with the Eastern, Northern, and Southern Fronts being created on 5 September in the Eastern, Northern, and Southern Theaters. (A “front” was the Russian equivalent of an army group¹⁵¹. The Soviets would create more fronts and rename them during the civil war, which I do not track in this guidebook.)

149 Some sources claim the Red Army reached 1,000,000 in October 1918 but this seems incorrect and is contradicted by Kakurin.

150 The Whites also did the same when they drafted peasants.

151 The Imperial Russian Army and the regular Army of the Russian Republic had front HQs in World War I. The Soviets had inherited these but they were disbanded when Russian forces facing the Central Powers fell apart in early 1918. Once they began using front HQs in the civil war, the Soviets thereafter used fronts for large-scale military operations, typically over a grouping of several army HQs.

September also saw the Whites finally managing to organize a functioning government that claimed authority over all of Russia. The Czechoslovak Legion had become impatient with White disunity and prodded the Whites to try to unite. Representatives of the major regional White movements and some other anti-Soviet groups met at Ufa in the southern Urals. These groups had widely diverging ideas on what Russia should become, but a compromise between liberals and authoritarians created the Provisional All-Russian Government on 23 September 1918. The government's administration was created by merging Samara's Komuch, the earlier, ineffective attempt at a government, with the Provisional Siberian Government, which controlled much of Siberia. This government was located at Ufa at first, but the growing Red Army was soon on the offensive in the Volga-Urals region, threatening Samara and Ufa. The government moved to Omsk in western Siberia in October.

This government was called "Provisional" as the Whites had agreed to reconvene the Constituent Assembly in early 1919 or whenever it was safe. This was the Assembly that the Soviets had illegally closed down in January 1918, and the Whites hoped to gather many of the deputies in a safe place to decide on a final form of government and a constitution¹⁵². Events in the civil war would soon end almost all hopes of convening the Assembly.

The new provisional government began taking action to define the White cause. It proclaimed that it would liberate Russia from the Soviets. It rejected attempts of separatist groups to declare independence but tried to accommodate them by promising the groups "broad" autonomy within a federal Russia. More controversially, one of its stated goals was to resume the war against the Central Powers. This may have further encouraged the Allied Powers' intervention in Russia, but it did not endear the Whites to the many people in Russia who disliked the Soviets but did not want a return to the world war.

The Provisional All-Russian Government was quite weak and struggled to unify the regional White groups. While these groups did have some officials in the provisional government, they still mostly operated independently, both politically and militarily. The provisional government issued an appeal to the regional White groups for unity and for consolidation under itself, in part so that the war could be conducted with centralized planning and coordinated operations. This succeed in consolidating many various regional governments in the east of Russia under the main White government, although some like in the Transbaykal in practice mostly continued to go their own way. White regions in the north,

¹⁵² Although I have not researched this extensively, none of my sources mention whether pro-Soviet deputies would have been excluded from the reconvened Assembly. It seems very unlikely the Whites would have allowed this. Presumably the Soviets would have ignored the Assembly as defunct and would not have attended, especially since they knew they would have been in the minority.

northwest, and south effectively remained separate, leaving the Whites at a disadvantage to the Soviets with their highly centralized government and military.



Soviet allies, White allies: Various groups would ally or cooperate with either the Soviets or the Whites, sometimes switching sides as the war progressed. (For example, Kazakhs seeking autonomy within Russia switched sides and then were conquered.) The territory these groups controlled is accordingly shown as Soviet/Soviet allies and White/White allies.

Be aware that “control” of territory sometimes was quite tenuous, with various raiders, partisan forces, and rebel groups sometimes operating in the territory. Also, large parts of Russia were remote, sparsely inhabited regions, particularly northern Russia, Siberia, and the deserts of Central Asia. There often was little centralized control over these parts except at population centers, along rail lines, and along navigable waterways. Most of the Russian islands in the Arctic Ocean were uninhabited and had no significance in the civil war.

In September 1918, with the civil war consuming ever more resources, the Soviets reorganized their Party, governmental, and military to strengthen the war effort. A decree on 2 September declared the Soviet state was now an “armed camp”, with the countries’ top priorities being to providing the Red Army with food and supplies and to increase military production. On 4 September, another decree confiscated all remaining privately-owned railroads from their companies. This constituted about 25% of Russia’s railroads; the rest were already state-owned. The Soviets had earlier gained management of these private railroads via the railroad workers, but this decree centralized and improved operations of the entire rail system. On 5 September, another decree announced the start of the Red Terror, a repressive campaign of arrests, torture, executions, and massacres against the Soviets political and economic opponents.



Left: *Kazak, ty s kem? S nami ili s nimi?* (Cossack, who are you with? With us or with them?) This 1920 Soviet poster portrays the choice for Cossacks as being with the virtuous Reds or the wicked Whites.

Right: *Tak khozyaynichayut Bolsheviki v kazachikh stanitsakh.* (This is how the Bolsheviks do things in Cossack villages.) This 1918 White poster shows the Soviets looting a Cossack farm of food and personal possessions and terrorizing the people. While the poster is a dramatic depiction, the Soviets did do everything it shows and worse.

The Soviets also embarked on a campaign of “de-Cossackization” (*Raskazachivanie*), separate from the Red Terror but often bound up with it. Despite the Soviets’ attempts to co-opt

poorer Cossacks as virtuous “working Cossacks” and their raising of Red Cossack units, most Cossacks were strongly anti-Soviet and had become the veteran cores of most White armies. De-Cossackization was the Soviets’ revenge and attempt to terrorize the Cossacks into submission. It featured harsh repression, including the use of forced labor, extra-judicial executions, and massacres. It was collective punishment affecting Cossack civilians with little regard for their individual actions. Families and neighbors of Cossacks suspected to be anti-Soviet fighters were taken hostage and treated to appalling conditions, with the women subjected to rape by their guards. The policy explicitly targeted Cossack officials for “physical destruction”:

All this raises the urgent task of the complete, rapid, decisive destruction of the Cossacks as a special economic group, the destruction of their economic foundations, the physical destruction of the Cossack officials and officers... dispersal and neutralization of the ordinary Cossacks and the formal liquidation of the Cossacks.

—8 April 1919 Resolution of the Don Bureau of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik)

The main task of all the revolutionary bodies created on the Don is reduced to the merciless suppression of the counter-revolution and to ensuring the Soviet Republic from the possibility of its repetition.

In these types, revolutionary committees and temporary regimental military field tribunals established by order of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Southern Front should, through a survey of the so-called non-residents, as well as through mass searches in the occupied villages and farms and in general any villages on the Don, detect and immediately shoot:

a) all Cossacks without exception who held official positions by election or by appointment: district and village leaders, their assistants, police officers, judges, etc.;

...

f) all wealthy Cossacks without exception;

—1919 Instructions of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Southern Front

As the Soviets won the civil war, they disbanded the administrations of the Cossacks hosts. They did not disperse the surviving Cossacks from their communities but subjected them to the local government and Party organizations. The Cossacks not only lost their autonomy and traditional special treatment (like exemption from taxes in return for military service) but were explicitly targeted in Soviet law with restrictive measures until well into the 1930s.

The armed-camp decree also reorganized the top command structure of the Red Army. The Soviets had created a People’s Commissar for Military and Naval Affairs when they came to power in 1917 and a Supreme Military Council for the Red Army in March 1918. The council

and the operations department of the commissariat were now merged into a new body, the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic (RVSR, for **R**evolyutsionnyy **V**oennyi **S**ovet **R**espubliki; also as RVS). Trotskiy was chair of the RVSR and in overall control of the military, but a Commander-in-Chief post was created under him, with Jukums Vāciētis (in Russian, Ioakim Vatsetis) of the Red Latvian Rifles being assigned to this position. Vāciētis handled the day-to-day operations of the Red Army, although Trotskiy was frequently in the field himself, often at critical battle zones. On 30 September, a new decree, On the Revolutionary Military Council (Regulations), specified that the RVSR was “the organ of the highest military power in the country”, and “All the forces and means of the people are placed at the disposal of the Revolutionary Military Council for the needs of defending the borders of the Soviet Republic”. (For the full text of this decree, see the [appendix](#).) In November 1918, the Field Headquarters of the RVSR was formed as the supreme field HQ of all Red Army forces.

The creation of the RVSR centralized and improved operations of the Soviet military. Together with the other decrees, these measures helped preserve the Soviet state and win the civil war. When the Germans invaded the USSR in 1941, the Soviets would follow their precedent and create a State Defense Committee over the government and military and a Stavka of the Supreme High Command over the military. They would issue decrees prioritizing the fighting of the war and over, time, institute draconian punishments for desertion and unauthorized retreats. The WW2 Soviets even relied on a former Tsarist military officer, B.M. Shaposhnikov, who was made Chief of the Red Army’s General Staff the day after the Germans invaded¹⁵³.

Although the Soviets had a number of advantages over the Whites, they had some disadvantages as well. Their ruthlessness, repressive measures, and extreme suspicion of class enemies alienated many potential supporters. The Communist fanatics and the Cheka could force compliance to Soviet rule, but the potential for unrest, resistance, and rebellion was ever present. Even the proletariat, the class most disposed to the Soviets, experienced growing discontent and would resort to labor strikes, despite the Soviets having outlawed such actions. In the military, the system of military commissars and dual command was not efficient. The Soviets realized this and in late 1918 began reducing the scope of dual command. Communist Party cells in units were also told they could no longer interfere with the orders of the command staff¹⁵⁴. However, the Communist fixation on betrayal and class enemies meant the Soviets simply would not abandon dual command.

¹⁵³ Shaposhnikov had supported the Bolshevik’s revolution in 1917 and voluntarily joined the Red Army in 1918. He went on to have a career as trusted commander in the Red Army rather than being one of the many mistrusted military specialists.

The Central Powers lost World War I in the autumn of 1918, with Germany the last to fall on 11 November 1918. All terms of the Central Powers' peace treaties with Ukraine and the Soviets were nullified. Poland became truly independent rather than a German puppet state, and Finland became a republic instead of a monarchy under a German noble. The Ukrainian Hetmanate was overthrown and replaced with a restored Ukrainian People's Republic (UNR). The Baltic region, Belorussia, and Ukraine were all now thrust into the maelstrom of the Russian Civil War.

The Allies required all German forces everywhere to withdraw to Germany. In most places, the Allies demanded that the Germans withdraw "immediately", and, for example, German troops on the Western Front were allowed 15 days to return to Germany. The exception was Russia (including Ukraine, as the Allies did not recognize Ukrainian independence):

...all German troops at present in the territories which before the war belonged to Russia shall likewise withdraw within the frontiers of Germany, defined as above, as soon as the Allies, taking into account the internal situation of these territories, shall decide that the time for this has come.¹⁵⁵

This measure was meant to preventing the Soviets from taking over German-occupied territory as the Germans withdrew. The Allies eventually decided that the Germans had to withdraw in February 1919 for all of Russia except the Baltic region. Germany took advantage of this option, maintaining troops in some places, especially in Ukraine, until almost the deadline. However, Germany was uninterested in using its troops to advance Allied goals, so German forces in much of the Ukraine did not attempt to keep pro-Soviet troops out or interfere in the fighting between pro-Soviet and anti-Soviet forces there. This also led to the somewhat odd situation of Allied interventionist forces fighting local opponents along the Ukrainian coast in early 1919 with sizable German forces nearby, simply observing the action.

Ukraine with its large population, abundant agriculture, and the Donbass resource and industrial region became a prime prize and a battleground between the Ukrainians, the Soviets, the Whites, anarchists, and other forces. The Red Army went on the offensive against the UNR in northeastern Ukraine and quickly pushed back the weak UNR forces. While this was occurring, the Whites seized the Donbass in southeastern Ukraine.

154 A. Iovlev; "Vvedeniye Vedinonachaliya v RKKA (1918 - 1920 gg.)" ("The introduction of Unity of Command in the RKKA (1918-1920)"); <http://www.rkka.ru/history/edin/edin.htm> (in Russian).

155 <https://www.census.gov/history/pdf/armistice11-11-1918.pdf>.

In Belorussia and western Ukraine, the Germans actively worked against Allied interests when they withdrew. They often coordinated with the Soviets, so that the Red Army could immediately take over an area as the Germans left. This was intended not only to spite the Allies in general but also to prevent Poland, which was hostile to Germany, from taking over these areas.

The Baltic region (including Lithuania) was an exception to the February 1919 deadline for German withdrawal. Germany retained its own interests in the region and wanted to keep the Soviets out. The Red Army invaded the region soon after Brest-Litovsk was voided, and German troops fought with local forces against the Soviets. Estonia was even temporarily of having two bitter WW1 foes help them: German ground forces were fighting temporarily alongside Estonian troops against the Red Army offensive while a British naval force was shelling Red Army troops and supply lines along the Baltic coast. The Allies allowed the Germans to stay in region until the summer of 1919, and even afterwards some German troops remained, disguised as White troops¹⁵⁶.

11 November 1918 was the end of World War I and the end of combat for Allied forces, except those in Russia. Many soldiers and sailors of the European and North American Allied countries in Russia were dismayed to realize the war was not over for them. The invention in Russia continued unabated, and in places Allied ground and naval forces would engage in battles against Soviet forces and other troops hostile to them.

Sidetrip: The Battle of “Armistice Day” (The Battle of Tulgas)

By coincidence, 11 November marked the start of a Red Army attack against the Allied intervention forces in northern Russia. An Allied garrison at Tulgas, about 320 km (200 miles) south of Arkhangelsk on the Northern Dvina River, had become isolated when parts of the river froze. The Allied defenders had no hope of timely reinforcements and soon lost communications to their headquarters when the Soviets cut their telegraph line. The Soviets intended on completely overrunning the position. The propaganda value of such a defeat on the Allies was so great that Lenin dispatched Trotskiy himself, the commander of the Red Army, to supervise the operation.

¹⁵⁶ On 28 June 1919 the Germans reluctantly signed the Treaty of Versailles, agreeing to peace with the Allies. The treaty's harsh treatment of Germany deeply alienated the Germans and destroyed any chance of genuine German cooperation with the Allies. The Allies thus ordered the Germans out of the Baltic region, although a number of Germans remained for a while under the cover of being volunteer White Army troops.

Over several days of fighting, about 2,500 Red Army soldiers attacked 600 American, British, and Canadian troops. While the battle was quite small by WW1 standards, it was not a minor skirmish but a pitched battle with multiple assaults, hand-to-hand fighting, and point-blank artillery fire. The Red Army persisted in futile attacks across a bridge raked by machinegun fire.

When the Allies exploded a captured Soviet ammunition dump, the noise apparently convinced the Soviets that either the defenders were stronger than they thought or that Allied reinforcements had arrived; the Red Army broke off the battle and withdrew. Soviets casualties are unknown but are estimated to be on the order of 500–650, while the Allies suffered 130 casualties, including 30 wounded. It seems likely that the inexperience of the Red Army troops and commanders prevented the Soviets from overrunning the position.

The fact that the battle happened to start on 11 November caused many to call it the Battle of Armistice Day.



Aleksandr Vasilevich Kolchak

The White's Provisional All-Russian Government had been cobbled together from groups with very different political agendas. It contained a left-wing Directory dominated by Socialist-Revolutionaries and a Council of Ministers dominated by the center-right. The two factions did not get along well, and things came to a head in November 1918. A right-wing coup arrested the SR leaders on the night of 17/18 November. The Council of Ministers then endorsed the “complete concentration of military and civil power in the hands of one person with an authoritative name in the military and public circles”, or in other words a dictator. The council appointed Vice-Admiral **A.V. Kolchak** as **Supreme Ruler of Russia**. Kolchak's

early actions were to promote himself to full admiral and declare himself the commander-in-chief of all the land and naval forces of Russia.

This was the end of the Provisional All-Russian Government and the start of the Russian Government (*Rossiyskoe Pravitelstvo*), also known as the Government of the Russian State, the Omsk Government, and the Kolchak Government. While this new government claimed authority over all of Russia, it mostly only controlled the White parts of eastern Russia, with the regional White groups elsewhere cooperating or not as they saw fit. The Kolchak government would launch offensives from Siberia against the Soviets in 1919.

Most anti-Soviet socialists were dismayed by the coup, and relations with the Whites further broke down as Kolchak showed no interest in cooperating with them. Further, he was opposed to not only independence but also autonomy for ethnic groups. This ended the promise of “broad” autonomy within Russia that the Provisional All-Russian Government had promised earlier in the year, thereby alienated many ethnic groups. Instead, he pinned his hopes on receiving significant assistance from the Allied interventionist countries. Some of these countries, particularly Britain, responded by sending him supplies, rifles, and machineguns, although they required him to promise to not restore the monarchy. All this was a gift to Soviet propaganda, which portrayed Kolchak as a pawn of foreign powers planning to re-impose the aristocracy, clergy, and bourgeoisie over Russia.



Psy Antanty (Dogs of the Entente); 1919 Soviet poster
Denikin Kolchak Yudenich

Denikin was the general of the Southern Whites; Kolchak the general of the Eastern Whites and the supposed Supreme Ruler of all the Whites; Yudenich the general of the Northwestern Whites.



Razstrlyat kazhdago desyatago rabochago i krestyanina
Shoot every tenth worker and peasant (on the banner held by Kolchak)

The coup making Kolchak “Supreme Ruler” of the Whites was a gift to Soviet propaganda. This 1919 Soviet poster shows Kolchak enthroned, blessed by the clergy, and supported by Tsarist generals. The kulaks, represented by the figure on the left labeled КУЛАК (*KULAK*) and the bourgeoisie, represented by the figure on the right labeled БУРЖУЙ (*BURZHUY*) are supplying Kolchak with food and money.

The winter of 1918/19 saw the Soviets reinforce their Northern Theater and attack the Allied intervention forces in a number of places. Both sides had relatively few forces in the north, so the Soviets had hopes of inflicting a significant defeat on the Allies. I speculate that the Soviets may have also thought the troops, used to the Russian climate, would prove superior in winter fighting with its subarctic conditions of minimal daylight, extreme cold, and deep snow. The Red Army attacks did not succeed in driving the Allies back to any great extent, but they did show Soviet resolve in confining the Allies to the far north.

Much farther to the south, the Southern Theater also saw a winter campaign. Here, the Southern Whites went on a January offensive and reached the outskirts of Tsaritsyn. Cold, losses, and demoralization all gravely weakened the White forces, and the city eluded capture again as the Soviets counterattacked and forced the Whites to retreat. The Whites suffered a near collapse in this sector, with the Red Army pushing deep into the Don

Cossack region. Further south during the winter, another Southern White force defeated the Soviets in the North Caucasus and overran much of this region.

The winter of 1918/19 also marked the start of Allied intervention in the south. The surrender of the Ottoman Empire in autumn 1918 allowed the Allies to gain control of the Turkish straits that connected the Mediterranean Sea to the Black Sea. This will be covered in the [Allied Intervention in the Black Sea](#) section.

Like the White's, the Ukrainian People's Republic also hoped for Allied aid, but the Allies did not recognize Ukrainian independence or the UNR as a government. In fact, Allied intervention actually led to conflict with the UNR at first. On 18 December, French troops at Odessa battled with UNR forces for control of this port city, with the French winning. Despite this inauspicious beginning, the UNR was eager for Allied aid and entered negotiations with the French, who were still more interested in working with the Whites than with the weak UNR. These negotiations ended unsuccessfully when a Red Army offensive captured Kiev, the UNR capital, on 5 February 1919. The UNR regrouped in western Ukraine and fought on, launching a partially successful counter-offensive in March 1918. Allied forces did not help the UNR.



The UNR pinned their hopes for international recognition, via the Paris Peace Conference. The Allies had invited (on 25 December 1918) the UNR to send a delegation to the conference. The conference convened in January 1919 to impose peace terms on the defeated Central Powers. The UNR's delegation pressed for Allied recognition of a Ukrainian state. They also claimed borders for Ukraine that were much expanded from those they had claimed in 1917 and from those of their 1918 treaty with the Central Powers. They wanted regions in southern Russia and the North Caucasus that had large, sometimes majority, populations of Ukrainian speakers. They also wanted the Crimea, although Ukrainian speakers there were less than 12% of the population.

Bessarabia had been a province of Russia but was now occupied by Romania, an Allied power of World War I. The UNR wanted to incorporate the Ukrainian-majority areas of Bessarabia into Ukraine, leaving Moldavian-majority areas for Romania. The UNR also wanted a small, Ukrainian-populated territory from Romania itself, which was unrealistic. Romania as one of the victors of WW1 had no intention of ceding any territory.

Far less controversially, the UNR wanted significant regions of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, as it had been an enemy country in WW1 that the Allies now planned to dismember. The UNR wanted the eastern part of the province of Galicia, which had a Ukrainian-majority but also contain other ethnic groups, particularly a significant minority of Polish-speakers. They also wanted Bukovina, which had a Ukrainian majority in its north but a Moldavian-majority in its south.

While the Ukrainians were at the Paris Peace Conference, the Soviets were not. The Allies did not recognize the Soviet state and excluded Soviet participation. The UNR accordingly hoped that this would led the Allied Powers to prefer to having an independent Ukraine over the chance that Ukraine would end up part of the hostile Soviet state. The Allies, however, were not united over the status of Ukraine. Various countries hoped the Whites would defeat the Soviets and Ukraine would be a part of a non-Soviet Russian state. Another complication at the conference was that the UNR and Poland were at odds over the borderlands between them. Many Poles had fought for the Allies against the Central Powers, disposing Allied countries in favor of Poland.

In the end, the Conference could not agree on any policy concerning Russia and its borders, leaving by default the issues to be settled by the Russian Civil War. The Soviets in any case would not have respected any decision on Russia by the Conference that would have endangered or limited them. Indeed, they still had hopes of proletarian revolutions breaking out across Europe, as we shall see.

8 Civil War: Allied Intervention Fails, 1919



V Zhertvu Internatsionalu
For Sacrifice to the International

This White propaganda poster shows the leading Communists sacrificing Russia on the altar of international socialism, represented by the statue of Karl Marx. “International” refers to the Communist International (Comintern, also called the Third International), a worldwide association of socialist and communist parties.

Since broadcast radio was in its infancy at this time and absent entirely in Russia, posters and partisan newspapers were the prime means the various sides in the civil war used to spread their propaganda to the public. A common theme for both sides was that the other side was planning to massacre its opponents. Trotskiy, who is shown as the blood-soaked sacrificial, was particularly demonized¹⁵⁷.

Ya.M. Sverdlov had been Lenin’s walking encyclopedia of Party members, but he died in March 1919 aged 33, most likely due to influenza during the worldwide “Spanish” flu pandemic of 1918–1920. Sverdlov loss caused the Communists to reorganize parts of the Party to replicate Sverdlov’s abilities. Lenin also had the congress re-institute the **Politburo**. Lenin, Sverdlov, Trotskiy, and a handful of other top Communists had essentially been running the day-to-day operations of the Party through the little-known Bureau of the

¹⁵⁷ The poster depicts most of the top Communist leadership except for Stalin. It seems likely Stalin would have resented his exclusion, due to his insecurity and desire to be seen as a leading Communist after Lenin.

Central Committee, which to some Party members made it look like an ad-hoc clique had taken control of the Party. The Politburo institutionalized this system as a public, permanent Party body with defined responsibilities and formal procedures to elect its members.



Lenin, Trotsky, Kamenev, and Stalin had all been on the [first Politburo](#) of 1917. N.N. Krestinskiy was a highly-capable organizer, earning him positions in the Central Committee, the Secretariat, the Orgburo, and the Politburo. However, in the early 1920s Krestinskiy backed Trotsky over Lenin on party matters. Trotsky was too important to demote, but not Krestinskiy, who became ambassador to Germany. After Lenin's death, Krestinskiy continued to back Trotsky and opposed Stalin's until the late 1920s. Like a number of anti-Stalin Communist leaders he at first went on to serve Stalin, holding deputy positions in the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs and briefly becoming head of the People's Commissariat of Justice. However, Stalin would destroy Krestinskiy like he did with almost everyone who had opposed him in the 1920s: In 1938, Krestinskiy was arrested, convicted in a show trial, and executed.

The Soviets began issuing *sovznaki*, their own paper money, in 1919. When the Soviets came to power in 1917, they expected their socialist state would quickly evolve along Marxist thinking into a full communist society that did not use money, so they did not introduce their own currency at this time. Instead, the money of the Russian Empire and Russian Provisional Government remained in circulation. Full communism would have been very improbable to achieve in the short term even in the best of circumstances, and it became impossible once the civil war broke out and the Allies intervened. The Soviet government had to spend vast sums of money to fight the civil war, far beyond what it took in. In 1919, they introduced "settlement tokens" (*raschetnyy znaki*) which became known as *sovznaki* (short for *Sovetskiye znaki*, Soviet tokens). The Soviets chose "tokens" to avoid calling *sovznaki* money, to maintain the illusion they were transitioning to a money-less society, but *sovznaki* was money. It was a paper currency not exchangeable for gold or anything else of intrinsic worth, so it was an inflationary way for the Soviets to simply print money to finance their operations. They began unrestricted printing of *sovznaki* in May 1919 to finance their deficit spending. The result was frequent hyperinflation, with *sovznaki* rapidly losing its

value¹⁵⁸. The increasing collapse of the Soviet economy during the civil war also meant massive deficit spending continued even after the war entered its mopping up phase in late 1920. In 1922, for example, government revenues covered only 13% of expenditures, and the 87% deficit¹⁵⁹ was financed by printing sovznaki.

Price Index of the Russian and Soviet States, 1914–1921

<i>Date</i>	<i>Index</i>	<i>Annualized Inflation Rate*</i>	<i>Regime</i>	<i>Notes</i>
August 1914	100	-	Russian Empire	Start of World War I.
November 1917	630	(see note below)	Provisional Government	Russian Provisional Government (in power since March 1917) is overthrown by the Soviets on 7 November.
July 1918	6,200	1,326%	Russian SFSR	Russian Civil War now raging.
July 1919	60,500	876%	Russian SFSR	Soviets begin financing deficit spending by unrestricted printing of sovznaki in May 1919.
July 1920	129,000	113%	Russian SFSR	Most of the Whites were defeated in late 1919 and early 1920. Soviets are now fighting a major war with Poland and the civil war with the Southern Whites.
January 1921	1,290,000	2,160%	Russian SFSR	Soviets defeated by Poland in second half of 1920; Soviets crush Southern Whites in Nov. 1920.

Source: The Date and Index columns are from Domenico Mario Nuti; “Hidden and Repressed Inflation in Soviet-type Economies: Definitions, Measurements and Stabilisation”; 1985; <https://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/23103>. The other columns are my calculations and text. (Some earlier works use 1913, the last year of peace, for the base index of 100 and measure from there, but Nuti seems better.)

The Annualized Inflation Rate is calculated between the intervals given on the table, such as 1,326% for July 1918 from November 1917. The formulas used are $I = (D2-D1)/D2*100$ and $AI = 12*I/M$ (yes, these can be combined in a single formula, but it is clearer this way), where

158 Inflation had reached over 600% in 1917 under the Russian Provisional Government and slightly declined to just under 600% under the Soviet government in 1918. With the sovznarki, it reached over 1,300% in 1919, fell back to just under 600% in 1920, and then ramped up to about 1,600% in 1921 and 7,200% in 1922. See Steven M. Efremov; thesis, “The Role of Inflation in Soviet History: Prices, Living Standards, and Political Change”; 2012; <https://dc.etsu.edu/etd/1474>.

159 Michael T. Florinsky; “Inflations: Russia—The U.S.S.R.”; *Current History* Vol. 15, No. 83; 1948; <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45307374>. The Soviet government’s peacetime deficit of 87% in 1922 was even higher than the Russian government’s World War I deficit of 81% in 1917, the worse budget of the war for Russia. (The 1917 budget was 30.6 billion rubles of which 24.9 billion rubles was deficit spending. See Mark Harrison and Andrei Markevich; “Russia’s Home Front, 1914-1922: The Economy”; 2012; https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/economics/staff/mharrison/public/rgwr_postprint.pdf.)

I is the Inflation rate of the interval
D1 is the earlier Date
D2 is the later Date
AI is the Annualized Inflation rate (12 months of inflation)
M is the number of Months from D1 to D2

The annualized inflation rate for November 1917 from August 1914 computes to 163%. However, I do not include it in the table as it implies inflation over this 39 month period increased at a steady rate. While inflation did set in from the start of the WW1, it was much lower in 1914–1915 than it was in 1916–1917 (about 200% by early 1916, about 400% by late 1916, and about 680% by November 1917, although these figures comes from a variety of works).

Sovznaki currency was only used as a means of exchange in territory controlled by the Soviets as no one else including the Whites would accept it. Even in Soviet territory, most people did not want sovznaki, which rapidly lost value. Most people only accepted sovznaki when they had to, and they preferred to use a very inefficient barter system instead. In the country, the peasants also used bread or salt as a substitute for money. The government itself had to resort to partially paying workers with rationed goods.

The Soviets' control of Petrograd, Moskva, and the other cities of the Central Industrial Region gave them a solid industrial base. Soviet mismanagement of the economy and shortages of resources and energy caused by the civil war nevertheless badly affected the output of factories, with various sources suggesting industrial production in 1921 was perhaps 20% that of 1913, the last full year of peace in Russia¹⁶⁰. The Soviets experienced acute energy shortages during the height of the civil war in 1918–1919. The Donbass had been a major source of coal for western Russia, but the Soviets did not control the Donbass for much of the civil war.

Sidetrip: The Donbass

Donbass means **Don**etskiy **Bas**seyn, Donets Basin. This was a coal basin in eastern Ukraine that also contained plentiful iron ore resources. It became a major mining and industrial area in the late 19th Century. Donbass coal fueled factories and heated cities across western Russia, including both Petrograd and Moskva. The Soviets lost control of the Donbass in the spring of 1918 as a consequence of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. During the Central Power's occupation of Ukraine,

¹⁶⁰ Sources disagree on industrial production, with the most extreme cases claiming production in 1921 was only 12% that of 1913. Complicating this picture is what qualified as "industrial production", as some sources divide it into heavy industry, which required considerable capital and resources like steel mills, and light industry, which could be something as simple as woodworking workshops.

forces of the Ukrainian state controlled the Donbass and prevented any coal or other resources from there to go to their enemies, the Soviets. After the Central Powers withdrew from Ukraine in late 1918, all sides fought over the Donbass with at times the Ukrainians, the Reds, the Whites, and anarchists controlling it. No side received much benefit from the Donbass at this time. By the end of the civil war, its infrastructure was badly damaged and its mines flooded.

Russia had been one of the largest oil producers in the world before World War I. Oil fields and refineries in the Transcaucasus (at Baku), in the North Caucasus, and in the Emba region northeast of the Caspian Sea were the source of almost all of Russia's oil, kerosene, and gasoline. At times, the Soviets did not control any of these energy centers. The Soviets did control Ukhta, a remote center with poor transportation links. Ukhta had a low-output oilfield and refinery that made kerosene for the northern region. The oil center could not be expanded and utilized more without considerable investment in oil drilling, refining, and rail links, but the Soviets lacked the funds and equipment to do this during the civil war.

Lack of energy resources forced the Soviets to greatly ration fuel and seek alternatives, such as using less-efficient wood for steam locomotives. The Red Army also had some aircraft, armored cars, and a few thousand trucks it inherited from the former regular Russian Army, as well as a very few tanks captured during the civil war. Despite their relatively small numbers, they were very important for reconnaissance and mobility, but they all needed gasoline.

Spotlight: The Soviets and Oil, 1919–1920

To deal with the lack of petroleum-based fuels, the Soviets in 1919 decreed that their use must be authorized by a special Soviet agency, the **Main Oil Committee**. When the Whites threatened to capture fuel reserves in the central Volga region that year, the Soviets went to extraordinary measures to move these supplies to safety. Anyone caught using fuel without authorization or failing to save fuel stockpiles was to be prosecuted under martial law by military revolutionary tribunals, which could impose capital punishment.

While the fuel situation was dire, it seems to have affected the civilian economy much more than the military. The limited numbers of Red Army vehicles and aircraft meant its military fuel needs were modest. The army instead relied extensively on foot infantry, cavalry, and horse-drawn artillery, with almost all transport of supplies using railroads and horse-drawn wagons.

Nevertheless, Soviet oil stockpiles dwindled to critical level, with only about 204,000 barrels of oil (about 27,700 metric tons) left on 1 November 1919. Crisis was averted, however, as the Red Army was now on the offensive. In early 1920, the Red Army seized the Emba and North Caucasus oil centers. April saw the main prize captured: Baku, by far the largest oil center, with its oil wells and refineries mostly undamaged. Within days of taking Baku, its oil was being sent up the Caspian Sea and the Volga River to the Soviet heartland.

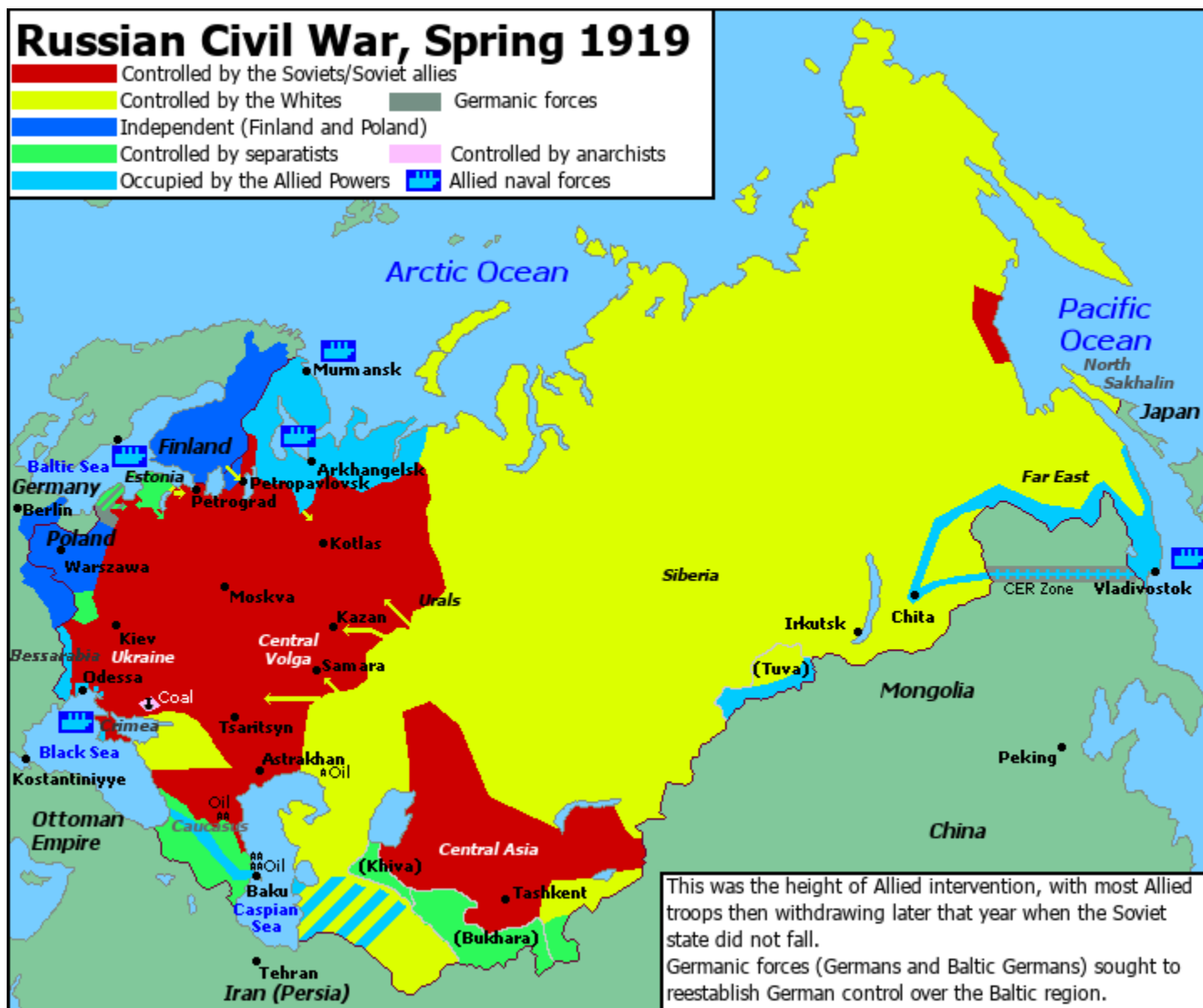
The Central Power had controlled the Donbass for much of 1918, with the Southern Whites soon advancing into it after the defeat of Germany in November 1918. The region contained many Black Army socialist-anarchists, who fought back against the White as conventional forces and partisans. The Soviets were too busy in the winter of 1918/19 with offensive operations against the UNR in eastern and central Ukraine to do much about the Donbass at first. By March 1919, they had assembled an invasion force and struck south into the region. The Black Army, caught between the Reds and the Whites, allied with the Soviets and helped them against the Whites.

The Southern Whites had expected the Red Army offensive and had reinforced their forces there. Battles for the Donbass raged throughout March, April, and May. At once point, the Soviets had captured most of the Donbass including the key industrial cities and mines but then lost most of them to White counterattacks. The Red Army retreated north towards Soviet Russia while the Black Army reverted to partisan warfare against the White occupiers. The Donbass had been largely intact before this time, but the fighting now badly damaged or destroyed much of its mining and industrial infrastructure. Much of the population of region fled the fighting, leaving few workers to continue production with the remaining equipment. Coal, iron ore, and industrial production of the Donbass collapsed and would not recover until well after the civil war ended.

After a honeymoon as the Black Army and Red Army conquered much of the Donbass in April, the alliance between the anarchists and the Soviets broke down once the Whites started to retake the Donbass. The Makhno and the Black Army went from being heroes in Soviet propaganda to villains. The Soviets, always willing to blame others for their mistakes, now condemned the anarchists for the loss of the Donbass by causing “mass desertions”¹⁶¹ in the Red Army. Unwilling Red Army conscripts did desert to the anarchists, but the real

161 N.E. Kakurin; *Strategicheskiy Oчерk Grazhdanskoy Voyny (Strategic Outline of the Civil War)*; 1926;
http://militera.lib.ru/science/kakurin_ne/02.html (in Russian).

problem was that the Red Army did not have enough strength in the Donbass to hold out against the Whites.



The high point of Allied intervention came in 1919. Besides the foray in the Black Sea, the Allies were active in many other places:

- The Allies had gained control of much of the **northern theater** and planned to expand operations there with White assistance in 1919 as well as tried to link up with the Whites in the Urals and Siberia.
- The British naval force in the **Baltic Sea** kept the Soviet Baltic Sea Fleet confined to base. The British even deployed one of their newest naval weapon systems, an aircraft carrier, to the Baltic, where its aircraft would bombed the Kronshtadt naval base. The

British goal in this theater was to assist anti-Soviet forces to capture Petrograd. This city was a major industrial and population center but its political importance was perhaps even more important. Petrograd was the “cradle of the Bolshevik revolution”, and its loss might badly shake Soviet morale.

- Allied naval and ground forces in the **Black Sea** seized ports in Ukraine and the Crimea and attempted to aid White forces in the Southern Theater against the Soviets.
- British forces in the **Caucasus region** helped deny the major oil center of Baku from Soviet control and assisted various separatists forces in the region. At one point, the British control the length of the main railway in the Transcaucasus, from Baku on the Caspian Sea to Poti on the Black Sea.
- British forces in **Central Asia** worked against the Soviets in much of what is now Turkmenistan.
- In the **Russian far east**, troops from Britain, the US, Japan, and other Allies remained in Vladivostok. Japan sent by far the largest contingent of troops of all interventionist forces, eventually about 72,000. They marched deep inland, seizing control of the Russian-operated Chinese Eastern Railway in Manchuria and the Trans-Siberian Railroad up to the city of Chita, about 2,650 km (1,650 miles) by rail from Vladivostok. Various works claim the Japanese intended to advance to Irkutsk by Lake Baykal, another 875 km (545 miles) further west by rail, but this did not happen.
- Chinese forces penetrated parts of southern Siberia, in and around the **Tuva region**. When the Chinese Empire fell into revolution in 1911, the Chinese region of Outer Mongolia had divided into Mongolia, which became independent with Russian support, and Tuva, which became a Russian protectorate. The Chinese successor state, the Republic of China, did not renounce its claims to these areas. China became an Allied Power in World War I and participated in the Allied intervention at Vladivostok with a small force. The chaos of the Russian Civil War removed Russian assistance to Mongolia and turned Tuva into a battleground. China seized this opportunity to regain its lost territories by occupying Mongolia, parts of Tuva, and nearby areas. This would ultimately fail as the Soviets won the civil war; they gained control of all of Tuva and turned Mongolia into a Soviet satellite state.

Overall, the Allies intervened along every coast of Russia and Ukraine where there were significant port facilities and well as overland from China and from Iran, which was partially

controlled by the British. However, Allied intervention in most places would turn out to be faltering and ultimately ineffective. The intervention in the Black Sea region illustrates this.

Spotlight: Allied Intervention in the Black Sea



In December 1918, Allied naval forces entered the Black Sea and began landing troops at ports in Ukraine and the Crimea, in hopes of denying them to Soviets and to help the Whites in southern Russia. In the Crimea, a Crimean government that was pro-German during the German occupation transformed itself into a pro-Allied government, welcoming the Allied arrival. Many inhabitants of the Crimea, however, were indifferent or hostile to the Allies.

Allied intervention in the Black Sea region continued in early 1919. British and French ships landed small forces of troops, mostly demoralized, war-weary French, Greek, and Polish soldiers, at several places. A number of these soldiers and sailors were attracted to the Soviets' socialist goals. The whole operation was poorly organized and supplied, and even its commanders were unenthusiastic about its prospects for success. As in the Crimea, most civilians in the Ukrainian intervention areas were passive or outright hostile to the Allies. In March 1918, pro-Soviet forces began inflicting defeats on the interventionist troops in Ukraine. French and British sailors began to mutiny in April 1919.

At Sevastopol in the Crimea, the Allies saw Greek troops trying to put down a pro-Soviet workers' uprising that was supported by mutinous French troops. This spelled the end of Allied military intervention in the Black Sea region, with

Allied forces being withdrawn before the end of April. The British would remain in a support role, helping to supply and train the Whites in southern Russia.

The Red Army quickly overran the Crimea following the Allied departure. The pro-Allied Crimean government collapsed and was replaced by the Crimean Socialist Soviet Republic. This was a nominally independent government allied to Soviet Russia but in actuality a Soviet puppet state. (The Crimean SSR in turn fell when the Southern Whites took control of the Crimea in June).

The Black Sea intervention had been misguided in part due to Allied misconceptions and lack of information about the situation in Russia. The dearth of information was acute: International news reporting from Russia had collapsed in 1918 during the civil war, and most Allied diplomats had left Russia following the Allied intervention. News about Russia only slowly leaked out and was mixed with wild rumors, Soviet propaganda, and White propaganda, such as the Soviets having converted Russian churches into brothels with women forced to work as prostitutes. At the Paris Peace Conference, British Prime Minister David Lloyd George remarked that "Russia was a jungle in which no one could tell what was within a few yards of him". Better information might have directed Allied intervention to concentrate on the eastern Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, rather than in Ukraine in the western Black Sea. For example, while the Whites controlled Novorossiysk, other ports in this area like Anapa and Gelendzhik were contested or controlled by the Soviets. Allied troops could have helped take these ports, releasing White troops to secure the North Caucasus sooner and then move north to fight the Soviets in southern Russia.



A British Mark V heavy tank in France in WW1

Even though Allied military intervention in the Black Sea region ended in April, the British continued to support the Southern Whites with substantial amounts of weapons, supplies, and money in 1919. Shipments included a number of the British heavy tanks or “landships” of World War I, and volunteers from the British Army trained the Whites on these vehicles.

The collapse of the Southern White’s offensive in early 1919 had led to the Red Army conquering much of the Don Cossack region by the spring of 1919. Soviets momentum had stalled by the spring, with the Red Army bogged down by deal with Cossacks revolts in their rear areas. This allowed the Southern Whites to staged a dramatic recovery. Further south in the North Caucasus, White forces there had defeated the Reds. These White forces then moved north, attacking the Red Army in southern Russia and freeing the Don Cossack region.

While this was going on, the Soviets and Southern Whites battled for the Donbass, with the Whites finally winning and controlling almost all of the region by early June. Allied aid helped the Whites in this struggles, as they received substantial amounts of aircraft, rifles, machineguns, and ammunition. They also used some British heavy tanks in the Donbass, which proved almost unstoppable at first. The Soviets troops had no prior experience in fighting tanks and sometimes ran away merely upon the appearance of the tanks on the battlefield. (The Soviets would learn how to fight tanks over time.)

With the Don Cossack region and the Donbass secured, the Southern Whites then went on a general offensive, throwing the Soviets back in many parts of Ukraine and southern Russia. In June 1919, they took Tsaritsyn to their east and Kharkov (Kharkiv) to their north. Tsaritsyn, which Soviet propaganda had glorified for withstanding White attempts to take the city in 1918 and early 1919, easily fell with the surrender of about 40,000 Soviet troops. British Mark V tanks once again proved crucial in breaching the city’s defenses, as ill-prepared Soviet troops fled when a squadron of tanks made a surprise attack and broke through the outer trench line. A single tank, manned by British training troops who had ignored orders to avoid combat, drove into the city itself and forced its surrender. Soviet propaganda would continue to celebrate Tsaritsyn but would simply not mention the events of June 1919.

Spring 1919 also saw semi-coordinated plans by the Allies and Whites to connect the territory of the Northern Whites with that of the Eastern Whites. Both forces were to attack towards one other and link up at Kotlas. This would allow the Czechoslovak Legion to evacuate Russia via the Allied-controlled northern ports. Unfortunately, the Allies were not

fully committed to these efforts. Both the Americans and the British had already decided to withdraw their troops from the region later in 1919, regardless of the outcome of their operations. Further, although the Kotlas objective was the shortest route to link the two White regions and could be supported by rail communications, it involved advancing through many forests and swamps in a region with a poor road network. The terrain thus favored the defender and hindered fast movement.

Kolchak's Whites also had extremely ambitious plans to attack the Soviets from the Urals region. A northern thrust, after linking up with the Northern Whites, was to continue west and take Petrograd. Central and southern thrusts were to penetrate the central Volga region, defeat the Red Army there, and advance west to take Moskva. If the plans worked, the Soviets would lose their two largest cities, their largest industrial centers, their capital, and the birthplace of their revolution. These offensives began in March.

Kolchak had insufficient forces for his ambitions. The northern drive made some progress and even contacted Northern White patrols in a remote area, but the main advance on Kotlas stalled. The Allied-Northern White attack toward Kotlas only started in June and was quickly abandoned when Kolchak's northern drive had to withdraw.

Kolchak's central and southern thrusts fared better and achieved a complete breakthrough in one sector, crushing the opposing Red Army forces. However, the Soviets had superior resources of manpower and supplies, which they used to reinforce their Eastern Front. This allowed M.V. Frunze to stabilize the front lines and then in late April to launch a counteroffensive, defeating the Whites on the southern and central sectors and pushing east. This in turn forced Kolchak to abandonment his northern offensive, as the Red Army was threatening to cut its lines of communications. By July, most of Kolchak's forces had been pushed back east of the Urals, and Kolchak's hope of victory in 1919 had vanished. Worse was to follow, as the Red Army soon began new offensive operations, pushing the Whites east into the depths of Siberia.

Spotlight: M.V. Frunze



Mikhail Vasilevich Frunze (1885-1925)

M.V. Frunze's rise to the highest levels of the Red Army began during Kolchak's spring offensive of 1919. Frunze had become a dedicated Bolshevik at age 18, when the 1903 Russian Social Democratic Labor Party saw the emergence of the rival Bolshevik and Menshevik factions. Frunze was wounded by government forces in the peaceful Blood Sunday march of January 1905, an experience he claimed turned his interest to the Bolsheviks' military potential and turned him into one of the "generals of the revolution". In the abortive Revolution of 1905, Frunze was an agitator, strike leader, and workers' militia commander. He brought his militia unit from Ivanovo-Voznesensk (now, Ivanovo, Russia) to Moskva to fight with the rebels in the Presnaya district in December 1905. Soviet propaganda claimed, perhaps correctly, that he led the unit heroically during combat against government forces.

Frunze was arrested after the revolution in 1907 and sentenced to four years of forced labor. He was then sentenced to death for attempted murders of police officials guarding his place of imprisonment. This sentence was later reduced to six years of hard labor in Siberia, where he escaped and resumed revolutionary work under various aliases. He was active as a workers' militia leader in Minsk during the 1917 February Revolution that caused the Tsar to abdicate and again as a workers' militia leader, this time in Moskva, in the 1917 October Revolution that brought the Bolsheviks to power.

During the Russian Civil War, Frunze first became a military commissar and then a Red Army commander. After Kolchak's Whites broke through the Soviet

front in March 1919, Frunze was appointed commander of the group of armies facing the advancing Whites. He organized an effective defense and then launched a successful counteroffensive in April that threw the Whites back behind the Ural Mountains.

Frunze was promoted to commander of the entire Soviet Eastern Front in July 1919 as a reward for his victory. In August, he was sent to subjugate Turkestan (Russian Central Asia). Frunze knew parts of Turkestan well, having been born and raised in what is now Kyrgyzstan. (Frunze was neither Turkic nor Muslim like the vast majority of the population there. He was the son of a Russian-speaking Moldavian father, an official in the Russian government, and a Russian mother.)

Turkestan during the civil war was fought over by the Reds, Whites, Allies, separatists, and other groups. The Soviets always controlled part of the region throughout the civil war but were often isolated from the rest of the Soviet state after the revolt of the Czechoslovak Legion in May 1918. Frunze drove a corridor linking up with Soviet Turkestan in September 1919. He then established Soviet control over the region in 1919–1920, including occupying the supposedly-independent protectorates of Khiva and Bukhara. (This paved the way for the Soviets to consolidate the entire region and begin to integrate it deeply with the Soviet state; see the appendix on [Soviet Central Asia](#) if you want more details. Turkestan did remain restive after the conquest, and it would take the Soviets years to pacify these Muslim lands and defeat the Basmachi rebels.)

In September 1920, Frunze was transferred to command the Southern Front, where he defeated the last major White offensive of the civil war. He also established Soviet control over most of Ukraine by defeating the Ukrainian anarchist movement and the final forces of the Ukrainian People's Republic. After the civil war, he undertook political and diplomatic work while continuing military duties.

Frunze was one of the most effective Red Army army and front commanders of the civil war. As his reward after the civil war, he was selected for high Communist Party positions, becoming a member of the Central Committee and a candidate member of the Politburo. In January 1925, he also became chair of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic (RVSR), the headquarters of the Red Army, when Trotskiy was removed from his military and governmental

positions. (Trotsky had fallen into political troubles during the infighting over control of the Party following Lenin's death in 1924. He later would be expelled from the Party and exiled from the USSR.) Frunze and Trotsky had disagreed on the role and organization of the Red Army after the civil war, so Frunze's appointment to the RVSR allowed him to reorganize the Army mostly along his lines.

Beside being an able military commander, several historians indicate that Frunze was a Communist intellectual and was considered as a possible successor to Lenin. However, Frunze did not try to become Party head but instead backed G.E. Zinoviev's faction in the struggle for the leadership. This pitted him against Stalin's faction and likely would have doomed him to arrest and execution, the typically fate of top Communists who had opposed Stalin's rise. However, Frunze had a chronic medical condition and died during surgery on 31 October 1925. Soviet propaganda glorified Frunze as a larger-than-life Communist hero and built him up as the ablest Red Army field commander in the civil war.

It is difficult to judge Frunze's actual abilities given all this puffery, but the Polish-Soviet War in 1920 perhaps gives an indication. That year, the Soviets made the conquest of Poland the Red Army's top priority, with two fronts, the Western and Southwestern, tasked with accomplishing this mission. Frunze remained in Turkestan, not involved in the Polish-Soviet conflict at all. The Red Army Commander, S.S. Kamenev, planned the operations, with M.N. Tukhachevskiy commanding the Western Front and A.I. Egorov in charge of the Southwestern Front. Tukhachevskiy got the command of the Western Front, "currently the most important front of the Republic¹⁶²" because he had proven skillful in commanding troops involved in defeating both the Eastern Whites and then the Southern Whites in the North Caucasus. Egorov was also a successful commander, involved in defeating the Southern Whites in eastern Ukraine. Tukhachevskiy's reputation was dented when the Poles smashed the Western Front¹⁶³, so Frunze then was assigned to finish off the Southern Whites.

162 A statement of the RVSR, the Red Army HQ, according to N.N. Azovtsev; S.D. Gusarevich; V.O. Daines and other editors; *Grazhdanskaia Voina v SSSR v Dvukh Tomakh; Tom 2: Reshayushchie Pobedy Krasnoi Armii. Krach Imperialisticheskoi Interventsii (Mart 1919 g.–Oktyabr 1922 g.)* [*Civil War in the USSR in Two Volumes; Volume 2: Decisive Victories of the Red Army. Collapse of Imperialist Intervention (March 1919–October 1922)*]; 1986. I have not seen this work.

163 The Southwestern Front also failed, being unable to take Lvov (Lwow, Lviv) as assigned but Egorov's reputation was not diminished like Tukhachevskiy's. Kamenev had ordered the Southwestern Front to send troops north to assist the Western Front, which weakened the Southwestern Front too much. The fact that these troops were too late to help the Western Front



M.V. Frunze on Maneuvers; Painting by I.I. Brodskiy, 1929

The Soviets named a city Frunze in his honor (now Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan) as well as the Red Army's top military academy (the Military Academy named for M.V. Frunze), a battleship, and many other places across the USSR.

The Southern Whites in July launched an offensive to try take Moskva. The Soviets reacted vigorously to this threat, launching counter-offensives and seeking ways to disrupt the White drive. Fortunately for the Soviets, the threat from Kolchak was over by the time the Southern Whites were able to make their move, so the Red Army could concentrate forces against the Southerners. The Whites made progress at first and advanced about half the distance from Kharkov to Moskva, taking Oryol in October.

Kolchak did try to send help to the Southern Whites. The Ural Army, a small force mostly of Ural Cossack cavalry, had managed to establish land communications with the Southern Whites in July. That month, it had also tried and failed to liberate Uralsk, the headquarters city of the Ural Cossack Host, from the Red Army. Kolchak then ordered the Ural Army to go assist the Southern Whites¹⁶⁴. The plan was to send many of these Cossacks to Kharkov, from which then were supposed to raid the rear areas of the Red Army in the Central Theater. This could have substantially helped the Southern Whites. Cossacks of the Southern Whites, for example, had gone on a deep raid of the rear areas of the Red Army at the start of the White offensive. They captured towns, cut Soviet lines of communications, smashed

was due to Stalin, the top military commissar of the Southwestern Front, not Egorov. Stalin at first intervened to have Kamenev's order ignored, most likely because he wanted the fame that would come from taking Lvov, an important city.

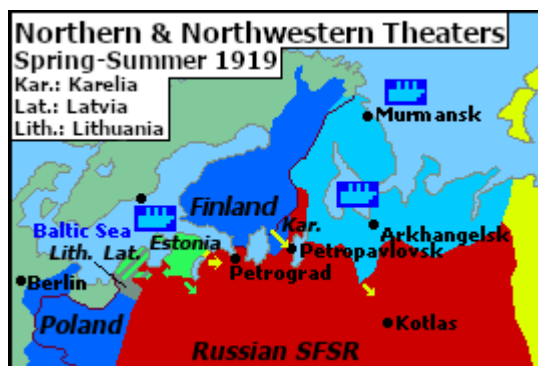
¹⁶⁴ Uralsk was the headquarters of the Ural Cossack Host and changed hands several times during 1918–1919, with the Soviets gaining control in January 1919. During Kolchak's spring offensive, Red Army forces in the Uralsk area marched north to fight the attacking White forces, leaving a garrison in Uralsk itself. The White's small Ural Army used this opportunity to surround and attack Uralsk, but the Soviet garrison held out during an 80-day siege. In July, Red Army forces released from the successful counter-offensive against Kolchak attacked the Ural Army and forced them to withdraw from the Uralsk area.

newly formed Red conscript units, and caused havoc. The Soviets had to send infantry and cavalry forces to chase the Cossacks, diverting troops away from the main defense lines. One of the regions the Cossacks raided was around Tambov. Perhaps as part of this disruption, some anti-Soviet peasants upset with Soviet grain requisitions took to partisan warfare. This movement would grow into the Tambov Rebellion in 1920.

The Ural Cossacks did not join these raids. The commanders of the Ural Army were uninterested in leaving their home region and the nearby areas around Tsaritsyn, Astrakhan, and Samara. Instead, their troops engaged in operations against the Soviets in these areas and contributed little to the overall White effort.

Besides the Southern White's northward offensive towards Moskva, in the summer of 1919 they also advanced west from eastern Ukraine into central Ukraine, attacking the Soviets. The UNR, which had been holding out in western Ukraine, took this opportunity to attack the Soviets and advanced east into central Ukraine. In August, both sides were converging on Kiev. The UNR's and White's operations, however, were not coordinated, as they were not allies although they were not quite enemies, either. The UNR reached Kiev first, taking the city on 30 August. At that time, Kiev was solely on the west side of the Dnepr River (modern Kyiv straddles the river). Believing the Whites were still several days' march from the city, the UNR forces prepared for a victory parade for the 31st and carelessly did not guard all the bridges crossing the Dnepr into the city. Advance forces of the Southern Whites reached the Kiev area the evening of the 30th and advanced into Kiev across open bridges on the 31st. After a brief clash, the Whites seized the city. The two sides agreed to create a neutral zone between their forces to prevent further clashes, leaving Kiev in White hands.

Negotiations in September to resolve the differences between the UNR and Whites and possibly ally together against the Soviets failed. The Southern Whites were committed to a unitary Russian state within the 1914 borders of the former Russian empire and had no interest in Ukrainian independence or even autonomy. Clashes between the two sides grew into all-out warfare by October. This fighting tied down Southern White forces that could have been better used against the Soviets and missed the opportunity to have the Ukrainian forces join the operations against the Red Army.



The Northern Theater in the spring and summer of 1919 saw several anti-Soviet operations, in addition to the Allied-White operations towards Kotlas in the theater's east. Anti-Soviet forces controlled a large amount territory in the theater, but they were far less impressive that how they seemed on a map. The Allied interventionist troops were the best equipped, best trained, and best supplied of these forces, but they were relatively few in number and spread thin securing the region. Some, perhaps many, of these soldiers were discouraged at being stuck in Russia.

The White's Northern Army was much worse than the Allied interventionists: it was small, weak, and somewhat unreliable. Few local people volunteered to join this army, forcing the Northern Whites to turn to conscription. The locals found many ways to avoid conscription, so relatively few ended up drafted. At times, over half the Northern Army consisted of former Red Army soldiers¹⁶⁵.

Finland was active in the western part of the theater. Part of the population of Soviet Karelia consisted of Finnic-language Karelians, and the Finns hoped to unite Karelia with Finland. Finns troops were far more motivated than the Northern Whites, but Finland could not commit many troops. A Finnish expeditionary force advanced into Karelia and reached the outskirts of Petrozavlovsk, the main city, but was not strong enough to take the city. The Karelians turned out to be apathetic to the Finns' efforts, so a Karelian uprising against the Soviets did not occur. Instead, Red Army reinforcements and attacks drove the Finns back to Finland in the summer of 1919.

The Finns in the spring of 1919 had indicated they were willing to participate in Allied-White operations to take Petrograd, if given sufficient Allied support. Finnish forces were quite close to this city, holding positions just to the north. Allied support for Finland did not materialize, and nothing came of this offer. This was another missed opportunity for the

¹⁶⁵ I suspect most if not almost all of these former Red Army soldiers were reluctant peasants the Soviets drafted in 1918, rather than volunteers motivated by Communist ideology. The peasant soldiers would have been unwilling to fight for the Soviets and likely surrendered or deserted to the Whites when they could.

Allies and Whites, as Petrograd was soon under threat from the west, from the Northwestern Whites¹⁶⁶ based in Estonia.

The Estonians had been fighting the Red Army since November 1918 and went on the offensive across their entire front in the spring of 1919. With a British naval force in the Baltic Sea keeping the Soviet Baltic Fleet bottled up in port, Northwestern Whites and Estonian troops almost reached the outskirts of Petrograd before being halted. Offensive operations in this direction then pause, as the Estonians had to concentrate on fighting Germanic forces to their south, in Latvia. German forces had managed to take over Latvia, and Germany was seeking to control the entire Baltic region again, like it had in 1918. The Germans, however, was far too weak to risk renewed war with the Allies, and the project collapsed when the British demanded German troops withdraw from the Baltic region. The Germans officially complied but covertly transferred many of their troops to the Western Whites, a White force organized and supported by the Germans. It ostensibly existed to fight the Soviets but actually helped German attempts to control Lithuania and Latvia.

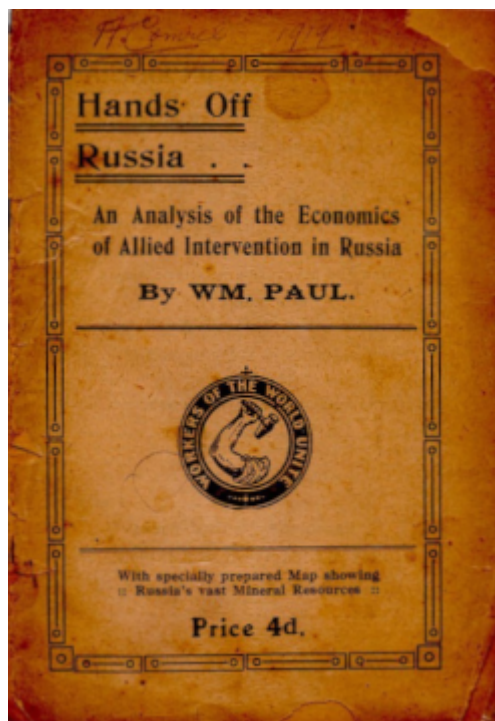
The distraction of the Germanic-Estonian conflict allowed the Soviets to build up their defenses. It may have been unlikely that the British naval force, the Northwestern Whites, and Estonians could have captured Petrograd even without this distraction, but the Soviets were lucky in that the threats to this city from the east, north, and west all were insufficient.

After the summer of 1919, Allied intervention in Russia was winding down. Some western histories have argued that the intervention did little except to permanently antagonize the Soviet leadership against western countries. The British intervention in the Baltic Sea was clearly intended to capture Petrograd and help weaken or overthrow the Soviet state. The Soviets would thereafter regard capitalist Britain as their chief international adversary, until the mid-1930s when the growing power of the Nazis made Germany the larger threat. However, the Soviets would have been hostile to capitalist countries even if there had been no Allied intervention at all. The Soviets' Communist ideology with its goal of world proletarian revolution meant the Soviets believed they were in an existential struggle with the capitalist countries.

Allied intervention was half-hearted and achieved nothing of consequence. The civil war with all its horrors, suffering, and deaths likely would have been shorter had the Allies left

¹⁶⁶ The Northwestern Whites frequently renamed themselves, even at one point calling themselves the Northern Army even though there was another White force called the Northern Army in the Russian far north. I use "Northwestern Whites" as a simplification for their variety of names: Russian Volunteer Northern Army, Separate Pskov Russian Volunteer Corps, Pskov Corps, Northern Corps, Northern Army, and Northwestern Army.

Russia alone. The leaders of the Allied countries did not have a common plan the goal of intervention, and none wanted to commit the troops and resources to fight a major war against Russia. Even if they had wanted to, there were little enthusiasm for such a war in their militaries or in their population. A number of soldiers and sailors in the interventionist forces sympathized with the Reds more than with the Whites and sometimes more than with their own governments. Most simply saw no point in being in Russia and wanted to go home. Demoralization was common, and some mutinies and desertions occurred. On the home front in most Allied countries, the great majority of the citizens wanted peace, so there was little political support for war in Russia.



Cover of the British edition of *Hands Off Russia*

"4d" is four 1919 British pennies or very roughly about £2.50 in 2022 pounds when adjusting for inflation. (4d in 1919 US currency would have been about 8–9¢ or very roughly \$1.50 in 2022 dollars.

In many Allied countries, there was very strong sentiment against intervention in Russia among the many citizens who favored socialism. This resulted in political agitation in favor of the Soviets. The Russian Communists and the Soviet government secretly encouraged and funded these anti-intervention efforts. For example, the Party helped pay for publication of the *Hands Off Russia* pamphlet in several countries.

Allied governments that had endured the most fighting like Britain and France had incurred heavy casualties and huge expenses due to the war. While they may have wanted to see the

Soviets overthrown, they had little appetite for more losses and expenses. All these factors meant that when the Soviet state failed to collapse quickly, almost all Allied Powers began withdrawing their forces in 1919. Allied forces in northern Russia withdrew in September and October 1919. In Siberia, they withdrew in early 1920. The Japanese were the major exception, staying in parts of the Russian Far East for several more years.



Things went badly for the White cause in the autumn of 1919. In the Baltic region, the Western Whites, which contained many German troops (mostly *Freikorps* volunteers), made far more trouble for Latvia, and Lithuania than they did for the Soviets. Attempts to get the Western Whites to assist the Northwestern Whites outside of Petrograd or to operate against the Soviets in eastern Latvia failed. Instead, the Western Whites got into disputes and

military conflicts with Latvia and Lithuania. The Western Whites occupied Riga, the Latvian capital, and announced their intentions to make Latvia part of Russia again. The Latvians had to divert forces from their front lines facing the Soviets to force the Whites out of Riga. Further south, the Whites and Lithuanians fought over control of Lithuania. In November, the Latvians forced the Western Whites out of the country, while the Lithuanians inflicted a major defeat on the Whites. This marked the waning of the Western Whites, and their German troops soon returned home to Germany.

The Baltic region also saw the eclipse of the Northwestern Whites in the autumn. With some help from Estonia, they launched an offensive in late September aimed at taking Petrograd. The Whites scored initial success and advanced on the city, cutting all its western and central communications routes except for the Moskva-Petrograd rail line¹⁶⁷. The Soviets believed that only White mismanagement prevented them from cutting this line, too. The threat to the city was enough that the Soviet authorities mobilized many Petrograd workers into militia units and fortified the city with barricades¹⁶⁸. Reinforcements from Moskva helped bolster the defenses by mid October, and, too late, the Whites tried but failed to cut the Moskva-Petrograd line. The Red Army now had superior forces and went on the offensive, forcing the Whites and Estonians back. With the Northwestern Whites now having no realistic prospects to take Petrograd, the Estonians feared they might try to take over Estonia, like the Western Whites had tried in Latvia and Lithuania. The Estonians preemptively disarmed the Northwestern Whites. This White group remained in existence for a few more months but were no longer a military threat to anyone.

Sidetrip: Peace Moves in the Baltic Region

The Soviets in September 1919 tried to make separate peace deals each with Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. They had tried to make peace with Estonia earlier in 1919, but British pressure on Estonia had blocked this. The Soviets likely saw their wars in the Baltic region as needless distractions from their main efforts. They did hope that peace in the Baltic region would induce Britain to recall its Baltic naval force and perhaps even lead to better relations between the Soviets and the Allied powers. This September initiative did not immediately bear fruit, but each of the Baltic countries would soon reconsider and negotiate peace deals. Earnest negotiations with Estonia began in November and resulted in a peace

¹⁶⁷ This was the Nikolaev Railroad, named for Tsar Nikolay I. In 1923, the Soviets renamed it the October Railroad, in honor of their October Revolution.

¹⁶⁸ N.E. Kakurin; *Strategicheskiy Ocherk Grazhdanskoy Voyny (Strategic Outline of the Civil War)*; 1926; http://militera.lib.ru/science/kakurin_ne/02.html (in Russian).

treaty in February 1920. Latvia entered negotiations in April 1920 and made peace in August; Lithuania started talks in May and agreed to a treaty in July¹⁶⁹.

In all of these treaties, the Soviets formally recognized the independence of the other side: Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. At the time, many people in the Baltic states and elsewhere suspected that Soviet intentions were insincere. In this view, once the Soviets had settled their more pressing military matters, they would then attack and conquer the Baltic states. However, the Polish-Soviet War ended badly for the Soviets in 1920, leaving them desiring a general peace across eastern Europe. In 1939–1940, a far stronger Soviet Union would break the peace Baltic treaties, occupy the Baltic states, and annex them into the USSR.

The Soviets would later claim “The open recognition by the Soviet government of the independence of all small peoples soon pushed the Estonian government onto the path of direct peace negotiations with Soviet Russia”¹⁷⁰. This made it seem like Estonia was to blame for the Estonian-Soviet war of 1918–1920. In reality, the Soviets had not recognized Estonia’s declaration of independence and then invaded Estonia in 1918. The claim that the Soviets recognized the independence of all “small peoples” was sheer hypocrisy, as many ethnic groups that sought independence had simply been conquered. This included, for example, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, all of which had populations about the same size as the Baltic states.

The Eastern Whites, who had been badly defeated in the spring and summer of 1919, launched an offensive in September, but it failed. In October the Soviets went on the attack again. The White forces were too weak to stop the Reds and began retreating. Omsk, Kolchak’s capital was lost in mid-November, and the retreat soon became famous as the “Great Siberian Ice March” as the Whites retreated east across roughly 2,000 kilometers (1,250 miles) to the Transbaykal. Kolchak attempted to flee east by train but got sidelined about halfway between Krasnoyarsk and Irkutsk as the Whites lost control of much of the Trans-Siberian Railroad.

Perhaps on the order of 200,000–240,000 Whites, about equally divided between soldiers and civilian refugees, retreated from the Omsk area. Without access to the “Transsib”, they were forced to move by foot and horse on Siberian roads. They were without supplies, marching

169 The treaty went into for in August when Lithuania’s legislature ratified it.

170 N.E. Kakurin; *Strategicheskiy Ocherk Grazhdanskoy Voyny (Strategic Outline of the Civil War)*; 1926; http://militera.lib.ru/science/kakurin_ne/02.html (in Russian).

through bitter cold, being attacked by Soviet partisan bands, and afflicted by an outbreak of typhus. V.O. Koppel, the White general in charge of the retreat, decided to reduce his forces to just the most dedicated soldiers and allowed the rest to disperse, to try to go home or to surrender to the Soviets. He also left his sick and wounded to their fates (many were captured by the Soviets) and had to abandon his artillery and machineguns in the deep snow. The Whites force most disintegrated, leaving perhaps just 30,000 or so soldiers under White command. The Whites planned to regroup and resupply at Krasnoyarsk, but a workers' revolt there placed this city under Soviet control. The Whites were forced to bypass the city in early January, suffering Red Army attacks and being reduced to perhaps 25,000 soldiers. Koppel died a few days later from pneumonia, perhaps a fitting fate for a general who had recently abandoned sick and wounded people.

The next city to the east was Irkutsk, which also suffered a revolt in December. Left Social-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks, who had been sidelined since the coup that brought Kolchak to power, joined with liberals and local Communists to seize the city and form an anti-Kolchak government, the Political Center. Their goal was to overthrow Kolchak, who was still stuck west of Irkutsk. Kolchak resigned as Supreme Ruler when he heard of this in early January, in favor of A.I. Denikin of the Southern Whites. Later that month, the Political Center gained custody of Kolchak ¹⁷¹ and then ceded power to the Soviets, who executed Kolchak in February. The threat to the Soviet heartland from the Whites in the Urals and Siberia had been totally destroyed.

The remnants of the Eastern White forces bypassed Irkutsk, marching south of Lake Baykal into the Transbaykal region. About 15,000 Whites reached Chita, the main Transbaykal city.

Sidetrip: "Kolchak's Gold"

The collapse of the Eastern Whites and Kolchak's government saw the Soviets recapture a substantial amount of the gold reserves that the Whites had captured at Kazan in August 1918, 410 million rubles-worth of the approximately 650 million rubles-worth that had been lost. This led to a widely asked question: Where was the rest of what was now called the "Kolchak's gold"?

The answer of course was that the Kolchak government spent most of the missing gold, although some almost certainly did go missing. The White warlord of the Transbaykal region seems to have gotten hold of 44 million rubles-worth

¹⁷¹ Kolchak was in territory controlled by the Czechoslovak Legion, trying to travel east on the Trans-Siberian Railroad to leave Russia and enter exile. The Czechs, however, traded Kolchak to the Irkutsk rebels in return for their own unhindered passage east.

of the gold and spent it for his fight against the Reds and his forlorn quest to recreate a Great Mongol State from Russian, Mongolian, and Chinese territory.

In popular imagination, however, the gold was hidden or lost, just waiting to be discovered. Former Whites claimed the Czechoslovakian Legion stole 63 million rubles-worth of the gold. Rumors abounded that they got it back to Czechoslovakia, although there's no credible evidence of this. Other rumors claim the train carrying the Czech loot was caught in an avalanche along the shores of Lake Baykal, the world's deepest lake, and the carriages with the gold sunk to the bottom of the lake. At one point, small submarines searched the lake without finding any gold. Yet another rumor claimed the loot train reached Vladivostok on the Pacific Ocean but the gold sunk in this port city's harbor when the Czech were unable to smuggle it out of Russia. No gold has been found in the harbor.

Stories that the Whites hid the gold rather than the Czechs stealing it were also popular. Other rumors claim it was hidden in the remote Yamal Peninsula on the Arctic Ocean in Siberia, in the Altay Mountains near the border with Mongolia, or somewhere in Siberia along the route of the Trans-Siberian Railroad.

In the Northern Theater, Allied interventionist forces withdrew during the late summer and early autumn, abandoning Murmansk on 27 September and Murmansk on 12 October. The Northern Whites, never a strong or reliable force, were too weak to hold out for long against the Red Army. In December, the Red Army began a winter campaign, with the Northern Whites progressively collapsing. The Soviets took Arkhangelsk in February 1920 and Murmansk in March, ending White presence in the far north.

The last main White force in the field, the Southern Whites, also fared badly but hung on. Their summer drive on Moskva had stalled at Oryol in October. Meanwhile, the anarchist Black Army became a major problem in the Whites' rear areas. These Ukrainian anarchists had been waging a guerrilla war against the Whites in many parts of Ukraine since the White conquest of the Donbass in the spring of 1919. The bulk of the White forces were in the north facing the Red Army, leaving relatively small White garrisons in Ukraine. The Black Army attacked these troops and achieved a signal victory in September. During October, the anarchists overran many parts of eastern and south-central Ukraine, disrupting the supply lines to the Whites' front line forces. White forces had to be diverted from the front to operate against the anarchists.

While this was happening, the Red Army built up its forces facing the Southern Whites. Poland, which had been fighting the Red Army on the Soviet Western Front, temporarily paused operations and entered into negotiations with Soviets, which allowed the Red Army to transfer a crack division from that front to the Southern Front. The Poles did not want to see the Whites prevail in the civil war, as they feared the Whites would be more hostile to the existence of an independent Poland than the Soviets. This was a completely justified apprehension, as the Southern Whites wanted to restore a unitary Russian state within the 1914 borders of the former Russian Empire, which would have meant the subjugation of Poland. Had the Whites been more realistic in their goals, they might have gained a valuable ally in Poland.

The Red Army went on the offensive against the Southern Whites in October, attacking from several directions. The Whites, outnumbered and poorly supplied, were defeated at Oryol and Voronezh. These were major defeats, and the Whites quickly lost ground. While this was happening, the Southern Whites continued their senseless war with the UNR in western Ukraine. The UNR was reduced to a tiny territory (called the “triangle of death”) and in the winter of 1919/20 went over to partisan warfare and raids against the Whites — and, soon, against the Soviets, whose victorious troops were advancing throughout most of Ukraine and southern Russia. Kiev fell to the Red on 16 December 1919; Rostov-na-Donu in southern Russia fell on 8 January 1920; Odessa in southwestern Ukraine was captured on 7 February. The Whites lost all their territory in Ukraine, but the UNR managed not only to hold out but actually regain some territory.

While this was happening, the Eastern Whites were in collapse. Kolchak in January 1920 resigned as Supreme Ruler of the Whites in favor of Denikin, the leader of the Southern Whites. This had no practical consequences for Denikin or the Southern Whites, since the other main White groups were going down to defeat and the surviving White groups, mainly the Transbaykal Whites, had no intention of taking orders from Denikin. Denikin, who knew the emptiness of the office, refused to accept the title or to exercise its functions, although he was considered the “acting” Supreme Ruler.

Besides losing control of Ukraine and southern Russia (including the territory of the Don Cossacks), the Southern Whites continued to lose ground to the Red Army over the winter of 1919/20. They hoped to hold the Kuban region of the North Caucasus, but the Red Army proven to be too strong, especially after an important White force was caught in a fierce

snowstorm in an uninhabitable part of the steppe and lost half its soldiers¹⁷². The Southern White capital city of Ekaterinodar was lost in March (and renamed Krasnodar by the Soviets in December 1920), with the Whites evacuating the Kuban from Novorossiysk to the Crimean Peninsula later that month. The evacuation was not planned in advance, lacked sufficient ships, and was chaotic. Novorossiysk fell to the Red Army in late March before the evacuation was complete, leaving 22,000 White troops to be captured. Other White troops left in the North Caucasus were quickly mapped up by the Soviets, with the remnants surrendering in the Sochi area along the Black Sea in early May 1920.



Pyotr Nikolaevich Vranghel, the Black Baron

The Southern Whites now held just the Crimean Peninsula. There were only very limited invasion routes into the Crimea, so the Whites dug in and halted the Reds. The Crimea became the last major White bastion in European Russia. The defeats suffered by the Southern Whites since autumn 1919 persuaded Britain to cease supporting them with weapons and supplies, which had been an import factor in their operations in 1919. The disasters that had befallen the Southern Whites convinced Denikin to resign in April 1920 and go into exile. P.A. Vranghel (often spelled “Wrangel” in English¹⁷³), another ex-Tsarist

172 N.E. Kakurin; *Strategicheskiy Ocherk Grazhdanskoj Voyny (Strategic Outline of the Civil War)*; 1926;

http://militera.lib.ru/science/kakurin_ne/02.html (in Russian).

173 “Wrangel” is the German spelling, and the Wrangel family was part of the centuries-old Baltic German nobility. At some point, they adopted Cyrillic spelling, hence their name became *Врангели* (Vranghel).

general, became leader of the Southern Whites¹⁷⁴. Vranghel came from the Russian nobility and became known as the “Black Baron” as he had adopted for his uniform a black Circassian-style coat. (These coats, in various colors, were often as part of Cossack uniforms, so Vranghel’s choice was a bit idiosyncratic but not outlandish. Vranghel did not have Cossack origins but came from the Baltic German nobility).

The Ukrainian anarchists had certainly helped the Red Army defeat the Southern Whites by disrupting their supply lines. The Soviets, however, had no gratitude towards the anarchists nor any interest in renewing their alliance with them. In January 1920, the Red Army attacked the Black Army and soon established Soviet control over the anarchists’ territories. However, the Black Army simply reverted to guerrilla tactics, beginning a months-long campaign of partisan warfare against the Soviets. Both sides treated the other brutally. The Soviets unleashed the Cheka against actual and suspected anarchists. In turn, when the anarchists captured Red Army troops, they summarily executed all commanders and commissars. Ordinary Red Army soldiers were given a choice of joining the Black Army or being stripped of their uniforms and sent home. As in the spring of 1919, many anti-Soviet peasant conscripts in the Red Army found ways to surrender or desert to the Black Army, so the conflict with the anarchists became a constant source of Red Army losses.

With the civil war now going well for the Soviets, they began to revise the system of political control over the Red Army. Only battalions and larger units had military commissars, who had dual command with the units’ commanders. In October 1919, **political officers**¹⁷⁵ were instituted for units below battalion size. The political officers did not have dual command but were in charge of watching for signs of disloyalty and for indoctrinating the troops in Communist ideology. While this was an expansion of the political control system over the Red Army, it foreshadowed the elimination of dual command, as it suggested that the existing commissars could be transformed into political officers.

Dual command was disliked by many Red Army commanders and acknowledged by some Communist leaders as militarily inefficient. Unity of command, in which commanders’ orders were not subject to review or change, clearly would be better for military operations. In December, the Soviets debated abolishing dual command in its entirety but decided against taking so bold a step, fearing what might happen if some commanders or military specialists

174 Since Denikin had refused to accept the title of Supreme Ruler when Kolchak resigned in January 1920, he did not pass it on to Vranghel. Some historians consider the office of Supreme Ruler ended when Kolchak resigned in January while others consider it as continuing with Denikin as acting Supreme Ruler and then ending with Denikin’s resignation as Southern White leader.
175 A. Iovlev; “*Vvedeniye Vedinonachaliya v RKKA (1918 - 1920 gg.)*” (“The introduction of Unity of Command in the RKKA (1918–1920)”); <http://www.rkka.ru/history/edin/edin.htm> (in Russian).

turned treasonous. Instead, the Soviets nibbled away at dual command. It was abolished in battalions in January 1920, being retained only for larger units (regiments and above). Later in 1920, some of these larger units were allowed to have unity of command if they had “Communist commanders” (commanders who were members of the Communist Party or otherwise had “proven their loyalty to worker-peasant power”). This change worked its way up through regiments, divisions, and even to some armies. Most Red Army units did not have Communist commanders, however, so dual command remained in place in most larger units to the end of the civil war.

The civil war entered a new phase during the winter of 1919/20. The Southern Whites were holding out, Japanese troops were still in the Russian Far East, the Ukrainians were holding parts of Ukraine, and there was growing conflict with Poland. The Red Army did not need as many combat troops following the defeat of the Eastern Whites, but it seemed too dangerous start demobilizing units. It was expensive, however, to maintain large forces of troops in the field, especially since the Soviet economy was falling apart.

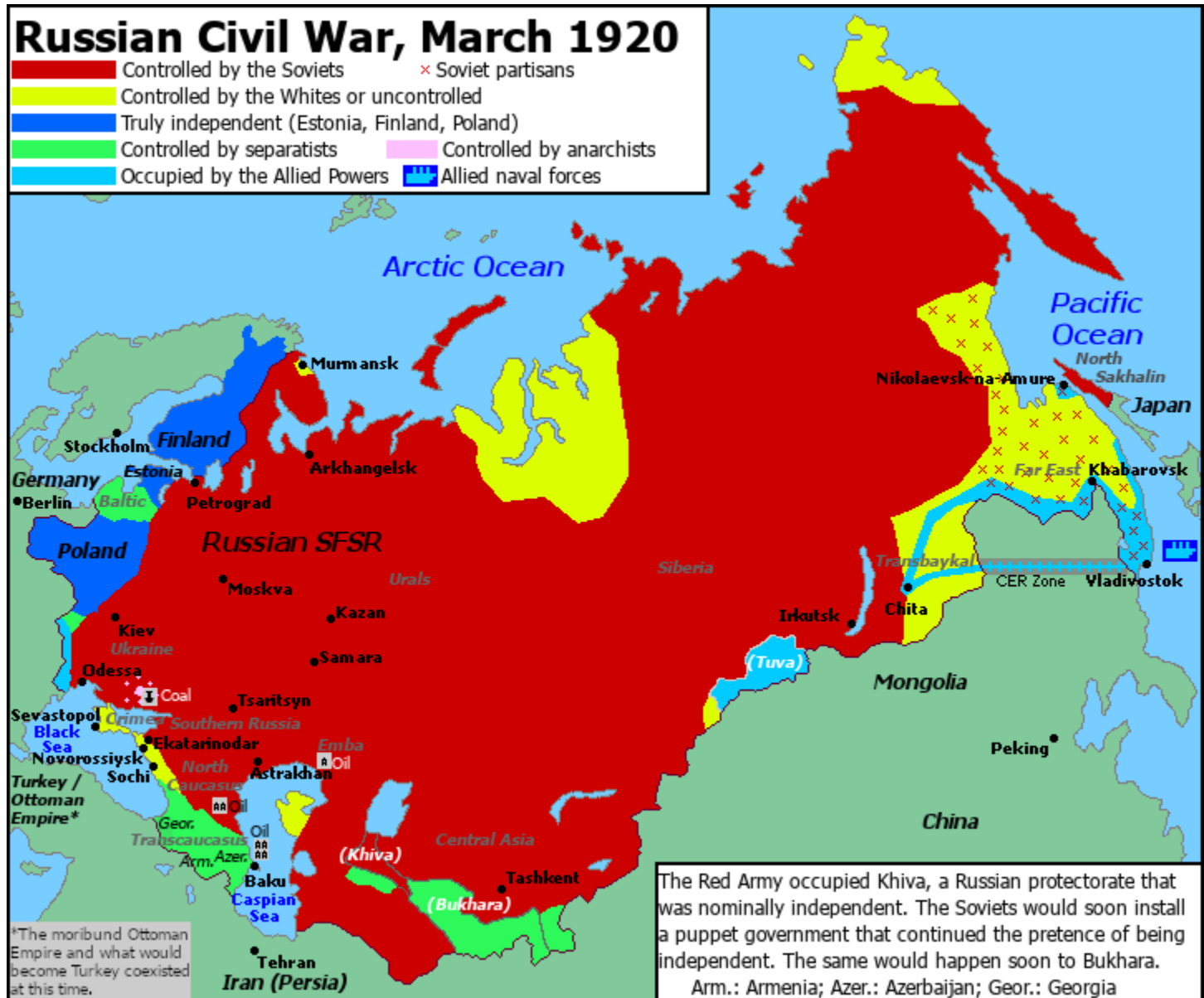
Further, critical infrastructure like railroads were breaking down due to lack of maintenance and repair. The Soviets found it increasingly difficult to obtain masses of civilian workers for this work or often for any work at all. They had inherited an economy badly afflicted by inflation, and their economic and political policies made things worse. Hyperinflation frequently set in during the civil war, and lack of financial resources prevented the Soviets from paying laborers a living wage, as a month’s pay for a common laborer could only buy enough food for a few days. Civilian laborers accordingly avoided working for the Soviets, and many fled to the countryside looking for food. The solution to this labor shortage was to turn excess Red Army troops into conscript laborers.

Red Army combat units in 1918–1919 had occasionally be set to manual labor, when the local combat situation allowed. In late 1919, the Soviets institutionalized this practice on a large scale by authorizing the creation of **labor armies**. A labor army (*trudovaya armiya*, often abbreviated as *trudarmiya*) would be created in a region where many troops there were no longer needed for combat purposes. They would be set to work at resource extraction (logging, coal mining, processing firewood, etc.), for agricultural tasks, and for infrastructure work (maintenance and repair of railroads, roads, bridges, telegraph lines, etc.). The first labor army, the 1st Revolutionary Labor Army, was created in January 1920 in the Urals from troops idled due to the collapse of the Eastern Whites. A total of eight labor armies would be formed in 1920–1921 in Ukraine and parts of the Russian SFSR.

A key consideration in converting combat troops into labor armies was that some or all of the troops could be quickly converted back to combat forces whenever the military situation demanded. For example, starting in March 1920, just two months after the 1st Labor Army had been formed, the Soviets started activating its former rifle and cavalry troops to go fight the Poles and Ukrainians in the Western Theater. This army remained in existence but mostly with just engineering and construction troops.

A labor army could also have its workers transferred out of the Red Army to become local security troops. For example, in June 1920 men from the 1st Labor Army were transferred to the Cheka's *Voyska VOKhR* (VOKhR Troops). These troops guarded Soviet infrastructure, fought "bandits" (rebels and insurgents), guarded the rear areas of the Red Army, and forcibly confiscated crops from the peasants.

9 Civil War: Soviet and Polish Victories, 1920



"We absolutely must take Baku. Direct all your efforts to this end..."
 Lenin's instructions to Red Army forces in the Caucasus, 17 March 1920

By March of 1920, the Soviets had smashed the Eastern and Northern Whites and thrown back the Southern Whites. They could now direct Red Army forces to other actions. Their advances in southern Russia and the North Caucasus opened the route to the Transcaucasus. One key objective was the Baku oil fields of Azerbaijan, which the Soviets had lost in 1918. The Soviets needed Baku's oil to end their energy crisis. Although they recently had regained control of the North Caucasus and Emba oilfields, the oil extraction and refining facilities at these places had been extensively damaged. The Soviets were also regaining

control over the Donbass, but the coal mines there were damaged and extensively flooded. Baku's oilfields and refineries, in contrast, were mostly intact and capable of producing substantial amounts of crude oil and refined oil products.

The invasion of Azerbaijan began in the spring of 1920. The Red Army rapidly conquered the country over the course of few days in April. Georgia was the next target, but an attempt to take over that country failed in early May. The Soviets then left the rest of the Transcaucasus (Armenia and Georgia) alone while they concentrated on more pressing operations. To calm the area, the Soviets and Georgians later in May agreed to a peace treaty in which the Soviet state recognized Georgia as an independent country. However, the Soviets were duplicitous, secretly planning to take over Georgia¹⁷⁶.

The Soviets economy was in dire straits in 1920, due to the confiscations caused by War Communism, the growing food shortages, and excessive inflation. These problems likely persuaded to finally take over the cooperative movement. In March 1920, a decree made all cooperatives part of the Soviet government. Consumption cooperatives became part of the People's Commissariat of Food and were used to distribute food to the population. It was now mandatory for civilians to belong to these cooperatives.

The Soviets revised their conscription policy during 1920, now explicitly making military-age men in all ethnic and religious groups subject to the draft. This was done for political reasons: since the Soviet state was supposed to be egalitarian, Soviet law should make no distinction between groups based on ethnicity or religion. (Class enemies remained fair game.) In reality, however, the Soviet excluded various Muslims groups from conscription. Many Muslims in the Caucasus and Central Asia had become anti-Soviet to varying degrees, because of both repressive Soviet policies and the Communists' hostility to religion. For example, during the Russian Civil War the Muslim Chechens of the North Caucasus had initially viewed the Soviets as liberators from White Army repression when the Red Army captured the region in March 1920. By September 1920, the Chechens were in revolt against the Soviets, who had proven more repressive than the Whites. It took the Red Army until March 1921 to suppress the revolt, and Chechen unrest would occasionally flare up, such as in 1923 and again in 1925, each time requiring Soviet military operations to regain control.

It was also impractical to conscript ordinary members of economically-undeveloped ethnic groups that followed traditional ("pre-capitalist" in Soviet terminology) ways of life like hunting or nomadic herding. The conscription policy accordingly allowed "temporary" exemptions for some groups, to be decided by local officials and Soviet military authorities.

176 John Erickson; *The Soviet High Command: A Military-Political History, 1918-1941*; 1984.

Men exempted in this way were officially liable for state labor service instead, but even here the policy allowed exemptions. In 1922, the temporary delay in conscription was reconfirmed for many Muslim groups in the Caucasus region. The situation in Central Asia, with its Basmachi insurgency and unrest, was no different, and many of these exemptions would remain in place well into the 1930s.

The pre-capitalist “peoples of the North”, indigenous peoples who lived in Siberia or far northern parts of the European portion of the USSR, were also exempted from conscription. These people followed lifestyles like hunting, fishing, or reindeer herding. It seems the northern peoples remained exempt from conscription even after the Soviets started drafting Central Asia Muslims in the 1930s. According to one source, the first time reindeer herders of the Kola Peninsula were drafted was in 1940, during the Winter War with Finland¹⁷⁷. They would be drafted again in 1941–1944 once the Germans invaded the USSR.

The military situations in the eastern and western peripheries of Soviet Russia remained challenges for the Soviets in 1920. In the far east, a small American force and a large Japanese force were still occupying Vladivostok and nearby areas. Although the Americans were withdrawing in early 1920, the Soviets did not want an event to occur that might cause the USA to keep troops in Russia. The situation with Japan were even trickier, as important Japanese factions wanted to keep parts of the Russian Far East under Japanese control. Worse, an incident involving the Japanese occurred in March, when pro-Soviet partisans captured Japanese soldiers and civilians at Nikolaevsk-na-Amure. The partisans went on to summarily execute hundreds of these prisoners. The Japanese then used this event as an excuse to occupy the northern half of Sakhalin Island¹⁷⁸. To limit the chances of further incidents, the Soviets allowed the creation of the Far Eastern Republic as a buffer state between Soviet Russia and Japan. (This state will be covered more later.)

We have never made a secret of the fact that our revolution is only the beginning, that its victorious end will come only when we have lit up the whole world with these same fires of revolution.

—V.I. Lenin, excerpt from his speech at the First All-Russia Congress of Working Cossacks, 1 March 1920¹⁷⁹.

177 Jinny McCormick; “This Reindeer Battalion of WWII Was Braver than Soviets, Tougher Than Tanks”; 2016;

https://www.warhistoryonline.com/world-war-ii/reindeer-battalion-wwii-braver-soviets-tougher_tanks.html.

178 Sakhalin Island at this time was divided into North Sakhalin, a part of Russia, and South Sakhalin, a part of Japan. The Soviets had recently taken control of North Sakhalin from the Whites. Japan wanted control of all the island.

179 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/mar/01.htm>.

In the west, the Soviets and Poland had been engaged in a series of escalating clashes and full-scale military conflict since 1919. This war continued into 1920. As the Soviets beat the Whites, they could now commit more forces against the Poles. This raised the prospects of victory over Poland, which rekindled the Soviet leadership's interest in world proletarian revolution. Poland would be the gateway into central Europe, which they believed was ready for revolution. Since short-lived Marxist revolutions had broken out in Germany and Hungary at the end of World War I, this hope was not unrealistic. The Soviets leadership accordingly made the conquest of Poland the Red Army's top priority¹⁸⁰.

Spotlight: The Rise of Poland

An independent Poland had arisen in 1918 out of Polish lands of the Austro-Hungarian, German, and Russian Empires. The Allied Powers at the Paris Peace Conference determined Poland's western borders with Germany but did not do the same for Poland's eastern borders with the Soviets. The Allies did not recognize the legitimacy of the Soviet state and refused any actions or negotiations that would imply otherwise.

The Soviets accepted the fact of Polish independence, but negotiations between the two countries failed to reach agreement on their mutual borders, on ending their growing conflict, or on any other issue. The Poles mistrusted the intentions and sincerity of the Soviets over the independence of Poland. The Soviets in turn regarded the Polish state as a bourgeois exploiter of Polish working people and farmers. They expected that if Polish socialists somehow came to power in Poland, they would join federate or unite Poland with the Soviet state.

180 N.E. Kakurin; *Strategicheskiy Oчерk Grazhdanskoy Voyny (Strategic Outline of the Civil War)*; 1926; http://militera.lib.ru/science/kakurin_ne/02.html (in Russian).



Chem konchitsya panskaya zateya

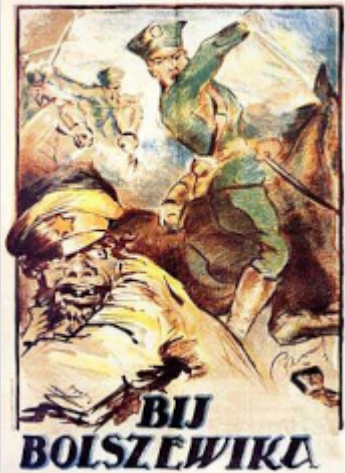
How the landowners' scheme will end (Soviet anti-Polish government poster, 1920)¹⁸¹

The Soviet leadership harbored hopes that the Polish proletariat would revolt and overthrow the Polish government. When this did not happen, when the Red Army advanced deep into Poland in 1920, they then hoped that Polish proletariat would rise up and assist the Red Army. S.S. Kamenev, who had replaced Jukums Vācietis as commander of the Red Army, later wrote: "Now the moment has come when the working class of Poland could really provide the Red Army with that help... but there was no outstretched hand of the proletariat."¹⁸² Kamenev blamed this inaction on the Polish bourgeoisie suppressing the proletariat, rather than the widespread antipathy most Poles had for the Russians and the Soviets¹⁸³.

181 The term "*panskaya*" can mean a term of respect like "Mister" in English. Traditional usage made it a term used by the lower classes to address higher-class people, like commoners addressing landowners or feudal lords. Private land ownership of course was against the Communists' ideology, so the context of *panskaya* here is "landowners", in the sense of them being the exploiters of the people. This is made clear by the poster's depiction the arrival of the Red Army (the flag carried by the troops has "R.S.F.S.R" on it, meaning the Russian SFSR) being cheered Polish farmers and by the proletariat, waving a banner proclaiming "Long live Soviet Poland" ("*Da zdravstvuyet Sovetskaya Polsha*").

182 S.S. Kamenev; *Zapiski o Grazhdanskoy Voynе i Voynnom Stroitelstve (Notes on the Civil War and Military Development)*; 1963.

183 It is unclear if Kamenev really believed that bourgeoisie had suppressed the Polish proletariat. This is possible, but it is also possible that Soviet propaganda did not want to admit the existence of anti-Soviet sentiments among Polish workers.



Bij Bolszewika

Beat the Bolshevik (1920 Polish poster)

In turn, some Polish nationalists hoped to annex the Lithuanian, Belorussian, and western Ukrainian lands that centuries ago had once been part of Poland, all lands that the Soviets wanted.

Clashes between Soviet and Polish forces increasingly grew into outright warfare in 1919, with the Poles at one point capturing Minsk, the main city of Belorussia (now, Belarus). Poland and Ukraine (the Ukrainian People's Republic, UNR) had also been at odds in 1919 over who would control the ethnically-mixed borderlands between the two states. By April 1920, the UNR was quite weak and only controlled a sliver of land in western Ukraine. Facing total defeat by the Red Army, the UNR settled its differences with the Poles, relinquishing its claims on eastern Galicia¹⁸⁴. The UNR and Poland formed an alliance against the Soviets, with Polish and Ukrainian forces going on the offensive and capturing Kiev on 7 May 1920. The offensive then stalled as the Red Army built up its forces in its Western Theater.

The Soviets went over to the attack, with Red Army offensives in June and July 1920 quickly routing the Poles and Ukrainians. The Soviets advanced deep into Poland and actually planned to push to Germany, in hopes of sparking a proletarian revolution there and in other parts of Europe. In August, the Soviets seemed to be on the verge of complete victory, with the Red Army not only at the gates of Warszawa, the Polish capital, but with troops bypassing the city to north only about 350 km (220 miles) from Berlin, the German capital. At

¹⁸⁴ In addition to the Ukrainian People's (UNR), there was also the West-Ukrainian People's Republic (WUNR, *Zakhidnoukrayinska Narodna Respublika*). In late 1918 the WUNR claimed authority over eastern Galicia (western Ukraine to the WUNR) as the Austro-Hungarian Empire broke up. The WUNR joined with the UNR as an autonomous region in January 1919 but broke with the UNR when the UNR ceded eastern Galicia to Poland in 1920. The WUNR was far too weak to do anything about the situation on the ground and disbanded in 1923.

this juncture, a Polish counterattack routed the Red invasion. The Poles in turn advanced into western Belorussian and western Ukraine, inflicting multiple defeats on Red Army forces throughout the autumn of 1920.

Sidetrip: Belorussia in 1920

Much of the fighting between the Poles and Soviets occurred in the borderlands between the two lands. The northern part of these borderlands consisted of Belorussia (now, Belarus). The Poles had pro-Polish local Belarusian puppet governments in this area, while the Soviets had a pro-Soviet Belarusian government. Many Belarusians did not favor either side and wanted to be left alone or to have Belarusian independence. In November 1920, when the Slutsk region of Belorussia passed from Polish occupation to the Soviets, many Belarusians rebelled against the Soviets for the cause of independence. The rebels fought the Red Army until late December, when their ammunition was exhausted. They crossed over to Polish-occupied territory and went into exile.

Although the Red Army's strength by late 1920 was over 5,000,000 soldiers, less than a million were on the Western Front facing the Poles. The need to fight the Southern Whites required many troops. Many of the remaining soldiers in Red Army were either in training or were in the labor armies, working to prevent the collapse of the Soviet economy. To rebuild the Western Front, the Soviets had to transfer in units from the 5th Army in Siberia and the Russian Far East, on the other side of the country.



“Only close union of workers and peasants will save Russia from destruction and hunger.”

This Soviet propaganda poster from 1920 portrayed a vision of prosperity far from reality for most Soviet people in 1920. In reality, hyperinflation and food shortages caused many workers to abandon their cities and factories to seek food in the countryside. Things were no better for the peasants, who were impoverished and increasingly rebellious over Soviet confiscation of most of their harvests.

The Soviets, with a failing economy, war remaining against the Southern Whites, and growing peasant rebellions against their rule, decided to settle for peace with Poland. A peace treaty was signed in March 1921. With peace already established with Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, this ended all warfare in the Soviet west. Bessarabia was one outstanding issue, but the Soviets were not willing to go to war with Romania to try to regain the province.

Sidetrip: Bessarabia

The loss of Bessarabia was a sore point for the Soviets. Bessarabia had become part of the Russian Empire in the 19th Century, and the Soviets were loath to lose it to Romania. They had even temporarily formed a Bessarabian SSR in 1919 as a government in exile for the region, but this failed to gain control over the territory, except for one Bessarabian town for two days. Britain, France, and Italy,

the major European victors of the World War I, recognized the incorporation of Bessarabia in Romania, but the Soviet Union did not¹⁸⁵.

Bessarabia was a multi-ethnic region with a large population of Moldavians. (The Moldavian language is either a dialect of Romanian or a separate language closely related to Romanian, depending upon the political views of who you ask¹⁸⁶.) It also had a large minority population of Ukrainians as well as other minorities populations of Jews, Russians, Bulgarians, Germans, and Gagauz Turks.



The Polish state had withstood the Soviet onslaught, but not the Ukrainian People's Republic. It lost the last of its Ukrainian territory in the summer of 1920 the government later went into exile. The Soviets imposed their own borders on Ukraine, creating the Ukrainian

185 The 1920 Treaty of Paris in 1920 among Britain, France, Italy, Japan, and Romania would have codified this in the League of Nations. Japan did not ratify the treaty, so it did not go into effect. Britain, France, and Italy recognized the incorporation of Bessarabia anyways. The Soviets were excluded from the treaty negotiations and maintained that Bessarabia should be part of the Soviet state.

186 People favoring the union or association of Moldavia/Moldova with Romania often take the side that Moldavian/Moldovan is a dialect of Romanian. People opposed to the union or association often maintain Moldavian/Moldovan is a separate language.

Socialist Soviet Republic. This state was nominally independent but was actually a puppet state controlled by the Russian SFSR. It was occupied by the Red Army and the Cheka, both of which worked to suppress revolts and pacify the country.

The Southern Whites, now under control of White general and baron P.N. Vranghel, had been holding out in the Crimean Peninsula in hopes of restoring White fortunes to some extent. The Polish-Soviet war was Vranghel's chance, as the Red Army sent many troops facing the Whites to go fight the Poles. The Southern Whites attacked out of the Crimea in June, advancing into southern Ukraine and capturing parts of the Donbass. Vranghel hoped to link up with UNR Ukrainian forces, perhaps drive the Red Army out of Ukraine, and secure Ukrainian agricultural resources. (The March 1920 evacuation of White troops, civilians, and many refugees to the Crimea had exceeded the peninsula's ability to grow enough food to feed everyone.) After falling back for a while, the Red Army in Ukraine managed to contain Vranghel's forces and prevent a link up with the UNR.



VRANGEL IDET!! K ORUZHIIYU, PROLETARII!! (Vranghel is coming!! To arms, Proletarians!!)

This is a 1920 Soviet poster by N.M. Kochergin. Vranghel (often rendered as “Wrangel” in English) was a White Army general in charge of the Southern Whites. By his feet are the feared Cossack cavalry, charging the peasants. Behind them is an execution squad, killing opponents of the Whites. Following Vranghel are the nobility, factory owners, landlords, and the clergy, holding a picture of the Tsar signaling they intended to restore the old regime.

The initial success of Vrangél's offensive attracted the attention of the Allied Powers. Britain had withdrawn its support for the Southern Whites after their defeats by the Soviets in late 1919 and early 1920. France saw Poland as an important eastern counterweight to Germany and in the summer of 1920 was greatly alarmed over the Soviet advance into central Poland. The French now saw Vrangél as a way to distract the Soviets and as a possible ally for Poland. France recognized Vrangél's government as the *de facto* government of "South Russia" and began sending aid to the Southern Whites.



In August, Vrangél attempted to open up another front against the Soviets. He sent three forces by ship from the Crimea to land in the Kuban region. The hope was that the inhabitants of the Kuban, especially the Kuban Cossacks, would revolt against the Soviets and led to White control of the region. All three landings succeeded, and the northern one at Primorsko-Akhtarsk gained a fair amount of territory. For a time, it seemed like the Whites might break out and capture Ekaterinodar, the former Southern White capital. The Soviets, however, assembled the forces needed to contain and counterattack the Whites by the end of August. The attack even featured the Azov Flotilla making a counter-landing of naval infantry in the rear of the Primorsko-Akhtarsk enclave. (This operation supposedly convinced the Soviets the value of having naval infantry permanently on hand in the Soviet fleets and flotillas, hence the relatively large force of Soviet naval infantry in World War II¹⁸⁷.) The Soviet counteroffensive succeeded in defeating all three White enclaves in the Kuban, with the last troops evacuating from Primorsko-Akhtarsk in early September. This ended the Southern Whites' hope of gain control of this region.

187 Evgeny Petrovich Abramov; "Sovetskaya Morskaya Pekhota na Frontakh Grazhdanskoy Voyny 1917–1922 gg." ("Soviet Naval Infantry on the Fronts of the Civil War 1917-1922"); 2018; <https://voencomuezd.livejournal.com/1509521.html> (in Russian).

The stunning victory of the Poles over the Soviets in August 1920, almost paradoxically, sealed the fate of the Southern Whites. The Soviets abandoned their plans to conquer Poland and began reinforcing their Southern Theater facing the Whites. They also brought in M.V. Frunze, one of their best field commanders, to commend the front. In September and October, with Polish offensives in the Western Theater somewhat distracting the Soviets, the Southern Whites renewed their attacks but failed to achieve any success against the now-stronger Red Army.

Reinforcements poured into Ukraine until the Red Army greatly outnumbered the Whites. Frunze's mission was the total defeat of the Southern Whites, and he prepared a massive offensive. He also negotiated a new alliance with Makhno's Black Army. The anarchists in eastern Ukraine had been waging partisan warfare against both the Soviets and the Whites. Makhno as always thought that the Soviets were simply misguided authoritarians while the Whites were the true enemy, and he agreed when offered very favorable terms. The Soviets promised to allow the anarchists complete freedom of speech and the right to stand in Soviet elections. In turn, the anarchists would fight under Red Army command and "would accept into its ranks neither detachments nor deserters from the Red Army"¹⁸⁸, a sore point for the Soviets who kept losing soldiers to the Black Army. The Soviets had no intention of honoring its promises once the anarchists were no longer of use. The anarchists in turn did not trust the Soviets and only conditionally obeyed Red Army commands, wary of Soviet betrayal.

One key element of the Soviet offensive was an assault from the Kakhovka bridgehead ([see earlier map](#) for the location of Kakhovka). An earlier Soviet attack had crossed the Dnepr River around Kakhovka but failed to break out. The Red Army then dug in at Kakhovka and fended off all White attacks that tried to eliminate this dangerous bridgehead. The relatively short distance from Kakhovka to the Perekop Isthmus, the land connection between the Crimea and Ukraine, meant a Red attack might cut off the White forces in Ukraine. This made the White positions in Ukraine tenuous, but Vrangal had been reluctant to withdraw from them, correctly believing that abandoning Ukraine would convince the French to withdraw their support. When Frunze's offensive came, the Red Army and Black Army struck the White positions in North Taurida and the Donbass from multiple directions. The advance from Kakhovka was powerful but did not manage to break through the Whites defenses. It hasten Vrangal's decision to finally retreat back to the static defenses at the Perekop Isthmus.

188 Michael Palij; *The Anarchism of Nestor Makhno, 1918-1921: An Aspect of the Ukrainian Revolution*; 1976;
<http://www.ditext.com/palij/19.html>.

Sidetrip: Soviet Bridgeheads

The Kakhovka bridgehead foreshadowed the Red Army's use of bridgeheads against the Germans during the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945. The Soviets excelled in seizing bridgeheads and heavily reinforcing them. Once the Soviets had dug in, German counterattacks rarely managed to eliminate a bridgehead. Like with the Southern Whites at Kakhovka, these bridgeheads were then constant threats to German defenses based along river lines.

For one famous example, after defeating the German Kursk offensive in the summer of 1943, the Red Army advanced west into Ukraine towards Kiev. When they reached the Dnepr River, they established two important bridgeheads, one to the north of Kiev and one to the south. Red Army vanguard forces seized the southern one, Bukrin, in September by improvised means without waiting for engineering assets to arrive. This started a week-long battle as German troops counterattacked the bridgehead while Soviet troops poured in and expanded it until it was 11 km (7 miles) wide and up to 6 km (4 miles) deep. In October, the Soviets twice attacked out of Bukrin seeking to liberate Kiev, but the Germans could not be dislodged from the difficult terrain around the bridgehead.

The main effort then shifted north to the Lyutezh bridgehead. This one, too, had been seized on the fly in September, with assistance of Soviet partisans in the area. German counterattacks into October failed to eliminate the foothold, and the Soviet expanded the bridgehead to a width of 20 km (12 miles) and a maximum depth of 10 km (6 miles). The Soviets made secondary attacks from Lyutezh twice in October to pin down German troops in support of the main (failed) attacks from Bukrin. When Lyutezh was selected for the main effort, the Soviets transferred considerable forces into the bridgehead and built numerous river crossings, totaling 26 bridges and 83 ferries. To hide the extent of the preparations, some bridges were built with no parts above the surface of the river, with the travel deck just under water.

The offensive began in early November. The Soviets first launched diversionary attacks from Bukrin, followed by the main assault from Lyutezh. The Lyutezh forces quickly broken out, captured Kiev, and pushed west.

The Whites hoped to stop the Soviets from entering the Crimea, as they had done earlier. The main invasion route was across the Perekop Isthmus. Defenses there consisted of

multiple lines of trenches with fortifications, based in part on the Tatar Wall, an earthen wall stretching 11 km (7 miles) across the isthmus, fronted by the Tatar Moat, a deep, wide trench. This wall and moat had been built centuries ago by slaves when the Crimea Tatar ruled the area and were still useful defensive positions, both now in 1920 and later in 1941 when the German 11th Army would batter its way onto the peninsula against heavy Red Army resistance. A second invasion route was from the Chongar Peninsula across the Sivash into the Crimea, along a railroad causeway there. A third route was to cross the Sivash from Ukraine to the Arabat Spit, a narrow strip of land. Both of these secondary routes were difficult, having only narrow frontages that were easily defended. The Sivash was a shallow, muddy, brackish body of water off the Sea of Azov.



White troops were dug in protecting all three routes, backed by a reserve force in northern Crimea in a central, inland location. Weak covering forces were spread out along the coast between the main positions. The Whites' Perekop defenses in particular reduced operations to those like the static warfare of World War I rather than the typical war of maneuver of the civil war. The Red Army anticipated a difficult fight to break through the defenses and decided to use chemical warfare against the Whites. It took them time, however, to collect the chemical weapons out of storage and send them to the Southern Front, especially since many had been mislocated and some, especially chlorine gas cylinders, needed repairs due

to poor maintenance. The chemical weapons arrived too late to be used. Instead, the Red Army prevailed with infantry assaults and a little luck.

Initial attacks on the White defenses failed in early November. Another major assault on 8 November also failed. However, on that day, somewhat unusual weather conditions allowed the Sivash to be forded. A strong wind blew from the west, pushing some water out of the Sivash, while an unusual cold snap (-12°C [10.4°F]) froze the mud. Black Army and Red Army forces were able to ford a narrow, 7-km (4-mile) stretch of the Sivash to the east of the Perekop lines. The Whites only had weak forces guarding against this possibility, and the Blacks and Reds broke through. White reserves were too far away to react in time to this surprise crossing. With the Perekop defense lines flanked, White forces there withdrew, planning to reestablish new lines further south. This maneuver failed and the Whites forces now collapsed. Red Army forces now rapidly pushed deep into the Crimea. When it became clear that the Whites could not recover, on 13–16 November about 150,000 White troops and pro-White civilians evacuated the Crimea by sea and went into exile. By 18 November, the Soviets were in control of almost all of the Crimea. Anyone White not lucky enough to be evacuated faced a grim fate. Over the next few weeks, the Soviets unleashed a terror campaign against the Whites, other Soviet class enemies, and innocent people caught up in the frenzy. More than 50,000 people were massacred¹⁸⁹.

Now there are 300,000 bourgeoisie in the Crimea. This is the source of future speculation, espionage, all kinds of assistance to the capitalists. But we are not afraid of them. We say that we will take them, distribute them, subdue them, digest them.

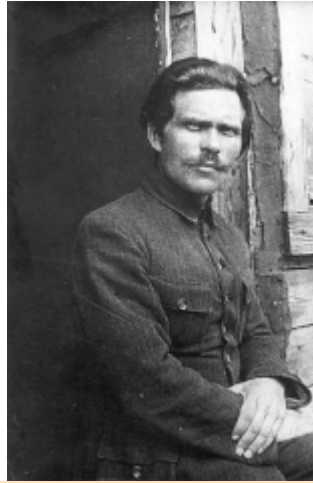
—V.I. Lenin, 6 December 1920

The savagery and extent of the Crimean Red Terror became well known and was an embarrassment for the Soviet leadership. The Soviets tried to blame it on overzealous local commanders and by the troops spontaneously taking revenge against the Whites. It was actually authorized by the top leaders of the Party and Soviet state. The Soviet leadership even ordered troops and security forces to seal off the Crimea during the terror campaign. They offered the excuse that they were containing typhus and smallpox epidemics from spreading out of the peninsula, but in reality they were preventing their intended victim the ability to flee the Crimea.

Makhno's Black Army had once again helped the Soviets against the Southern Whites. The anarchists' usefulness was over in November once the Whites collapsed in the Crimea. That

¹⁸⁹ Estimates of the death toll range from 12,000 to 150,000. The Soviets themselves recorded 56,000 deaths in just the major cities of the Crimea, so if this is accurate the overall toll must have been higher.

month, the Soviets broke their agreements with Makhno and had the Red Army attack the anarchists. The Blacks once again reverted to partisan warfare against the Soviets. There would be no fourth alliance or reprieve for the Ukrainian anarchists.



Nestor Makhno, in exile in Romania in 1921

The last major White force in Russia had been totally destroyed with the Soviet conquest of the Crimea. The Soviets had won the civil war. The military and security operations would continue for a couple more years as the Soviets mopped up most of the remaining resistance to their rule. Some fairly major operations occurred during the mopping up period, such as defeating the lesser White forces in the far east and Mongolia, conquering the rest of the Transcaucasus, and suppressing the Basmachi insurgents in Central Asia. The Ukrainian anarchists were also brutally suppressed, with Makhno going into exile in August 1921, fleeing to Romania and then settling in France.

In the Transcaucasus, Azerbaijan had fallen to the Soviets in the spring of 1920, but Armenia and Georgia had remained independent. The Soviets wanted control over the rest of the Transcaucasus, but the Turks wanted territory there, too. The Turks (as the Ottoman Empire) had gained territory in the Transcaucasus in March 1918 as part of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk but then had to relinquish it in 1918 when they lost World War I. By 1920, the Turks (as the Turkish National Movement, the future Republic of Turkey) were recovering from defeat and were seeking to regain these territories again. The Turks invaded Armenia in September 1920, which caused the Soviets to finally make their move in this area. Two subsequent treaties between the Soviets and the Turks hammered out the division of territory and established good relations between the two powers. The Soviets and Turks split Armenia in late 1920 and then Georgia in early 1921. The Soviet conquest of Georgia violated the peace treaty the Soviets had signed with the Georgians in May 1920.

Spotlight: The Russian Civil War and the Great Patriotic War

Many of the challenges the Soviet faced in the Great Patriotic War (GPW) of 1941–1945 were strikingly similar to those the Soviets overcame during the Russian Civil War (RCW) of 1917–1922. The experiences of the civil war had not been forgotten by Party and Soviet officials, with many top civilian and military leaders in 1941 having been commanders or military commissars during the civil war. This included Stalin himself, who held high political and military posts during the civil war, including field commands. I believe the experiences of the civil war partially help explain why the Soviets were not overwhelmed to the point of collapse in 1941–1942. Some points in common between the two events are:

- **Existential Threat:** The Germans in the Great Patriotic War intended to destroy the Soviet state, first by conquering its European territories where the bulk of the population and industry was located and then over time progressively taking its Asian territories. The Whites in RCW intended the total destruction of the Soviet state. In some ways, the threat in the RCW was more extreme: at times the Soviets mostly only controlled their “Central Industrial Region” of Petrograd, Moskva, and nearby areas, with Whites, Allied powers, and separatists all attacking the Soviets from the north, east, south, and west. In contrast, the threat in the GPW only came from one direction: the west, which gave the Soviet strategic depth to their east. The Red triumph in the RCW against these odds likely served as an example that they could also prevail in the GPW.
- **Centralization of the War Effort:** The Soviets in the RCW only fully centralized their war effort in 1918 once the threat to them had grown acute. The country was organized as an “armed camp” and an effective military command-and-control structure was created. The Soviets possibly would have done better in the RCW had they centralized their military effort earlier. Perhaps this experienced informed the Soviets at the start of the GPW, in which they quickly centralized the war effort. Stavka, the Soviets’ supreme military headquarters, was formed on the second day of the war, followed a week later by the State Defense Committee. This committee had absolute power over the government, the Communist Party,

and the military. It turned the country into the equivalent of the RCW's armed camp¹⁹⁰.

- **Civilian Disloyalty:** The GPW saw many Soviet citizens welcome the German invaders as liberators, with hundreds of thousands helping the German war effort as auxiliaries or soldiers. The RCW Soviets had experienced similar disloyalty and built the Cheka, a brutal secret police force, to deal with traitors. The GPW Soviets had their brutal secret police already in place to deal with disloyalty.
- **Military Disloyalty:** The RCW Soviets had serious problems with unwilling conscripts surrendering to the enemy or deserting. They also feared that various Soviet commanders and military experts would be traitors if given the chance. They built a system of military commissars and political officers to monitor and deal with these problems. Commissars had “dual command” with the commanders, which meant the commissars could change or overrule the orders of the commanders. In the GPW, this system of political control was already in place, with dual command being re-activated soon after the war started. In both wars, the commissars had (and used) the power of summary execution to enforce their decisions.
- **Unauthorized Retreats:** In the GPW, Soviet troops, especially in the early war years, would sometimes retreat from the front lines without orders from their commanders. This same problem had occurred in the RCW. In each case, the Soviets created special retreat-blocking units authorized to fire on soldiers who tried to retreat without orders.
- **Extreme Focus on the War Economy:** The Soviets developed War Communism to fight the RCW, in which the civilian economy as much as possible was focused to support the military, even at the cost of civilian depredation, malnourishment, and occasional starvation. Although the GPW Soviets did not call their wartime system “War Communism”, it was equivalent and had similar effects.

190 Soviet official decrees did not use the term “armed camp” during the GPW as far as I can tell, but it was a popular term during and after the war, echoing the RCW: “The entire national economy was rapidly and efficiently reconstructed, the work of all Party, government and public organizations were put on a war footing to meet the needs of the armed forces. Front and rear became a single and indivisible armed camp. The entire Soviet people united and rallied around the Bolshevik Party and the Government as never before.” This was in a 1947 propaganda work on Stalin; see <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/biographies/1947/stalin/11.htm>.

- **Forced Labor:** The RCW Soviets built a system of forced labor to supplement the war effort. The GPW Soviets had a similar system already in place (the GULag). During the war, they created another forced-labor system (the “Labor Army”) mostly involving ethnic groups thought to be disloyal to the USSR, like the Volga Germans.
- **Evacuations:** The GPW saw the Soviets evacuate crucial factories and millions of civilians away from German conquest. The RCW did **not** have an equivalent situation, although the Soviets did evacuate their government and some production equipment from Petrograd in early 1918. However, in 1915 during World War I the Russian Empire did evacuate important factories from Poland and Latvia once the Germans broke through the front. The Soviets were well aware of this earlier Russian effort.
- The Allied Powers of World War I intervened against the Soviets in the RCW. There was no equivalent intervention during the GPW. However, as the threat of Nazi Germany rose in the 1930s, the Soviets were concerned that Japan might join in a war with Germany against the USSR. The Soviets pursued policies to discourage Japan from doing so. Militarily, the Soviets went to lengths to defeat the Japanese in their 1930s border disputes, to try to convince Japan that a war with the Soviet Union would be costly if not unwinnable. Diplomatically, the Soviets in April 1941 negotiated a non-aggression pact with Japan. Thereafter, the Soviets still kept substantial forces in the Soviet Far East guarding against a Japanese invasion, even when they could have been used to fight the Germans.

There were of course aspects of the GPW that had not occurred during the RCW. The RCW had mainly been a war of existing technology, with neither the Reds nor the Whites having the resources to engage in a technological arms race. In contrast, the Germans and Soviets in the GPW strove to improve their existing weapons and invention new ones through the war.

The Soviets in the RCW were internationally isolated and received almost no assistance from foreign countries. In contrast, the Soviets in the GPW became a key ally of the western Allied countries fighting Germany and received substantial amounts of Allied aid.



The **Socialist Soviet Republic of Iran** was established by Iranian rebels with Soviet assistance and at times sought to take over Iran. The Russian SFSR, however, normalized relations with Iran and withdrew its forces, with the SSR of Iran collapsing by the end of 1921. (This state is often known by several alternative names, such as the Persian SSR and the Gilan SSR.)

All the other SSRs were nominally independent socialist states but were actually controlled by the Russian SFSR. With some further reorganization, the Communists would form the USSR from the Russian SFSR and these SSRs in 1922.

The **Tannu-Tuva People's Republic** and the **Bukharan and Khorezm People's Soviet Republics** were nominally independent but were just puppet states controlled by the Russian SFSR.

The **Far Eastern Republic** was a Communist-controlled buffer state set up to separate the Russian SFSR from the Japanese interventionist forces.

Mongolia was contested among Mongolian nationalists, Chinese forces, White Army forces, and pro-Soviet Mongolian revolutionaries. Mongolia had declared its independence from China in 1911, with support from Russia. Russian helped ended in the Russian Civil War, with China occupying Mongolia in 1919. Mongolian and White troops forced the Chinese out in 1921, only to be defeated in turn by Red Army and Red Mongol forces from the Russian SFSR and Mongolian revolutionaries inside the country. Mongolia became an independent country that was highly dependent upon the Russian SFSR/USSR. It would become the Mongolian People's Republic in 1924.

What's in a Name: Socialist Soviet Republics (and More)

The Communists created various nominally-independent socialist soviet republics during the Russian Civil War. "Soviet" meant the republic was organized in a hierarchy of Communist-controlled soviets, as covered elsewhere. "Socialist" meant, per Marxist-Leninist ideology, that the republic was in a socialist transitional stage to full communism, from being a bourgeois (or feudal) state. "Republic" meant the government ultimately was elected by the people, either directly or indirectly (as in the early years of the Soviet state), but in accordance with the Marxist idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The working classes were in charge, not the bourgeois or feudal overlord classes, who were not allowed to vote. However, the Communists were not truly sincere even to this limited form of democracy, as they were determined that their Party would be in charge and its goals would become government policies, regardless of what the voters wanted. As the Communists consolidated power, they instituted single-party rule in their socialist states and reduced elections to sham contests.

The Soviet Union itself did not exist during the Russian Civil War. Instead, the main Soviet state was the Russian SFSR. The SSRs were created in regions that had significant non-Russian ethnic groups fighting for their independence from the Soviets (and from the Whites). The SSRs during the civil war thus gave the appearance that these groups could be both socialist and independent, although it was apparent that the Russians SFSR controlled them. Territory that the Soviets could not conquer became independent (or joined other states). For example, Latvia became truly independent and the Latvian Socialist Soviet Republic of

1918–1920 disappeared¹⁹¹. The remaining SSRs ended the civil war under Russian SFSR control and all, after a reorganization that merged the Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Georgian SSRs into a Transcaucasian SFSR, were united in 1922 into the USSR.

The difference between an SSR and an SFSR depended upon the ethnic composition of the republic. An SSR had with a large majority ethnic group and one or more smaller minority groups. A SFSR was supposedly a federation. The Russian SFSR had a large majority group (Russians) with very many smaller minority groups. The Transcaucasian SFSR had no majority group but instead had three main groups and several smaller. In both the SSRs and SFSRs, the smaller groups had their own supposedly autonomous entities, as covered elsewhere.

Soviet-style communism had other types of republics. In keeping with their Marxist views on the progress of history, in the 1920s–1930s, only the most “politically advanced” groups were qualified to be socialist republics. Groups that were judged not politically advanced enough became people’s republics. (Some of these were people’s soviet republics, but this just meant it was a people’s republic organized on the basis of soviets.) In the 1920s–1930s, many of these people’s republics were just puppet states controlled by the Soviet state and were later merged into the USSR when the Soviets judged their “socialist development” was advanced enough. One exception was the Mongolian People’s Republic, which was a satellite state highly dependent on the USSR but not actually a puppet state. Another exception was the SSR of Iran, which in the Soviet system probably should have been called a people’s soviet republic. However, this state was formed and named by Iranian revolutionaries, who had Soviet assistance but were not under Soviet control.

After World War II, this hierarchy of people’s republics and socialist republics was no longer meaningful and fell into disuse. Many different names were used for the Soviet’s satellite states, essentially without regard for assumed socialist development. For example, some Soviet satellites included the People’s Republic of Bulgaria, the German Democratic Republic, and the Socialist Republic of Romania.

191 A Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic was subsequently established in 1940 when the USSR took over Latvia and annexed it into the Soviet Union.

At its height of intervention, the Japanese interventionist forces had advanced deep into eastern Siberia, occupying Chita in the Transbaykal area. After the Soviets triumphed over Kolchak's Whites in western Siberia in late 1919 and early 1920, the Red Army advanced on the Transbaykal, and pro-Soviet partisans across the Russian Far East rose up. One group at Nikolaevsk-na-Amure massacred Japanese soldiers and civilians. In retaliation, the Japanese occupied North Sakhalin, the Russian part of Sakhalin Island. Japan not only wanted control of North Sakhalin for imperial reasons but also because the region had commercially exploitable oilfields. Soon after the occupation of North Sakhalin, Japan began developing the Okha oilfields, which would become a significant source of oil for the Imperial Japanese Navy.

To avoid further incidents that might provoke the Japanese further, the Soviets allowed the creation of a buffer state, the Far Eastern Republic (FER), to separate the two countries. Japan implicitly agreed to this by negotiating with the FER. The FER was controlled by a diverse grouping of Russian socialists, including Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks, but the Communists had dominance. The FER's Communists followed the directions of the Soviet leaders, making the FER not quite a Soviet puppet state but certainly not a truly independent country.

Japan's intervention deep into Siberia made less and less sense as the Soviets consolidated their control over the rest of the country, and the Japanese withdrew back to the Vladivostok area in late 1920. The presences of the Japanese helped the rather weak White forces in the far east managed to hold on. These Whites in 1921 managed to take over Vladivostok and then advanced on other parts of the FER. They also managed to gain control of parts of Mongolia. The White resurgence prompted the Soviets to act decisively. In mid-1921, Red Army troops with a Red Mongol contingent advanced into Mongolia from Siberia while Communist Mongol revolutionaries rose up within the country. The quickly seized control of Mongolia, turning the land into a Soviet satellite state.

In the FER, the Whites took Khabarovsk in December 1921. This prompted the Soviets to reduce the FER to just a puppet state and fill the FER's army with Red Army troops and commanders. This army attacked the White forces, taking Khabarovsk in February, and driving the Whites steadily back towards Vladivostok.

Japan had never found acceptance from the other Allied countries for its imperialist agenda in the Russia Far East, which adversely affected Japan's relations with its former WW1 allies. This, coupled with the obvious growing strength of the Soviets and the costs of maintaining a large expeditionary force in the Russian Far East, persuaded Japan to abandon the Russian

mainland. The Japanese in late 1922 withdrew from the Vladivostok area. The FER occupied Vladivostok in October 1922, and in November dissolved itself into the Russian SFSR, ending the pretense that the Soviet state was not in control of the far east.



Krasnyy Vladivostok — nash strakh!
Red Vladivostok is our center! (1920s Soviet poster)

After the Japanese evacuated Vladivostok in 1922, they continued to occupy the northern half of Sakhalin Island, the last part of Soviet territory under foreign control. The poster shows a small Japanese soldier occupying North Sakhalin, confronted by a giant Red Army soldier.

Japan held on to North Sakhalin until 1925, continuing to develop its oil deposits. The Soviets wanted to reestablish their rule over the region, but it was clear the Japanese did not want to withdraw if it meant losing access to the oil. This led the two sides to strike a deal: the treaty that normalized relations between the Soviet Union and Japan allowed the Japanese to continue exploiting North Sakhalin's oil, which they did until 1944.

The defeat of the Whites in the Russian Far East and Mongolia effectively extinguished the White Movement in Russia and can be seen as one of the end points of the civil war. The Soviets would continue to suppressing the final resistance of various rebels and separatists into 1924 in some places, particularly in Central Asia, where many in the large Muslim population there were hostile to Communism. Parts of Central Asia would remain restive for many years, but the Soviet were now too strong for any rebellion to have more than temporary, limited success.

Many Whites had gone into exile, and some would try to discredit the Soviets or provoke a new counter-revolution in Russia, but these efforts came to nothing. In turn, the Soviets through propaganda and covert actions much more effectively worked to undermine and destroy anti-Soviet exile White organizations.

The Red Army had grown immensely during the Russian Civil War, from a few hundred thousand people in the spring of 1918 to about 5.5 million by late 1920¹⁹². Although that latter number sounds impressive, the Soviet state was unable to adequately equip and supply a force of that size. Also, the Red Army extensively relied on conscripting unwilling peasants into its ranks and constantly suffered from high rates of desertion, so it always had large numbers of new draftees in training. For example, by the end of 1919, the Red Army had about 3 million people, but less than 1 million were active in the field, about 1 million were in training, and the rest were in rear areas. In another example, the 1920 Red Army force sent to overrun Poland was only on the order of 800,000–950,000 troops (including support troops), roughly the same size of the opposing Polish force. Had the Soviets been able to send and supply a force half again as large, the Red Army might have prevailed against Poland rather than been defeated.

The Soviets had fought the civil war using War Communism, in which the state in essence took anything it needed, particularly food, often with nominal or even no compensation. For example, Sovnarkom decrees and resolutions in 1920 allowed even ordinary household items to be requisitioned “in case of particularly acute public need” and made precious metals held by civilians and private organizations subject to confiscation at nominal compensation, including gold bullion, gold coins, and gold objects¹⁹³. War Communism worked in the short term but caused economic collapse. For example, the Soviets appropriated “surplus” food, whether or not it was really surplus, at ruinous compensations rates, which impoverished the peasants.

Peasants in the actual war zones were often far worse off. Ukraine and southern Russia were the breadbaskets of Russia and became prizes the Reds, Whites, and others fought over in the civil war. During the military campaigns in these regions, the contenting armies would often confiscate crops to feed their troops. If a side was about to lose an area, it sometimes destroyed the crops there to deny them to the enemy. Looting by soldiers was often a problem.

The Soviet economy also continued to be afflicted with frequent hyperinflation, with sovznaki rapidly decreasing in purchasing power. The Soviets were forced to launch new series of sovznaki, each one revalued from the previous series: After the 1919 series, there was a 1921 series, an initial 1922 series, a second 1922 series, and a 1923 series. Each series

¹⁹² Kakurin states the Red Army reached 5,300,000 during 1920 but may necessarily be stating its peak strength.

¹⁹³ A person could own gold objects with a total weight equivalent to 16 gold coins, but anything above that limit was supposed to be confiscated. See L. V. Sapogovskaya; “*Istoriya Zolotodobychi v SSSR*” (“History of Gold Mining in the USSR”); 2016; <https://statehistory.ru/5495/Istoriya-zolotodobychi-v-SSSR/> (in Russian).

revalued the sovznaki, so that earlier series were worth less than newer series¹⁹⁴. For at least some of the series, the Soviets had to issue so many sovznaki notes that they exhausted the range of unique serial numbers. Instead, the Soviets simply repeated serial numbers, so that multiple sovznaki all bearing the same serial number ended up in circulation¹⁹⁵.



100,000-ruble sovznak note of the 1921 series

All this economic chaos meant there was little agricultural surplus available to feed the Soviet cities and Red Army, and the Army received priority. There was little food left for the city dwellers, many of whom could not even afford to buy enough on the black market. Many cities emptied out during the civil war as people fled to the countryside in the hopes of finding sufficient food. The two largest cities were badly hit, with Petrograd losing about 70% of its population and Moskva about 50%.

Agricultural confiscations alienated the peasants and actually worsened food production. Unable to sell their surplus crops and recover their expenses, many peasants responded by planting fewer crops, sometimes growing enough just to feed their own families. The Communists responded at first in typical fashion, by blaming others for what their policies were causing. Speculators and hoarders became bogeymen, blamed in part with causing the shortages by withholding food for sale in hopes of driving prices up. There were certainly speculators, hoarders, and black marketeers all contributing to the problem. The basic problems were the misguided Soviet policies that were reducing the food supply, coupled

194 This made paying in sovznaki somewhat complicated, as the value of the sovznaki depended upon its series. Each series had a distinctive design to help people tell them apart. This even understates the payment problem, as Imperial Russian banknotes, Provisional Government notes, foreign currency, and metal coinage were also in circulation! (Although hyperinflation meant most people tried to hoard rather than spend any silver or gold coins they had, since they held their value. This is a classic illustration of the saying, “bad money drives out good”.)

195 This would have made sovznaki more vulnerable to counterfeiting had the currency not lost its value so quickly. Although I have only researched this topic a little, I’ve seen no sources mentioned counterfeit sovznaki being a problem.

with the fortunes of war that often place prime agricultural areas out of Soviet control. The bourgeoisie, a perennial Soviet scapegoat, was also blamed, for secret manipulating the food supply in hopes of destroying the Soviet state. While some members of the bourgeoisie likely were willing to do this, there is no evidence the bourgeoisie had any power at this time to do such.

The Soviets also blamed the peasants, especially kulaks, for the food shortages. They were accused of hiding food from the state. A number of peasants did do this, for a variety of reasons, but this was a symptom of the food situation and not its underlying causes. The Soviets sent secret police forces, Communist volunteers, and Red Army troops into the countryside to extract by force food from the peasants. The result was ever-greater peasant unrest, culminating in peasant revolts in many places against the Soviet state. Fortunately for the Bolsheviks, they had mostly defeated the Whites before the peasant revolts became widespread, so they were able to use the Red Army to suppress the revolts. They also finally had to concede that their agricultural policies had failed.

The Communists' War Communism, food confiscations, political repression, and their retreat from democracy into a one-party authoritarian system alienated many civilians from the Soviet regime. The Whites benefited little from this, as they also often treated civilians poorly. The Whites' financial and material resources were even more limited than the Soviets', so they too resorted to confiscatory measures. White forces in the field, particularly during their many retreats, would often extensively loot the countryside. Soviet propaganda exploited this by relentlessly portraying the Whites as oppressors of the peasants. Propaganda also accused the Whites of seeking to reimpose the monarchy, bring back the aristocracy, take the factories away from the workers, restore the rapacious higher clergy, and turn peasants' land over to the landlords. Since this was indeed the goal of some (not most) White groups, Soviet propaganda played on people's realistic fears.

The Soviets earned a well-deserved reputation for ruthless during the civil war. Two examples illustrate this. First, the Crimean Peninsula had become a White Army stronghold in the civil war. When the Red Army finally defeated the White's Southern Front, they overran Crimea in November 1920. Over the next few weeks, the Soviets there unleashed a terror campaign against their opponents and class enemies, massacring about 50,000 people.

For the second example, under War Communism the Soviets confiscated much of the grain grown by peasants, which prompted dozens of revolts during the civil war. The largest was the Tambov Rebellion of 1920–1921, occurring in an agricultural area southeast of Moskva. Red Army military units and Cheka security forces attacked the rebels using all weapons at

their disposal, including indiscriminate artillery fire and poison gas attacks that targeted civilians as well as rebel forces. About 15,000 people in the area were killed and 100,000 arrested.



Financial Report for 1921; Soviet poster; Mikhail Cheremnykh; 1921

Vot Otchet Predsovnarkoma tob. Lenina za 1921 god.

Here is the Financial Account given by Lenin for 1921

This poster celebrates the accomplishments of the Soviet state in various categories from 1918–1921 and 1920–1921, including combating hunger, reforming agricultural taxes, beginning the New Economic Policy (NEP), growing international trade, beginning electrification of the country, reorganizing the Cheka, increasing industrial development, and more. The reference to agricultural taxes was meant to inform the peasantry that the confiscatory War Communism policy was ended in favor of more equitable taxes, a key NEP program to help agriculture recover from the civil war. Similarly, the reference to the reorganization of the Cheka was to reassure the public that the horrors of the Cheka's Red Terror were ending, in which on the order of perhaps 100,000 people were executed and hundreds of thousands were imprisoned or sent to forced-labor camps.

All told, perhaps 9 to 15 million people, mostly civilians, died in Russia in 1914–1923 due to war, disease, and starvation. By 1921, the Russian SFSR was in ruins and the economy was in collapse. In addition to peasant unrest and revolt, many parts of the Soviet population were restive. In early 1921, for example, Petrograd saw many protests by civilians and strikes by workers. This in turn led to a rebellion that March by sailors at the nearby Kronshtadt naval base, who called for the Soviets to reform by granting greater political freedom, economic rights for workers and peasants, and an end to autocratic and repressive Soviet

organizations. Since sailors revolting in the Petrograd region against the Russian Republic in 1917 had been a key element of the October Revolution, this sailor revolt against the Soviets was potentially symbolic for public opinion. With some soldiers and civilians joining the sailors, the rebellion had about 15,000 people under arms. To stop it from spreading, the Soviets denounced it as a counter-revolutionary attempt by the White Army, which it was not, and sent 50,000 troops to crush the rebellion.

The Kronshtadt Rebellion caused the Soviets to tighten, not loosen, autocratic control of the country. It did, however, prompt the Soviets to accelerate the adoption of the **New Economic Policy** (NEP), an economic recovery plan they had been planning. Starting in March 1921, the Soviets officially abandoned War Communism and began the NEP. Limited amounts of private enterprise for profit were allowed, private merchants (“NEPmen”) were allowed to sell products, and the peasants could sell their surplus food for profit in the markets¹⁹⁶. By 1923, over 75% of the (legal) retail trade was conducted by the NEPmen. To further bolster agriculture, in 1924 the Soviets issued a decree allowing peasants to hire laborers (despite Marxism ideology that branded this exploitation of labor) and to lease out their tenured land to others. The Soviets also reversed some of their extreme policies concerning cooperatives in 1921. Cooperatives became free of the food commissariat and membership in them was now voluntary again. Lenin, who had continued to distrust cooperatives, finally had to publicly accept them. In 1923, he wrote “when the population is grouped as much as possible in cooperatives, socialism is realized by itself”. The failure of the collective communes to become widespread forced his to retreat from them: “Imagining all sorts of projects for workers’ associations to build socialism is one thing; another thing is to learn to build this socialism practically, so that every small peasant can participate in this work”¹⁹⁷.

With food and other necessities becoming available and affordable, the power of the black market was finally reduced. The Soviet economy thus revived under the NEP, although the Soviet leadership always intended the policy to be only a temporary measure.

Spotlight: The NEP and the End of the Labor Armies

The NEP signaled the end of the labor armies. After 1920, the winding down of the civil war and peace with Poland also meant the Red Army no longer needed the labor armies as a source of soldiers in times of need. On 30 March 1921, the first step towards demobilizing the labor armies occurred when they were

¹⁹⁶ The NEP charged the peasants a tax, payable in agricultural output, at about half of what used to be confiscated. This gave peasants incentives to grow food again.

¹⁹⁷ Patrick Le Tréhondat; “*La révolution russe et les coopératives*” (“The Russian Revolution and the Cooperatives”); 2016; <https://autogestion.asso.fr/la-revolution-russe-et-les-cooperatives/> (in French).

transferred from the Red Army to civilian control¹⁹⁸. As economic recovery tentatively began in 1921, it made sense to release the workers from these armies into the civilian economy, where they could be more productive. The armies were demobilized: in September–December 1921 in Ukraine and in December 1921–February 1922 in Russia. The 1st Revolutionary Labor Army, the first labor army to form in 1920, was also the last to be disbanded, on 2 February 1922.

Before the NEP made much progress in rebuilding the economy, however, the year 1921 saw mass tragedy. War Communism with its massive confiscation of agriculture output from the peasants had discouraged many of them from trying to grow large harvests, since they ended up with little or nothing to show for their expenses and efforts. Fighting and looting during the height of the civil war also badly affected agricultural areas. This already-bad situation turned to crisis when drought struck major Soviet agriculture areas in 1921. Famine and starvation affected many regions along the Volga and Urals Rivers during 1921–1922, with mass hunger lasting well into 1923. Incidents of cannibalism occurred, and perhaps five million people dying of starvation.

The famine was so bad that the Soviets turned to international help, mostly American, for food and assistance. World War I had ended in 1918 with immense economic misery and hunger across large parts of Europe. In 1919, the American Relief Administration (ARA), a private organization jointly funded by the US government and private donations, began sending food and other supplies to over 20 European countries. The Soviets refused ARA aid in 1919, since the ARA insisted on fair and equitable distribution of aid to anyone who needed it across the country, while the Soviets only wanted aid in territory they controlled. In 1921, the Soviets agreed to ARA terms, which in turn agreed to provide food to feed one million people per day. A team of 300 Americans went to the Russian SFSR to supervise the operation, and by 1922 the ARA was feed ten million people per day. In 1923, the ARA closed its operations, as will be covered below.

Starting in 1921, with only mopping up and security operations under way, the Soviet drastically reduced their size of their armed forces, to about 550,000 people by late 1924¹⁹⁹. This released millions of men to work in the economy and help rebuild the country.

198 Several works claim the labor armies were transferred to the People's Commissariat of Labor of the Russian SFSR. This applied only to the labor armies in the territory of the Russia SFSR. In the Ukrainian SSR, they went to a Ukrainian government organization. The Soviet Union had not been formed yet, and while the Russian Communist leadership controlled both Russia and Ukraine they went through the pretense that Ukraine was an independent country.

199 As usual with much information about the USSR, different sources give different figures for the size of the Red Army, from ranging from 530,000 to 562,000.

By 1922, the Soviets decided to start tackling their hyperinflation problem through currency reform. They now believed a money-less communist society would take a generation to achieve²⁰⁰ and that money was necessary until then. They decided to issue a new currency. Alongside the inflationary sovznaki²⁰¹, they issued a stable *chervonets* currency backed by reserves of gold, silver, foreign currency, certain goods, and other items that held value. The Soviets issued paper chervonets banknotes of various denominations, backed up with the reserves. They also minted and issued 10-ruble gold chervonets coins. The name “chervonets” was chosen because a chervonets²⁰² had been a traditional 10-ruble gold coin of the Russian Empire, which people still hoarded. The Soviet chervonets coin was thus deliberately created to be the equivalent of the old Imperial gold chervonets, gaining trust by association with these coins. For a brief period in the 1920s, Soviet citizens were allowed to have Soviet chervonets coins and even own gold, although doing so was later discouraged and then rescinded.



A 1922 one chervonets banknote

The new chervonets currency was quickly accepted by the population. The Soviets allowed people to redeem sovznaki rubles for chervonets ones, although to finance their deficit spending they continued to issue new series of sovznaki in 1922 and 1923. In March 1924, the Soviets finally ceased issuing sovznaki. People could redeem their sovznaki for chervonets rubles at a rate of 50,000 1923 sovznaki rubles for 1 chervonets ruble, 5,000,000 1922 sovznaki

200 For example, Lenin began to tell children and teens that full communism would be achieved in their lifetimes.

201 They also legally recognized the old Imperial Russian rubles as a legal means of payment, since these were still in circulation and held value far better than sovznaki. These rubles would be retired later.

202 *Chervonets* (plural, *chervontsy*) derived from **chervonnoe zoloto**. It literally meant “red gold”, from the rose-colored gold of the gold coin but came to stand for “pure gold”. Since the coin was a 10-ruble coin, “chervonets” later also came to mean any 10-ruble coin or banknote.

rubles for 1 chervonets ruble, and 50,000,000,000 earlier sovznaki rubles for 1 chervonets ruble.

The creation of chervonets and the end of sovznaki were two of three steps needed to tackle hyperinflation. The third was budget discipline: ending deficit spending by the government. The 1924 currency reform law had prohibited the Soviet government from printing money to finance deficit spending. The Soviets balanced the government budget in fiscal year 1923–1924 and then ran a surplus in fiscal year 1924–1925. All these moves showed the population that the Soviets were now serious about having a stable currency, and hyperinflation ended²⁰³. Inflation was just 3% in 1925. Mild to moderate inflation and even deflation would occur at times during the NEP era, now mainly due to economic factors and Soviet policies rather than explicit deficit spending. For example, inflation was 11% in 1926 and -3% in 1927²⁰⁴.

From 1924, the new chervonets currency was briefly fully convertible with foreign currencies, which the NEPmen took advantage of. It became quoted on various exchanges throughout the capitalist world²⁰⁵. In 1926, the Soviets rescinded convertibility and began to discourage private citizens from buying gold or acquiring foreign currencies. They also encouraged citizens to exchange their gold and silver metal coins and items for chervonets rubles at the branches of the State Bank. Over the next two years, they turned the Soviet ruble into an internal currency that citizens could not use to purchase foreign goods or exchange for foreign currencies. For international use by the government, they set an official exchange based at times on either the American dollar or French franc²⁰⁶.

As the Red Army shrank in 1921–1924 and the currency was reformed in 1922–1924, a momentous change occurred: on 30 December 1922, the Communists merged their territories together, creating the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

203 During hyperinflation, people would spend the paper currency as soon as they could upon receiving it, to minimize their losses as its value fell. This in itself contributed to hyperinflation.

204 Steven M. Efremov; thesis, “The Role of Inflation in Soviet History: Prices, Living Standards, and Political Change”; 2012; <https://dc.etsu.edu/etd/1474>.

205 The chervonets coins used Soviet symbols, which proved to be a problem outside the USSR. Western countries otherwise willing to accept these gold coins refused them because of the symbols. The Soviets responded by minting a version of the coin for international trade, using the image of Tsar Nikolay II, whom they had executed in 1918!

206 When freely convertible, the chervonets ruble had been

USSR, 30 Dec. 1922

- Union republics of the USSR.
- Soviet territory occupied by Japan.
- Nominally-independent states actually controlled by the USSR.
- Independent state dependent upon the USSR (Soviet satellite state).
- Chinese Eastern Railway, under White Russian administration.

SFSR: Socialist Federative Soviet Republic; SSR: Socialist Soviet Republic; PSR: People's Soviet Republic; PR: People's Republic.



The **Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)** was founded by the merger of the Belorussian SSR, Russian SFSR, Transcaucasian SFSR, and Ukrainian SSR. These were the original four “union republics” of the USSR.

The **Transcaucasian SFSR** itself was formed in 1922 prior to the creation of the USSR, by federating the formerly-separate Armenian, Azerbaijan, and Georgian SSRs together. The Soviet claimed the federation was created to make it easier to pacify the region, restore the economy, and promote harmony between ethnic groups. I suspect an unofficial reason was to have another SFSR of many ethnic groups, in addition to the Russian SFSR. The region was indeed restive, rebellious against the Soviets, and some of its ethnic groups had intense rivalries with each other. The Armenians and Azerbaijanis in particular had fought one another over territory both sides claimed. When the Soviets took over, they imposed a solution that led to Ngoro-Karabach, mostly populated by Armenians but ringed by territory populated mostly by Azerbaijanis, being made an

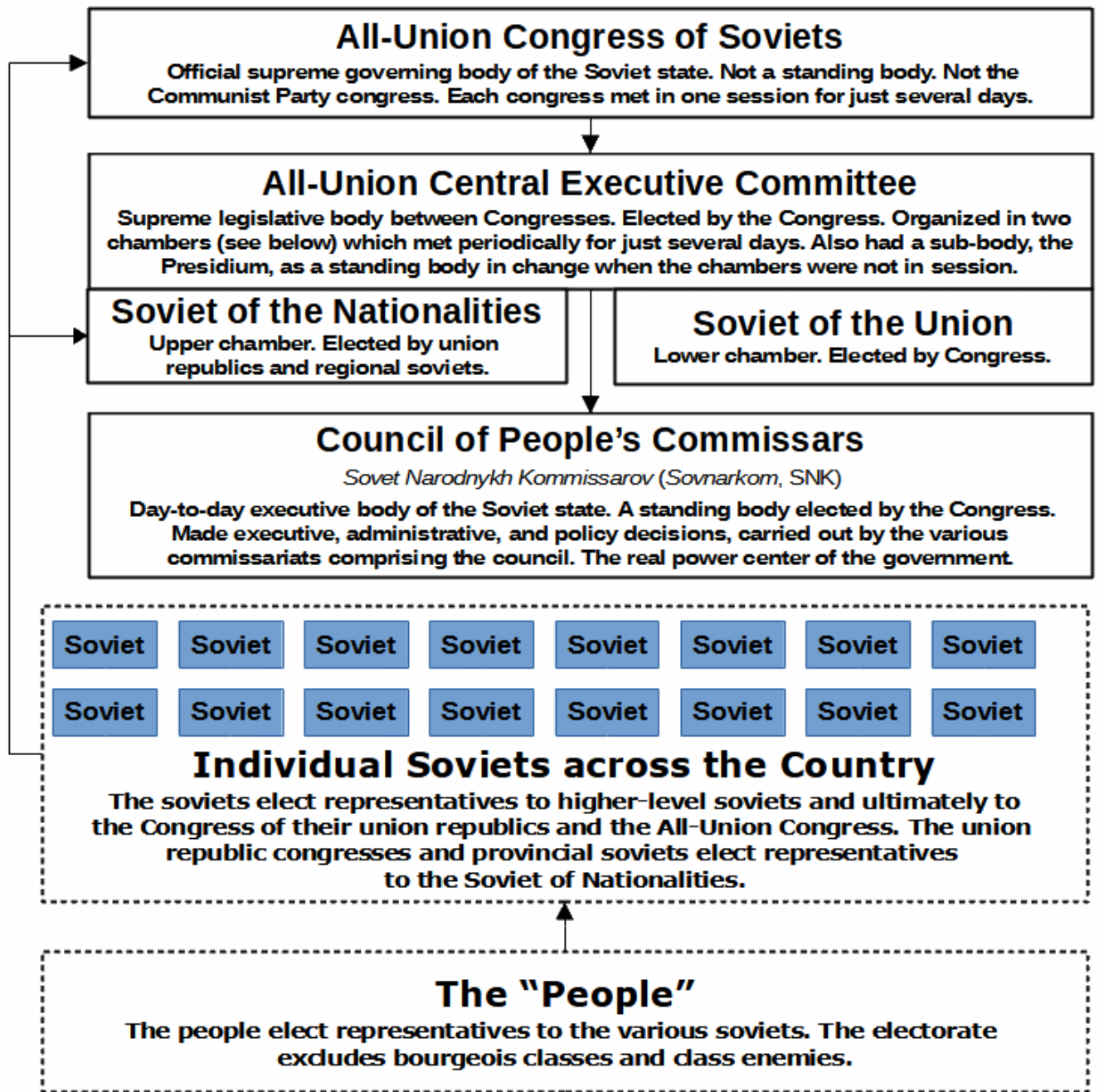
autonomous part of the Azerbaijan SSR. (It was designated the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast in 1923.) Nakhchivan, an area was mostly populated by Azerbaijanis but cut off from Azerbaijan by Armenian territory, was also made an autonomous territory of Azerbaijan. (It was designated the Nakhchivan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in 1924.) This froze but did not resolve the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict while the USSR lasted, and it has repeated flared up since the Soviet Union broke up.

The region also contained the Socialist Soviet Republic of Abkhazia, which had joined with the Georgian SSR as a nominally independent “treaty republic”, merging some of its government commissariats into the Georgian ones. The SSR of Abkhazia was like the Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics (ASSRs) that were being created in the Russian SFSR. In 1931, the SSR of Abkhazia was transformed into a standard ASSR, the Abkhazian ASSR.

In 1936, the Transcaucasian SFSR itself was broken up, with the Armenian, Azerbaijan, and Georgian SSRs become full union republics of the USSR. The Abkhazian ASSR remained part of the Georgian SSR.

In late 1922 with Soviet control now firmly entrenched, the Soviets consolidated their nominally-independent states together into a new entity, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. On 30 December 1933, the Belorussian SSR, Russian SFSR, Transcaucasian SFSR, and Ukrainian SSR signed to a treaty to form the Soviet Union, with the four states becoming **union republics** of the USSR. The treaty was followed up by a formal constitution for the USSR in January 1924.

Supposedly, the USSR was a union of republics with fair and free elections. Union republics supposedly had the right to leave the union if they wanted. Minority ethnic groups within the union republics supposedly had considerable rights to their ethnic identities. Larger groups had their own autonomous soviet socialist republics (ASSRs) while smaller groups had lower-level autonomous governments. In reality, the Communist Party ran everything, completely controlled the Soviet and union republic governments, rigged all the elections, and would never allow a union republic to secede.



The USSR's governmental organization was a slightly revised version of organization of the Russian SFSR ([see above](#)). One of the biggest changes was that the Central Executive Committee became a bicameral legislature containing the Soviet of Nationalities and the Soviet of the Union²⁰⁷. The CEC was just a legislative body, with Sovnarkom handling executive and administrative duties.

²⁰⁷ Some general works incorrectly describe these two Soviets as if they were outside the Central Executive Committee. I think these works have conflated the Presidium sub-body with the overall CEC.

The Soviet of Nationalities was the upper chamber of the CEC. Its membership was based on political entities and not on population. (This was roughly analogous to the US Senate, where each state regardless of population had two senators.) Each union republic (SFSR or SSR) had five deputies in the Soviet of Nationalities. Each autonomous republic (ASSR, a political entity within some union republics) also had five deputies. Each autonomous area (a lower-level political entity within some union republics) had one deputy. The Soviet of Nationalities was not directly elected by the general population; deputies were elected by union republics' congresses and regional soviets.

The Soviets had promised to treat ethnic groups better than the Russian Empire had done. Given its name, the Soviet of Nationalities seemed like it was meant to represent these groups, as the union republics and autonomous entities were organized based on the *territories* inhabited by important ethnic groups. Almost all of these territories actually contained many ethnic groups. The Communists actually decided who would be sent to the Soviet of Nationalities, and they sent loyal Communists regardless of ethnicity.

The Congress of the Union was based on population, but it was not directly elected by the people. Instead, its members were elected by the Congress of Soviets.

The Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom) was real governmental power center. It was an executive and administrative body, although it also had some legislative ability through its ability to issue decrees. The Communists completely controlled the membership of Sovnarkom, who typically were top Communists in the Party's Central Committee or Politburo. This meant a relatively small group of people controlled both the Party and Sovnarkom.

The USSR official was a "federal state". Besides the all-union government described above, each union republic had its own government. These governments mostly replicated the structure and systems of the all-union government: Each one had its own congress, CEC, and executive body of commissars. They also used indirect elections, with a hierarchical structure of lower soviets electing deputies to higher soviets and ultimately the individual congresses of each union republic. The electorate only directly elected deputies to their local soviets.

This was the government structure mostly established by the 1922 treaty that formed the Soviet Union and fleshed out by the 1924 constitution. The years 1922–1924 were a transitional period as the constitution was written and then put into force.

The preamble to the 1924 constitution of 1924²⁰⁸ enshrined the Soviets' geopolitical hopes by declaring the Soviet Union “will serve as a bulwark against the capitalist world and mark a new decisive step towards the union of workers of all countries in one world-wide Socialist Soviet Republic”. The preamble also declared that the USSR was a “free federation of peoples equal in rights”. However, constitution actually did not proclaim any individual rights for the citizenry: There was no mention at all of things like freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, freedom of religion, etc. This was a step back from the 1918 constitution of the Russian SFSR²⁰⁹, which contained provisions like “securing freedom of expression to the toiling masses” and “the right of religious and anti-religious propaganda is accorded to every citizen”. A new constitution would be adopted in 1936.

By the time the USSR was formed in 1922, the Communists were in complete political control. The 1924 constitution neither enshrined single-party rule of the state nor even mentioned the Communist Party at all. Nonetheless, all political parties but the Communist Party were banned, and the top Communist Party leadership made all important decisions for the USSR. Party bodies like Party congresses and the Central Committee still had real power; the deputies debated issues and could vote as they wished. The overall respect in the Party for Lenin meant Lenin's views almost always prevailed. Lenin, despite his bloodthirsty fanaticism, did not turn the Party or the state into his own personal dictatorship, like Stalin would later do.

The actual workings of the Soviet system in the 1920s mostly followed this scheme: The Communist Party's leadership in the Politburo and Central Committee made all the important decisions, adopting them as Party policies. High governmental bodies like the All-

208 For the English text of the 1924 constitution including the preamble, see

<https://web.archive.org/web/20170301180825/https://faculty.unlv.edu/pwerth/Const-USSR-1924%28abridge%29.pdf>. Be aware that many works containing the text of the constitution for some reason exclude the preamble, such as <https://soviethistory.msu.edu/1924-2/union-treaty/union-treaty-texts/first-union-constitution/>.

209 For the English text of the 1924 constitution, see <https://www.marxists.org/history/ussr/government/constitution/1918/index.htm>. The provisions on expression and religion are found in Article 2.

Union congresses or the two chambers of the CEC²¹⁰ then turned them into Soviet constitutional amendments or Soviet law. This stage was mostly political theater, since Communist domination of these government bodies meant the Party's policies would not be rejected. Sovnarkom, the Soviet executive branch, then implemented the laws. The Party leaders were also members of Sovnarkom, so Party and state were intimately intertwined.

Spotlight: Governing the Party, Part 3: The Communist Party under Lenin

Party congresses and central committees remained key elements of the Party as before (see [Part 2](#)). New formal Party bodies were created as the Party grew and exercised power. In 1917, the **Secretariat of the Central Committee** was created. This was at first a small body intended to handle technical issues and routine administrative tasks for the Central Committee, which selected the secretariat's leaders. The Secretariat proved very usefulness and grew into a body with hundreds of staff positions as it took on more administrative tasks, essentially coming to run many daily operations of the Party. In 1922, the post of General Secretary was established, again selected by the Central Committee.

At this time, the General Secretary was neither officially nor even unofficially the leader of the Communist Party. Technically, the Party did not have an official leader. The Central Committee, for example, was supposedly a collegial body composed of members of equal standing. Lenin of course was unofficially but widely recognized as the leader of the Party. Stalin would corrupt the Secretariat and the General Secretary position to advance his personal quest for power.

The **Politburo** was reinstated in 1919, as covered earlier. Its membership comprised the top Party leaders, so that they could quickly make Party decisions and policies, without waiting for the Central Committee to formally meet. The Central Committee selected who served on the Politburo, with membership open to any Party member, not just to members of the Central Committee. In practice many people serving on Politburo were in the Committee. Like with the Central Committee, the Politburo had full members and non-voting candidate members who could attend its meetings but not vote on resolutions.

Also in 1919, the **Organization Bureau** or Orgburo (*Orgbyuro*, for **Organizatsionnoye Byuro**) was formed to handle important decisions about the

²¹⁰ The CEC's Presidium could take action when the CEC two main bodies were not in session, and the Sovnarkom itself could take action directly. Laws and decrees proclaim in these ways could in theory be overturned by the higher government bodies, but this in practice did not happen for anything the Communists wanted.

organization of the party, particularly watching over local Party committees and assigning Party members specific positions and duties. The Central Committee selected the members of the Orgburo. The Orgburo had considerable power, since it collected information on all party members and could promote or demote party members. It was subordinate to both the Central Committee and Politburo, both of which could rescind Orgburo decisions. In essence, the Politburo handled policies and strategic decisions while the Orgburo ensured the correct Party members were in place to carry out these decisions. Areas of responsibility sometimes overlapped between the Politburo and Orgburo, but these were smoothed over because key Party leaders were often in both organizations simultaneously. There was also some overlap between the Orgburo and the Secretariat, which over time would see the Orgburo fade in importance and eventually (1952) be dissolved.

After seizing power in Russia, the Communist Party grew in size, beyond its base of dedicated revolutionaries. Party membership remained quite restricted, so the Party did not become a mass movement that anyone could join, unlike most political parties in countries with open political systems. Various Party leaders and Old Bolsheviks (members of the Party before the October Revolution) worried that some, perhaps many, of the new members had joined the Party due to opportunism and not out of true devotion to socialism. Accordingly, a **Central Control Commission** was created in 1921 to enforce Party discipline²¹¹. It oversaw how Party members and candidate Party members followed Party regulations and policies. It had the power to punish transgressors, including expulsion from the party. Party congresses selected the membership of the Central Control Commission.

The ability to discipline and expel Party members gave the Commission great power. In an attempt to avoid concentrating too much power in the hands of a single person, a Party member could not be a member of the Central Control Commission and the Central Committee at the same time. The head of the Commission was typically, although not always, made a member of the Politburo, usually as a full member but sometimes as a candidate member.

211 A "Control Commission" was created in 1920 that was responsible both for party discipline and for auditing party finances. The auditing portion became a separate body in 1921, with the Control Commission becoming the Central Control Commission.

It was a prescient measure to have separate membership in the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission. It was tragic irony that the same care did not apply with the Secretariat, as Stalin would accumulate great power by being a Central Committee member while heading the Secretariat.

The growth of the Party meant that Party members now had a wide range of opinions and positions about goals and policy issues, resulting in the formation of major factions. One was the Workers' Opposition, which thought government bureaucrats had too much control over the economy and wanted economic power be devolved to the labor unions. Another was the Democratic Centralist Group²¹², who thought the small Party elite had too much control over the Party and wanted political power be devolved to local Party bodies. Lenin of course did not like this kind of dissent and particularly disliked these two factions, since their goals would decentralize the power of the Communist leadership. His solution was to have the 1921 party congress adopt a resolution on Party unity, banning all factions. Rather than forming factions to disagree with existing policies or to promote other courses of action, a Party member was formally required to submit any "absolutely necessary" criticism "immediately, without any delay," to the consideration of Party bodies. In other words, members had to act individually rather than collectively, which made it easier for the Party leaders to keep them in line.

Even with the formal ban on factions, the Party under Lenin remained democratic in principle. The top leadership continued to debate issues within itself, even though Lenin's stature meant his views mostly prevailed. Unfortunately, the highly-centralized structure of the Party meant an even more ruthless leader could emerge and subvert it into a dictatorship. Stalin would be this person. He was not only General Secretary but also in the Politburo, the Central Committee, and the Orgburo. His Central Commission membership meant he could not also be on the Central Control Commission, but he had strong influence there, too. Successive heads of the Commission were both Stalin supports, V.V. Kuybyshev and G.K. "Sergo" Ordzhonikidze. After Lenin died in 1924, Stalin would use his posts and connections to take control of the Party.

212 Also known in English as the Group of Democratic Centralism, as the Russian *Gruppa Demokraticeskogo Tsentralizma* can be translated either way.

After the USSR was formed, the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) was the communist party for the entire country. The “Russian” in its name was now an anomaly, as Russia (the Russian SFSR) was just one of the USSR’s union republics. This was rectified in December 1925, when the name was changed to the **All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)**²¹³. Every union republic but one also had its own republic-level branch of the all-union party, such as the Ukrainian SSR having the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Ukraine. The exception was the Russian SFSR, where Party members belonged directly to the all-union party, as there was no branch party for Russia. If this seems to make the Russian SFSR more important than the other union republics, that is correct.

The Soviet maintained the pretense that all union republics were equal. In reality, the Russian SFSR was the core of the USSR, and the Party and Soviet government in effect gave it special status. This union republic was often treated somewhat differently than the others and sometimes was conflated with the USSR itself. For example, all union republics had a constitutional right to leave the USSR. However, if the Russian SFSR had left the USSR, this would have split the rest of the country into several disconnected enclaves, making it economically unviable. It seems clear that the underlying assumption was that the Russian SFSR as the unofficial core of the USSR would not secede. For another example, with the founding of the United Nations at the end of World War II, the Soviets secured UN membership not only for the USSR itself but also for the Ukrainian and Belorussian SSRs²¹⁴. The biggest, most populous union republic, the Russian SFSR, did not get its own UN membership, as both the Soviets and foreigners conflated the Russian SFSR with the USSR. (When the USSR broke up in 1991, Russia inherited the USSR’s UN seat including the coveted permanent membership on the Security Council, with the agreement of most of the other countries arising out of the Soviet Union²¹⁵.)

213 The party only dropped “(Bolshevik)” from its name in 1952, when it became the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).

214 The USSR initially argued all 16 of its union republics were sovereign states and qualified for membership in the UN. Allegedly, they gave up on this when the USA pointed out that the 48 American states would similarly be eligible for UN membership. A compromise was reached when the Soviets agreed to membership for just two union republics, the Belorussian and Ukrainian SSRs.

215 The “Commonwealth of Independent States” that contain most of the countries arising from the USSR agreed to Russia getting the Soviet UN seat. Georgia was just an observer to the CIS and thus did not vote on this. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania maintained (correctly) that the annexation into the USSR was illegal (the Soviet state in 1920 had signed treaties with all three recognizing their independence) and refused to participate in the CIS at all.



в СССР проживает более 100 наций и народностей

In the USSR there are more than 100 nations and peoples²¹⁶

For more about Soviet ethnic groups, including a detailed map the Soviets published in 1941 on them, see [Soviet Ethnic Groups in 1941](#).

Although the Soviets were determined to prevent national groups from becoming independent, in the 1920s they allowed considerable cultural autonomy and development²¹⁷. Every group was allowed to have some schooling in its own language rather than Russian, depending upon the size and economic development of the group. A large, advanced group would have own-language education up through college level, while a small, undeveloped group might just get a few years of own-language primary education. Many groups that did not have a written version of their language received a writing system codified in an appropriate alphabet, such as the Cyrillic script or the Latin script. Expressions of ethnic folklore, customs, and other cultural aspects were allowed and celebrated. There was a manipulative aspect to this cultural policy, as the Soviets of the time believed that cultural autonomy would generate gratitude among the nationalities and lessen separatist tendencies.

The nature of the post-civil-war Red Army became a highly-debated political issue even as the army was reduced in size. One faction, headed by Lev Trotskiy, the leader of the Red Army, advocated for a small professional army incorporating the expertise of the military

²¹⁶ Soviet-era poster; source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/424534702373559672/>.

²¹⁷ The policy was called *Korenizatsiya*, meaning “Indigenization” or “Ethnicization”.

specialists, backed up by a large militia. The other faction, headed by M.V. Frunze, a celebrated field commander of the civil war, called for a “Unified Military Doctrine” (UMD) with a “proletarian method of war” that reflected the Marxist nature of the state. Frunze attached particular importance to political officers and Communist cells in the Red Army, who would indoctrinate and motivate the army with Communist ideology. To Frunze, a future major war would require the full economic and political power of the state, with the Soviet military being the vehicle to spread revolution to the world proletariat.

It might seem that Trotsky's vision won out, as the Red Army became a small active force with a large territorial-militia system. However, that organization mainly reflected economic necessity. The Communist Party in 1922 actually agreed with the principles of UMD. Frunze was put in charge of the Red Army's transition to its new structure in 1924–1925, and his UMD thinking influenced many aspects of the army. Frunze did build a small, professional active army along the lines of Trotsky's vision, but he required it to have a revolutionary Marxist vision. The 1920s army had to be small, since the economic devastation of the USSR precluded anything else. “The maximum reduction of everything that is not absolutely necessary” (M.V. Frunze, 1926) was the Red Army's policy in the mid-1920s.

Trotsky's influence waned in the mid-1920s as Stalin won the infighting for Party leadership. Stalin progressively had Trotsky removed from his government positions, had him expelled from Party, and then forced him into foreign exile. This accordingly gave more power to Frunze over the Red Army. Frunze himself had ended up in an anti-Stalin faction, which would have sooner or later resulted in Stalin getting rid of him, but Frunze's death in 1925 removed him from the power struggle. Instead, the Soviets needed a Red Army civil war commander-hero in Trotsky's place and essentially made Frunze into a secular version of a military saint. Before the rise of the Soviets, Russia had a long religious tradition of celebrating military saints. For example, Saint *Georgiy* [George] the Victorious had long been a popular military saint with various Russian Empire military awards established in his name. The celebration of Frunze meant many places across the USSR were named in his honor, including the Military Academy in the name of M.V. Frunze, a top Soviet military academy located in Moskva to train Red Army general staff.

A deceased Communist leader often was more valuable to Stalin than a live one. Frunze's UMD with its call to support the military with the full economic power of the state was used by Stalin as one justification for his drive to collectivize agriculture and to massively industrialize the country starting in 1928. With Frunze gone, there was no chance that he could change his mind about the UMD or otherwise prove an obstacle to Stalin.

The reorganized Red Army was based on a professional officer²¹⁸ corps commanding a mixed system of regulars and territorials. Regular or “cadre” (per Red Army terminology) forces included the naval forces, the air forces, the technical troops, most cavalry forces, and the rifle divisions in the border military districts (MDs). Male citizens aged 19–40 were subject to military service and if called up into a regular unit served for 2–4 years depending upon branch and then passed into the reserves. The “temporary” exceptions of the civil war for certain groups like Muslims in the Caucasus and Central Asia were continued. Men from various groups of class enemies were completely excluded from military service: the former aristocracy, the bourgeoisie, clerics, Cossacks, and various others. This ignored the fact that many military specialists (former Tsarist military officer often of aristocratic or bourgeois origins) and the Red Cossacks had willingly and competently fought for the Soviets during the civil war²¹⁹.

In the 1920s, due to lack of resources and the need to build up the civilian economy, only a fraction of the men liable for conscription were actually called up. For example, at this time about 1.2 million men became eligible for conscription each year, with 750,000 being judged fit for military service. Only about 200,000 – 250,000 per year were actually drafted²²⁰.

Cadre divisions were not kept at full strength during peacetime but were to be filled up with reservists upon mobilization. In 1928, cadre forces comprised 28 rifle divisions and 11 cavalry divisions. Cadre rifle divisions were maintained at two levels:

- Each first-line cadre division had a full-time staff of 6,300, to be augmented with 12,300 reservists on mobilization (18,600 total).
- Each second-line cadre division had a full-time staff of only 604, to be augmented with 11,750 reservists on mobilization (12,354 total).

218 Revolutionary fervor had at first abolished all officers ranks in favor of troop-elected commanders based on assignment: brigade commander, division commander, army commander, etc. As time went on, elections were dropped and officer ranks were gradually brought back. For simplicity, I use the easily-understood “officer” even during times when only “commander” was used.

219 The military specialists were all let go at the end of the civil war. However, people with class enemy origins who had volunteered to join the Red Army as commanders (rather than being hired as specialists) or as Red Cossacks could continue to serve in the Red Army. Boris Shaposhnikov, for example, was a Cossack who became an officer of the Imperial Russian Army but joined the Red Army in 1918 as a commander. He remained in Red Army service and rose to become Chief of the General Staff.

220 A.Yu. Bezugolnyy; “Prizyvnoe Zakonodatelstvo i Komplektovanie Raboche-Krestyanskoy Krasnoy Armii Predstavitel'yami Nerusskikh Natsionalnostey v 1920-e gg.” (“Draft Legislation and Recruitment for the Workers’ and Peasants’ Red Army by Representatives of non-Russian Nationalities in the 1920s”); *Vestnik Kalmytskogo Instituta Gumanitarnykh Issledovaniy* (Bulletin of the Kalmyk Institute for Humanitarian Research); 2013, Issue 3.

Rifle divisions, some cavalry divisions, and some cavalry brigades in the interior MDs were in the “territorial-militia” system. (At some point, “militia” was dropped from the terminology.) Typically, a territorial unit had a small permanent core consisting of active service commanders, political officers, and technical troops. The the rest of the unit consisted of part-time territorials. Upon being drafted for territorial service, the draftee was supposed to undergo three months of training in his first year followed by 1–2 months of training per year for the next four years. It seems that soon after the territorial system was functioning, this 1–2 months of training per year after the first year in practice became just a single month per year.

Except when undergoing training, a territorial lived at home and worked in the civilian economy. In case of war or emergencies, the territorials could be activated to take the field. This territorial system was intended to benefit the economy, since it kept the territorials in productive work for most of the year, while being able to mobilize millions of soldiers for defense of the country. For example, in 1927 the active Red Army was about 600,000-strong, but this would rise to 3,400,000 upon mobilization of the territorials²²¹. This was a huge force for the late 1920s, although the poor level of training of the territorials was always an issue.

Territorial rifle divisions were maintained at three levels:

- Each first-line territorial division had a full-time staff of 2,400, to be augmented with 10,681 territorials on mobilization (13,081 total).
- Each second-line territorial division had a full-time staff of 604–622, to be augmented with 11,734–11,750 territorials on mobilization (12,338– 12,372 total).
- Each third-line territorial division had a full-time “cell” (*yacheyka*) of 190. If sufficient territorials were available on mobilization, this division would form up as a first-line territorial division.

The three levels of territorial divisions formed a hierarchy based on regional population: A region containing a first-line territorial division would often have a second-line territorial division and sometimes a third-line territorial division, so that upon mobilization, the region would raise two and sometimes three divisions. The conditional nature of third-line territorial divisions meant that there wasn’t always a fixed number of these divisions. In 1928, there were about 45 territorial divisions, most of them rifle divisions. There were a few territorial cavalry divisions, but the Soviets kept most cavalry divisions as cadre forces. At

221 Alexander Hill; *The Red Army and the Second World War*; 2017.

this time, cavalry was the Red Army's main maneuver arm, and keeping cavalry divisions as cadre meant they received much better training.

From the very start of the territorial system, the Red Army's high command was well aware that the official training regime of the territorials was quite substandard. It seems likely that drilling, marching, and political indoctrination made up most of the training. One territorial commented that he never fired his rifle even once during his time as a territorial.

In addition to the Red Army regulars and territorials, some union republics and autonomous areas formed **national military units** (*natsionalnye voinskie chasty*). "National" in Soviet terminology meant ethnic group, and these units were for non-Russian ethnic groups. The Belorussian and Ukrainian SSRs had these units, as did the Armenian, Azerbaijan, and Georgian SSRs of the Transcaucasian SFSR. The Russian SFSR did not have any Russian or Slavic national military units, since the republic's Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians²²² went into the Red Army. However, non-Slavic ethnic minorities within the Russian SFSR did have national military units, such as Karelians, Kazakhs, Turkmens, and several other groups.

These units were authorized in 1923. They were part of the Red Army, were administered by the Red Army, and were organized like Red Army forces, some as regulars and some as territorials. However, if I read my sources correctly, the territorials in these units were volunteers, not conscripts. In places like Central Asia, many of these units were raised from groups that were exempted from conscription due to ethnic unrest.

M.V. Frunze was behind the creation of peacetime **national units** (meaning military units for non-Russian ethnic groups), as a way to increase Soviet military power. National units was not a new idea. Imperial Russia had used them to varying degrees, often as auxiliary troops. The Soviets had used their own versions of them during the Russian Civil War. While members of some ethnic minorities were willing to fight for the Soviets as part of the Red Army, others would fight only if in their own national units. During the civil war, ethnic units at times provided good service but sometimes were sources of ethnic separatism²²³. The Soviets ended up maintaining them but strictly controlling them. As the civil war was won,

222 The Russian SFSR contain some Belarusians and many Ukrainians. Ukrainians were spread out across many agricultural lands of Russia, having migrated there as the Russian Empire conquered these lands. Parts of the Russian Far East had so many Ukrainians that it informally became known as "Green Ukraine" (green for the extensive forests of the region).

223 Timothy K. Blauvelt; "Military Mobilisation and National Identity in the Soviet Union"; *War & Society*, Vol. 21 No. 1; 2003; https://www.academia.edu/277237/Military_Mobilisation_and_National_Identity_In_the_Soviet_Union_War_and_Society_May_2003_.

national units from groups believed to be most separatist were disbanded. For example, Muslim national units raised in the Caucasus region were dissolved in 1920–1921.

However, many of the same factors that led to the Soviets to use national units during the civil war were still present after that war, especially in getting military service out of ethnic minorities that did not want to be in the Red Army. Frunze was a leading advocate for having national units after the civil, and his views prevailed. The official purpose of these units was for defense of their republic or autonomous entity. The Soviets also had several ideological agendas for these units. The Communists claimed that the unrest of the Soviet ethnic groups stemmed from their mistreatment at the hands of the imperialist, colonialist Russian Empire. (This view was certainly true for many groups, but it conveniently ignoring the unrest caused by Soviet mistreatment of many groups during the civil war.) The existence of the national military units was thus one attempt to show that the Soviets were treating ethnic groups better than the Tsars had done. This probably did not work out as well in practice as in theory. Especially in the 1920s, non-Slavic national units often had many Slavs in the units' command staffs, partly due to a lack of qualified ethnic minorities for these roles. It is likely that many Slavic officers held the traditional view from the Russian Empire that many non-Slavic ethnic groups were inferior and made for poor soldiers. This implies some Slavic officers mistrusted and mistreated their ethnic minority soldiers.

The national military units also existed for use in Soviet international propaganda. The Soviets were opposed to imperialism and colonialism. (They denied their own practices were imperialist, claiming it was the will of the proletariat to join their socialist state. They also would continue forms of internal colonialism by settling Russians in various ethnic areas.) Their propaganda tried to incite unrest among the indigenous inhabitants of the colonies of imperialist countries as well as to cause anti-colonial and anti-imperial dissent within the citizenry of imperialist countries. Propaganda sometimes featured Soviet national military units in hopes of gaining support among the “colonial peoples of other countries”: The USSR was empowering the “former colonial peoples of the Tsarist empire” by allowing them their own military forces²²⁴. (Imperialist countries did raise colonial troops from their colonies, but the Soviets could point out that these forces were completely under control of the imperial power itself. This conveniently ignored the fact that the Soviet national military units were under Red Army control.)

224 A.Yu. Bezugolnyy; “Prizyvnoe Zakonodatelstvo i Komplektovanie Raboche-Krestyanskoy Krasnoy Armii Predstavatelyami Nerusskikh Natsionalnostey v 1920-e gg.” (“Draft Legislation and Recruitment for the Workers’ and Peasants’ Red Army by Representatives of non-Russian Nationalities in the 1920s”); *Vestnik Kalmytskogo Instituta Gumanitarnykh Issledovaniy* (*Bulletin of the Kalmyk Institute for Humanitarian Research*); 2013, Issue 3.

Yet another goal was to spread Communist ideology among ethnic minorities via the national units. Like in the regular Red Army, soldiers in national units were subjected to political indoctrination as part of their service.

For many ethnic groups subject to conscription, being drafted into ethnic-based national units was likely much more acceptable than being sent to a mixed-ethnic Red Army unit, which often contained many Russians. There were sometimes large cultural and linguistic issues in mixed ethnic units. The Red Army found, for example, that many Central Asian groups were not only illiterate in Russian but also in their own languages. Worse, recruits from certain ethnic groups spoke little or no Russian, the *lingua franca* of the Red Army, and had to be taught how to understand basic orders in Russian. Religious sentiments meant many Central Asian soldiers did not want to share living quarters with people from other religions. Religious dietary restrictions meant Central Asians refused to eat any pork and borscht (a Slavic beet soup often made with salt pork), foods often found in Red Army rations. Some Red Army meals were flavored with laurel leaves (bay leaves), which elicited protests that the Muslims were being “fed with leaves falling from trees that even camels cannot eat”.

The problems with ethnic groups went both ways. Slavic common soldiers in Red Army mixed-ethnic units were often peasants from farming villages and had rarely met non-Slavic people. These soldiers often viewed minority group soldiers with a mixture of curiosity, ridicule, and condescension. They used offensive nicknames for the minorities, who resented their treatment so much that fistfights and knife fights often broke out between the two groups. Religion made things worse, as Slavic soldiers would deliberately use the Christian sign of the cross knowing that it would offend Muslim soldiers, often provoking them to violence.

Some works claim that the national military units were just token forces, such just three national divisions in existence in 1924 and just one division and three regiments in 1925. This is not quite correct. They were indeed only a small part of the Red Army, but they were still a force of respectable size. In late 1924, there were 10 divisions and several smaller units:

- 4 territorial rifle divisions in the Ukrainian SSR.
- 2 rifle divisions in the Georgian SSR.
- 1 rifle division in the Armenian SSR.
- 1 rifle division in the Azerbaijan SSR.

- 1 territorial rifle division in the Belorussian SSR.
- 1 cavalry division, 1 rifle battalion, and 1 pack horse-mountain battery in the Bukharan People's Republic.
- 1 rifle company and 1 cavalry platoon in the Yakut ASSR of the Russian SFSR.
- 1 rifle company in the Crimean ASSR of the Russian SFSR.
- 1 cavalry squadron in the Dagestan ASSR of the Russian SFSR.

The Soviets raised more national military units as the 1920s progressed and economic development allowed. In late 1929, there were 13 divisions, 2 brigades, and several smaller units:

- 4 rifle divisions in the Ukrainian Military District.
- 4 rifle divisions (2 Georgian, 1 Armenian, 1 Azerbaijani) in the Red Banner Caucasus Red Army. (The Red Banner Caucasus Red Army became the Transcaucasus Military District in 1935.)
- 2 cavalry divisions (1 Kazakh, 1 Kyrgyz), 2 cavalry brigades (1 Turkmen, 1 Uzbek), and 1 Tajik mountain rifle battalion in the Central Asian MD.
- 2 rifle divisions in the Belorussian MD.
- 1 Buryat-Mongolian cavalry division in the Siberian MD.
- 1 cavalry regiment in the North Caucasus MD.
- 1 German rifle regiment, 1 Tatar-Bashkir rifle regiment in the Volga MD.
- 1 Karelian jaeger battalion in the Leningrad MD.

In addition to national units, the Soviets also instituted a policy of "concentration" for some ethnic groups. Soldiers from these groups were to be concentrated in subunits of larger Red Army units when practical. For examples, ethnic Poles in the Western Military District were concentrated in subunits of the 3rd Rifle Division. This process created 132 companies and 55 platoons of concentrated "nationals".

The importance on national units and concentration was much more for political reasons than military strength. The core of the Red Army consisted of Great Russians, whom the Soviets assumed would be their most loyal ethnic group. The "brother" eastern Slavs, the Belarusians and Ukrainians were assumed to be next in loyalty. This situation was thus little

different than that of the Russian Empire, where these three Slavic groups had been assumed to be the loyal core of the state and Imperial Russian Army. The Red Army specifically tracked its “great Russian core”. Great Russians were 74% of the entire army in 1921–1922, dropping to 64% in 1927. However, the 1927 decline was not as significant as it looked. When all three main Slavic groups were counted, the Red Army was about 90% eastern Slavic in 1927 (64% Russian, about 22% Ukrainian, and about 4% Belarusian). For comparison purposes, the 1926 Soviet census counted about 147 million people in the USSR, of which the three eastern Slavic groups made up only about 77% of the total (52.9% Russian, 21.2% Ukrainian, 3.2% Belarusian).

Spotlight: Gun Control in the Soviet State



Krestyanin otday oruzhiye!

Krasnoarmeytsu on luchshe zashchitit tebya, tvoye dobro i zemlyu

Peasant, give me your weapons!

A Red Army soldier can better protect you, your property and land

Once the Soviets rose to power, they at first planned to build a volunteer people’s militia as their principal military force. In January 1918, to “ensure the sovereign power of the working people” the Soviets decreed “the arming of the working people” (Declaration of Rights of the Working and Exploited People²²⁵). They also feared counter-revolution by the exploiters of the proletariat, so to “eliminate all possibility of the restoration of the power of the exploiters”, they proclaimed “the complete disarming of the propertied classes”. A few months later, the Soviets required civilians to register their firearms with the government, although not all complied with this order.

²²⁵ <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1918/jan/03.htm>.

The Soviets soon realized that relying on a militia was unrealistic, due to lack of volunteers, so they created a standing, conscripted army. The many opponents of the Soviets organized and fought against them in a vicious civil war. By December 1918, the working people lost their right to own most types of firearms, with the Soviets ordered civilians to surrender all handguns²²⁶, rifles, and machineguns, together with their ammunition. Only Soviet military forces, institutions of “state security” (the police, the Cheka, etc.), and certain government officials were allowed to have these weapons. (Smoothbore shotguns were not prohibited, as these were hunting weapons and necessary to the many people who sustained themselves by hunting.) The one civilian exception was for the Communist Party: each member was allowed to have one revolver and one rifle, both of which had to be registered with the state. People found in violation of the decree could be imprisoned for 1–10 years. Since the Soviets expected people to try to evade the law, they offered monetary rewards to informants who told the authorities about caches of hidden weapons.

This December 1918 decree was not just about disarming the populace but also about equipping the Red Army. (Soviet industry was in disarray and could not produce high volumes of weapons.) The civil authorities collecting these weapons were instructed to send them to Red Army depots, for use by the troops. Propaganda campaigns encouraged peasants (who were the large majority of the population and the most likely to own firearms) to turn over their guns for Red Army use.

In 1920, with the civil war winding down, the Soviets allowed civilians to obtain licenses and possess hunting rifles. Another change in 1923 established a classification and expanded licensing system for rifles. Civilians could obtain licenses for military-grade rifles only through the state security organization, which was quite strict about issuing these licenses. Civilians could also get licenses for the other grades of rifles (essentially, hunting rifles) from the civilian police force, who were also strict. The Soviets in practice made it quite difficult for city and town dwellers to obtain hunting weapons, on the pretext that there were few if any hunting opportunities in urban areas. (Almost no civilians had automobiles, so it was difficult for individual to go to the countryside on hunting

²²⁶ Soviet-based sources often state “revolvers” had to be turned in, but handguns were actually meant, as the laws also applied to pistols.

trips.) It was easier to get hunting weapons in rural areas, since hunting was traditional there²²⁷.

World War I and the Russian Civil War meant the country was at times awash with weapons, despite the Soviets efforts to collect them.

The gun laws changed again in 1924. In essence, only smoothbore hunting shotguns were allowed for the general population. Military-grade rifles were completely disallowed for civilians. Civilians could get licenses for the other grades of rifles but could not own them. Instead, they only had access to these weapons through state-controlled shooting ranges and civil defense organizations.

Handguns remained illegal for civilians²²⁸ with two exceptions: for Communist Party members and as special rewards to selected individuals.

The mid-1920s saw several programs in which the Soviets encouraged civilians to turn in their weapons as well as some where Soviet security forces sought out and confiscated weapons. One confiscation operation in Chechnya and Ingushetia in 1929, for example, confiscated almost 12,500 weapons. While the Soviets collected many firearms in these campaigns, many more remained in the hands of civilians. Just months after the Chechnya confiscation operation ended, armed revolts against the imposition of collective agriculture began, leading to a major Chechen revolt that lasted for years.

It seems likely that people in ethnic minority regions with a civil war history of resistance to the Soviets were the most likely to try to evade the guns laws. Civilians in some minority regions in the North Caucasus, for example, remained relatively well-armed, as attested by their subsequent armed resistance to Soviet policies like collective agriculture.

Civilians wanting to possess guns found inventive ways to circumvent the gun laws and collection campaigns. One popular tactic was to turn over some weapons to appear to be in compliance with the law while hiding the rest. Since the Soviets ran gun-collection campaigns on a sequential region basis, another popular tactic in some areas was for people to turn in all their firearms but then

227 It seems likely that the gun laws were lightly enforced or even ignored in remote, low-population regions that had traditional economies based on hunting, but my sources do not go into this.

228 I am not certain if the handgun laws were revised in 1924 or at a different time.

purchase replacements from civilians in another district when gun collection had not yet started²²⁹. Chechens, for example, procured firearms in this manner from nearby Dagestan and Georgia.

Hunting rifles were allowed again for personal purchase in 1927. There were also some exceptions to the law based on occupation, such as herders being allowed rifles to be able to protect their animals.

The Soviet state went to great lengths to control civilian access to firearms. However, many civilians resisted in various ways, including pro-Soviet people who just wanted to own guns. Many civilians simply hid their weapons as they were made illegal. Many learned how to make their own ammunition, since the Soviets strictly regulated sales of bullets. (Home-made black powder propellants became common, since it was harder to get the chemicals for smokeless gunpowder.) Conscripts serving in the Red Army found ways to take all sorts of weapons home with them when they left service. During the suppression of a revolt in Chechnya in 1929, the Soviets captured many modern Red Army rifles and some machineguns from the rebels, for example. Weapons and ammunition were available, at high prices, on the Soviet black market. However, the black market was a dangerous way to try to get a weapon, as the secret police often infiltrated the market and ran sting operations selling firearms. Trying to purchasing a weapon on the black market sometimes actually only bought a trip to the Gulag.

The next major change to Soviet gun laws occurred soon after Germany invaded the USSR in 1941. All personal hunting weapons had to be turned over to the Soviet authorities for use by the Red Army. However, during the war many civilians in self-defense paramilitary organizations gained access to rifles, even military ones. Rifles were also handed out to “responsible workers” like factory managers and directors of collective farms. (Gun laws changed after the war ended, but I do not track these.)

During the war, once the Germans began retreating, the Soviets also required civilians to turn in any firearms the Germans abandoned. While many civilians did turn in these weapons, others kept and hid them.

229 Jeronim Perović; “Highland Rebels: The North Caucasus during the Stalinist Collectivization Campaign”; *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 51 No. 2; 2015; <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24671839>.



In 1924–1925, the Soviets undertook the first of several major reorganizations of Soviet Central Asia, a Muslim region with many ethnic groups. The Uzbek and Turkmen SSRs were organized based on the Uzbeks and Turkmen (each region also contained smaller ethnic groups). These regions were detached from the Russian SFSR and became union republics of the USSR. These were the first new union republics since the formation of the USSR in 1922. The Uzbek SSR at this time was organized in two main enclaves, a large eastern one and a smaller western one, separated from each other by Russian SFSR and Turkmen SSR territory. Since the Soviets were intent on building a country-wide integrated economy, a union republic being split across two or more enclaves had little consequence. (For more details on this reorganization, see [Central Asia](#) in the appendices.)

This reorganization allowed the Soviets to dispense with two relics of the Russian Empire, the Khanate of Khiva and the Emirate of Bukhara (as the Khorezm People’s Soviet Republic and Bukharan People’s Soviet Republic under the Soviets). When the Russian Empire conquered Central Asia, the remnants of Khiva and Bukhara had been made into protectorates, leaving the local rulers in place. The fiction was that they were still independent states, just under Russian protection, but the Russians were in control, and it was clear that the local rulers would hold nominal power only as long as they caused the Russians no problems. When the Red Army gain conquered Russian Central Asia in 1920, the Soviets deposed the rulers and reorganized the entities as people’s republics. They supposedly were now fully independent republics under their local communist parties, but in actuality they puppet states occupied by the Red Army and under Soviets control. As the Soviets pacified Central Asia following the end of the civil war, the fiction of these states’ independence was no longer needed and they were reorganized out of existences, with their territories going into the Russian SFSR and the Uzbek and Turkmen SSRs.

1924 also saw the creation of the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic inside the Ukrainian SSR. Some Moldavians did live in Ukraine along the border with Bessarabia (now part of Romania). However, the creation of the ASSR had far more to do with Soviet international aspirations rather than internal Soviet ethnic policies: the Soviets decided that a Moldavian ASSR would help strengthen its claim to Bessarabia²³⁰. One problem was that the Moldavian population in this region was relatively small, and a Moldavian-majority entity would have been geographically small and unimpressive. Instead, the Soviets created a larger entity by adding in some Ukrainian-majority districts, creating a Moldavian ASSR in which the Moldavians were actually outnumbered by Ukrainians.

Ethnic Composition of the Moldavian ASSR

<i>Ethnic Group</i>	<i>1926 Census</i>	<i>1936 Census</i>
Ukrainians	48.5%	45.5%
Moldavians	30.1%	31.6%
Russians	8.5%	9.7%
Jews	8.5%	7.8%
Other Groups	4.4%	5.4%

The New Economic Policy created a mixed economy of private and state-owned enterprises, utilizing aspects of private capitalism and state capitalism. The Soviets justified this retreat from socialist economic policies as a way to achieve the “missing” prerequisites for future

²³⁰ More extreme Soviets hoped the Moldavian ASSR would become a haven for oppressed people wanting to flee Romania and would in turn spread Communist ideology and revolution into Romania and even the entire Balkans.

development. Under standard Marxist ideology, capitalism would have industrialized the country and created the large proletariat needed for the socialist revolution. The Russian Empire, however, had still been a primarily agricultural society with just a relatively small (but growing) industrial sector. Thus, the NEP would help build up industry and the proletariat. This socialist spin on the NEP most likely was just to silence the more radical Party leaders who thought the program was a step backwards. The reality was that War Communism had failed, the Soviet economy was collapsing, and the Soviet state lacked the financial resources to rebuild the economy on its own. Something like the NEP was thus necessary, to unleash the profit motive of would-be capitalists and thereby rebuild the economy, whether or not it meshed with Marxism. (Later Communist regimes in countries like Cuba, North Korea, and Vietnam would allow limited capitalism for similar reasons, and China would allow capitalism on a far greater scale than that of the NEP, although the country in recent years has been reimposing state control over private enterprise.)

The NEP allowed “NEPmen” (*NEPmani*), individuals acting as capitalists, to engage for profit in economic activities like light industry, retail, and handicrafts. Similarly, peasants were allowed to farm for personal profit. The Soviet government controlled foreign trade and kept state ownership of the “commanding heights of the economy”, including heavy industry, energy, transportation (particularly the all-important railroads), and the banks. Direct state management of enterprises in these areas, however, was ended. Instead, enterprises in a particular economic sector were organized into one or more “trusts” (*tresty*).

Trusts were technically state bodies and subject to many regulations, but they were allowed a great deal of freedom to manage themselves as a market-based economy, buying inputs and setting prices on their outputs mostly as they wished. One requirement was that trusts had to use part of their profits to build up a reserve of money capital for investment in the trusts’ enterprises, such as to increase factory production. Since the Soviet government had very limited financial resources at this time, the trust system built up many parts of the economy with little or no state investment. The trusts’ reserves of money were also to cover any losses that enterprises might incur, as the Soviet government would not pay debts of insolvent trusts. Government bodies and “cooperative” (non-market) organizations also had a preemptive right to purchase the products of trusts, ahead of market-based enterprises and the general public. Finally, the state received a share of the trusts’ profits and, for some trusts, a portion of the trust’s production without compensation.

Several trusts could be in the same field, such as textiles or oil. Trusts in a sector thus could compete with one another, but they were also allowed to form syndicates to coordinate their

operations and set prices. Trust managers received bonuses based on profits. This system resulted in Soviet economic recovery via the profit motive, but it also quickly evolved into many monopolistic trusts that needlessly increased prices to enrich the trust managers²³¹. This in turn caused the Soviets to enforce a system of price controls in 1924 as part of their currency reform and stabilization (discussed earlier), which still allowed the trusts to realize profits, albeit reduced ones²³².

The trust system did not mean the Soviets followed a hands-off policy towards the economy. Instead, it allowed them to concentrate their limited resources on selected sectors and projects. One major project was electricity generation. The Russian Empire had had a puny electricity sector, but the Soviets correctly saw mass electrification as a key way to modernize the country, to industrialize, and to improve people's lives. In 1920, the Soviets created the State Commission for the Electrification of Russia (GOELRO, for *Gosudarstvennaya Komissiya po Elektrifikatsii Rossii*), which that year developed a plan for electrification of various cities and rural areas, which the Soviet government approved for implementation in late 1921. The plan called for the creation of a total capacity of 8.8 gigawatt-hours (GWh) for the country, from a base of 0.5 GWh in 1921. (The Russian Empire had 1.9 GWh of capacity in 1913, but World War I and especially the Russian Civil War had badly degraded Russian electricity generation.) GOELRO's goals were to be achieved in 10 to 15 years. Foreign equipment and expertise were required in the early years, which had to be paid for in foreign currency. GOELRO was a success, with the USSR seeing significant increases in electric supply in the mid-to-late 1920s. By 1931, Soviet electricity generation capacity had reached 10.7 GWh, exceeding GOELRO's goal of 8.8 GWh. The centrally-planned example of GOELRO became in part a model and inspiration for Soviet industrialization, which began in 1928 with the first of a series of five-year plans.

GOELRO was just one example. Besides electricity, the 1920s Soviets encouraged industrialization and increased coal and oil production. Coal was needed both to fuel industry and to heat many of the growing cities. Considerable amounts of crude oil and refined petroleum products like kerosene and gasoline, were exported to earn foreign

231 Soviets trusts thus became somewhat similar to trusts and cartels in capitalist economies, which operated to enrich their owners and stockholders as the expense of the public. Capitalist economies responded by enacting antitrust laws, such as, in the USA, the 1890 Sherman Act, the 1914 Clayton Act, and the 1914 Federal Trade Commission Act.

232 The Soviets already had what was in effect a separate price control system, for the output of state-owned enterprises outside of the NEP system. This system supposedly was to provide cheap prices of goods for the peasants but was implemented so poorly that the opposite effect happened. The price-fixed goods were mainly sold at the factories and state stores, all of which were located in the cities. Party members had preferentially access to these goods, and city dwellers also had far better access to them than the peasants. Their relatively low prices meant they sold out quickly. NEPmen and other entrepreneurs would buy many of these goods, transport them to the countryside, and resell them at higher prices to the peasants.

currency. Since the 1920s Soviet Union had very few automotive vehicles, they exported the vast majority of their gasoline production, cashing in on the demand for fuel in the many European countries with rapidly growing automobile sectors. Petroleum products were also used for the Soviet economy, particularly fuel oil for transportation and industrial use; kerosene for lighting and heating. The Soviets also worked on rebuilding and expanding the railroad network. Their limited resources mostly prevented them from making major investments in industrialization at this time. Instead, they used their resources to purchase crucial foreign industrial equipment and expertise and to fund government-run efforts to improve industrial administration and efficiency.

The tools used to fight the civil war and control the populace remained in place. The dreaded Cheka was officially dissolved in 1922, but in actuality it was just reorganized, renamed, becoming the GPU, the State Political Administration, and then the United State Political Administration or OGPU (for **O**bedinyonnoe **G**osudarstvennoe **P**oliticheskoe **U**pravlenie)²³³. The GPU/OGPU officially lost many of the extrajudicial powers of the Cheka including summary executions but the organization resented this and slowly worked regained them. The civil war forced labor camps holding the enemies of the people continued their existence, although they were reduced in size and would later evolve under Stalin into the GULag.

The political control system over the Red Army was reformed. Dual command was abolished in its entirety, with military commissars becoming political officers in charge of political indoctrination and monitoring the loyalty of the Red Army. However, the USSR retained the ability to reinstitute military commissars and dual command at any time. Dual command would be brought back at times in the 1930s and 1940s whenever the Soviets feared their state was in danger.

Spotlight: Leninist vs. Stalinist Repression

Apologists for the Soviet Union often tried to portray Stalin's immensely repressive regime as an aberration of the state Lenin founded. This is not correct. The Soviet state under Lenin had mass-murdering Party leaders, a secret police force with extrajudicial powers including summary execution, a system of forced-labor camps, and harsh treatment for class enemies whether or not any

²³³ The Cheka was a special commission of the Russian SFSR although like the Red Army it operated everywhere the Soviets had control, such as the Ukrainian SSR. When it became the GPU in early 1922, it was still part of the Russian SFSR, now under the Russian People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (the NKVD), as the USSR itself would not be formed until late 1922. In 1923, the GPU was transferred from the Russian SFSR to the USSR level, becoming the OGPU and reporting directly to the Soviet of People's Commissars, the highest executive body of the USSR.

person of the despised classes had committed any crime. All the tools of repression were there, and Stalin just greatly expanded their use.

The NEP placated the peasants by replacing the forced confiscation of agricultural output with a more reasonable tax (payable in kind). Peasants were allowed to farm for profit, selling their output in markets. Propaganda and state institutions officially celebrated the peasants as partners with the proletariat, with the Soviet armed forces even being called the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army. The Soviet leadership actually had other plans for the peasants and Soviet agriculture. They did not trust the peasantry, correctly believing that most peasants would naturally want to own their own land rather than be workers in collective farms. However, the Soviets wanted to collectivize agriculture, industrialize the USSR, mechanize agriculture, and send peasants released from farming to work in the factories²³⁴. This would have the side benefit of turning many peasants into supposedly more-loyal proletarians. The Soviets had no intention of asking peasants if they wanted collectivization or to become factory workers.

The trouble with implementing this plan was how to pay for it. The Soviets needed foreign equipment and expertise to rebuild country and to industrialize, since Soviet industry was in ruins. However, paying for these imports and foreign experts was a problem. Upon taking power, the Soviets had refused to honor the debts of the Russian Empire. They also confiscated factories, businesses, mines, and almost everything of significant economic value, without compensation to the owners. Foreign governments, banks, and businesses in turn would not extend loans, credits, or any other type of finance to the Soviets. The Soviets were even blocked from using their gold reserves. The Allied Powers of World War I effectively prohibited countries from accepting Soviet gold as payment, regarding it as stolen from the Russian Empire (and thus rightfully should be used to pay the empire's debts). Finally, foreigners would not accept Soviet rubles.

All this meant the Soviets had to earn foreign currency to pay for imports and expertise²³⁵. The Soviets had no significant foreign currency reserves, so they earned foreign currency by exporting grain (particularly wheat), natural resources (particularly lumber and crude oil), and refined oil products (particularly kerosene and gasoline)²³⁶. While exporting grain to

234 A faction in the Soviet leadership wanted to treat the peasants better but were unable to get their views implemented.

235 The gold blockade of the USSR was not absolute. The Soviets did manage to sell some gold at a discount through intermediaries, particularly Sweden, in order to raise foreign currency. Also, Germany, one of the losers of WW1, would secretly take Soviet gold. These dodges fell far short of the Soviets needed to pay for imports.

236 The owners and stockholders of Russian oil companies confiscated by the Soviets managed to get international oil companies to boycott Soviet oil in the early 1920s, but this effort soon crumbled.

earn foreign currency might seem innocuous, as the Russian Empire had been the world's biggest wheat exporter before World War I, the ruthless nature of the Soviet regime meant they were willing to export grain even while Soviets citizens were suffering from the major famine of 1921–1923.

Spotlight: The End of ARA Relief Efforts and the “Scissors Crisis”

The drought that in part caused the famine of 1921–1923 ended in 1922, with harvests recovering. The Soviets then began planning to export grain that autumn. When this fact became public that year, it eroded support for international efforts to relieve the Soviet famine, which despite the improved harvest was still affecting millions of Soviet citizens, perhaps on the order of four million²³⁷.

Some works claim this caused the American Relief Administration, which had been feeding up to 10 million Soviet citizens per day, to end its Soviet operations in 1923. However, that is not quite correct. While the ARA was still feeding Soviet citizens, they certainly did not want the Soviets to export grain. In Soviet-ARA negotiations, the Soviets claimed that they needed these sales:

The government maintained that there was no possible source other than grain export for obtaining the necessary credits for the purchase of agricultural implements, cattle, foodstuffs, materials for the rehabilitation of the peasantry, and the urgent requirements of machinery for maintaining indispensable industries.²³⁸

I suspect the Soviets were being partially deceitful in the necessity of these sales. The “urgent requirements of machinery for maintaining indispensable industries” was very likely a way to advance their industrialization plans, which could be delayed, as necessary for famine relief.

The ARA and the Soviets negotiated a plan in which the Soviets would not export grain in 1922 if the ARA could arrange an international loan for the Soviets to replace the money that the exports would have raised. If this occurred, the Soviets would taking over famine relief efforts from the ARA. The ARA,

237 The ARA and the Soviets frequently negotiated over the ARA's relief efforts, with it becoming clear that the Soviet projections for those in need were at best poorly estimated and at worst politically motivated. The ARA mostly came to view the Soviet figures as inaccurate but used the changes in them over time as indicators of whether conditions were getting better or worse, directing the ARA planning. The four million figure for late 1922–early 1923 resulted from this process.

238 H.H. Fisher; Chapter XIV, “Export vs. Relief”; *The Famine in Soviet Russia 1919–1923*; 1927; <https://archive.org/details/famineinsovietru00haro>.

however, failed to find any organization willing to loan money to the Soviets, so this plan failed²³⁹. The Soviets went ahead with grain exports, while the ARA temporarily continued its relief efforts.

Rainfall continued to remain good for Soviet farming. In the spring of 1923, the ARA determined that Soviet agriculture was sufficient to feed the country without the need for foreign assistance. They informed the Soviets on 4 June that they would end their Soviet operations that summer. The Soviets by now also were eager to see the ARA end operations, as its relief efforts had earned the organization and Americans in general the gratitude of millions of citizens, at the expense of the Soviet state. Once the ARA was gone, the Soviets began propaganda campaigns to diminish its accomplishments and to write it out of Soviet history as much as practical. (The Soviets would later do something similarly with American Lend-Lease after the end of World War II.)

The improvement of Soviet agriculture in 1922–1923 led to an imbalance in the prices of agricultural goods and manufactured products. Industrial production was recovering at this time under the NEP but at a much slower rate than agriculture. Food prices fell due to increasing abundance (together with the Soviet government trying to manipulate grain prices to keep bread cheap in the cities), while industrial prices rose due to increasing demand (and almost certainly due to manipulation of prices by industrial trusts in order to increase profits and thus manager bonuses). This was called the **scissors crisis**, because a graph of the diverging agricultural and industrial prices looked like the blades of an opening pair of scissors to Lev Trotskiy²⁴⁰. The crisis was the fear of a new famine resulting from peasants cutting back on their farming operations. Many peasants could no longer make enough money to purchase the manufactured products they wanted for their farms and families. Seeing little purpose in growing crops for sale if the proceeds could not be used, many peasants began planting fewer crops, with some growing only enough to feed their families. Once the growing crisis became apparent in August 1923, the Soviets reacted quickly. They made numerous reforms to control and reduce the costs of

239 It seems likely to me that the Soviets demanded this loan in hopes of at least ending the refusal of foreign organizations to lend to the Soviets and perhaps even gaining official recognition of the Soviet state by foreign governments.

240 Trotskiy and the other Soviets debated what to do about these “price scissors” that the term entered conventional economics theory.

industrial production. This reversed the scissors, so that by spring 1924 the disparity between agricultural and industrial prices had been greatly reduced.

Soviet brutality also caused problems for their lumber exports in the 1920s. Lumbering had become a major operation for many Soviet forced-labor camps. The Soviets exported some output from the camps, without disclosing how the lumber was obtained. Some of the forced-labor prisoners managed to escape the camps and flee the Soviet Union. They publicized the brutal nature of the camps and the fact that the Soviets were selling lumber produced by forced labor. This caused international outcry and some international attempts to boycott Soviet lumber. The Soviets denied they were using forced labor, but this incident nonetheless caused the Soviets some international embarrassment. In future years, the Soviets would try to disguise exploitative forced labor of prisoners as “corrective” labor turning criminals into good citizens. They would also organize their economy so that products made by forced labor would be used in the domestic Soviet economy rather than being exported.

The Soviet Union was the world’s first socialist state and as such attracted much interest and often unquestioning admiration from socialists and left-wing reformers throughout the world. The Soviet Communists took advantage of this. In March 1919, the Soviets hosted in Moskva a conference for delegates from communist, socialist, and similar parties and organizations from around the world. The result was the Communist International (Comintern), which advocated for world communism, the overthrow of the bourgeoisie everywhere, and the establishment of a world socialist republic for the transition to stateless communism. The Soviets essentially controlled the Comintern and extensively funded it.

In addition to the Comintern, the Soviets also secretly funded and often partly or mostly controlled various communist and pro-communist parties in many foreign countries. Comintern and these parties in turn helped spread Soviet propaganda, gathered intelligence for the Soviets, and advocated proletarian revolution by all means including force.

Many pro-socialist and pro-communist citizens of foreign countries wished to help the Soviet state, and some in governmental or military positions in their countries provided intelligence to the Soviets. At first, they often did so on their own initiative, as during the height of the civil war the Soviets had very little resources (human or financial) to devote to foreign intelligence operations. Instead, they concentrated their efforts at home and in nearby areas like Mongolia, gathering intelligence about their many foes like the Whites, the Allied intervention forces, and the separatist groups.

In the 1920s, the Soviets began significant foreign intelligence operations, particularly in capitalist countries of most concern. The Soviets had two major intelligence agencies²⁴¹: a state one (with a frequently changing designation) that was controlled by the Soviet government and a military one (the GRU, for **G**lavnoe **R**azvedyvatelnoe **U**pravlenie, Main Intelligence Directorate) controlled by the Soviet military. Supposedly, the GRU concentrated on foreign military intelligence and state foreign intelligence concentrated on everything else. However, these organizations were usually rivals, rarely cooperated or shared information with one other, and often duplicated each other's efforts. They did return considerable information to the USSR in their early decades, especially by organizing networks of pro-Soviet foreign nationals willing to spy on their own governments, military forces, or private businesses.

One goal of Soviet intelligence work was to gain industrial secrets from western companies, to help the USSR in its industrialization efforts. Soviet engineers and technicians were trained as intelligence agents and sent abroad to acquire information on things like advanced munitions, aircraft, factory blueprints, and industrial formulas. Although the effort was extensive, some of stolen information was little help for the Soviets. For example, Soviets espionage in the USA allegedly gained the formula to make very-high-octane aviation gasoline, but the Soviet oil industry lacked the advanced equipment necessary to make it in quantity. (During World War II, the Soviets had to rely on American and British aid for their highest-octane gasoline.) Other secret information the Soviets gained was extremely useful. During World War II, Soviet espionage gained access to considerable information about the US Manhattan Project, which helped guide the subsequent Soviet atomic bomb project.

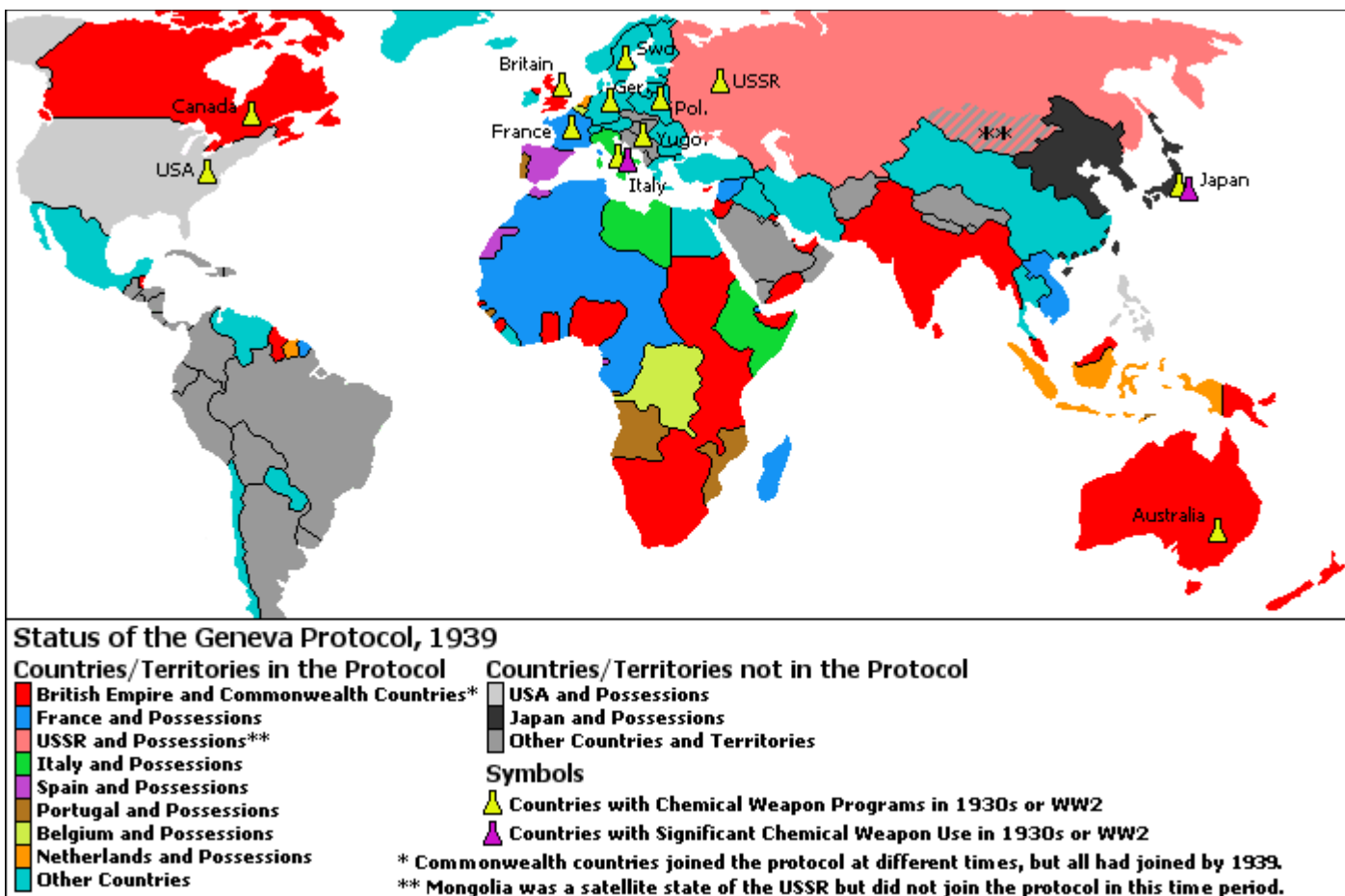
Many Communists in the USSR of the 1920s were idealistic modernists. They believed that revolution and socialism had created the conditions for the rise of better human beings: the New Soviet Man and New Soviet Woman. These would be selfless people who were devoted to collective effort and socialism, who were physically and intellectually developed, who were self-disciplined and loyal to Party and state, who energetically worked for the good of all over the selfishness of the individual. Party members were supposed to try to live up to these ideals and imbue them across all of Soviet society. The Soviets also used the schools, propaganda, literature, and the arts to promote these ideals, which survived in some form or another almost to the end of the USSR. As for the actual Soviet citizens (and some Party members), some believed in these ideals, many pretended to, and some ridiculed them,

241 They also at times also had some additional, minor intelligence agencies.

sometimes openly. In fact, some works on the USSR suggest that public satire of the New Soviet Man concept in 1920s caused the Soviets to strengthen their censorship policies.

The New Soviet Man and Woman ideals were both utopian and, with their emphasis on obedience to Party and government, self-serving for the Soviet elite. It is striking that so few Communist leaders themselves lived up to these standards. Stalin and his cronies enjoying their luxury dachas and being waited upon by servants would no doubt claim they were working for the good of all even as they consigned millions of innocent citizens to the GULag.

Most commanders in the 1920s Red Army were modernists. They embraced everything new in military technology: aircraft, tanks, chemical warfare, rocket artillery, jet and rocket propulsion, and biological warfare. At some point from 1922–1941, the Soviets had major programs to develop all of these technologies and more (like steam-powered aircraft, which failed despite considerable funding). While modernists dominated the Army, as fate would have it, some of Stalin’s military cronies from civil war times were opposed most new military technologies. Despite holding high positions in the Red Army, they could not prevent the adoption of these technologies, but they did at times slow their development.



Spotlight: Soviet Chemical and Biological Warfare Programs

The Soviets were interested in chemical warfare (“poison gas”) from the creation of the Soviet state in 1917. This was due to World War I, since all major combatants in that war resorted to chemical warfare despite treaties outlawing its use (the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907). The Russian Empire had built up a chemical warfare arsenal during the war, which the Soviets acquired. They had few opportunities to use chemical weapons in 1918–1920. Both the Russian Civil War and the Soviet-Polish War mostly featured very mobile actions, while the chemical weapons of the time were best used against static positions like in trench warfare. In the Northern Theater of the civil war, the British and Soviets used chemical weapons against each other a very limited number of times. In 1920, the Soviets planned to use chemical weapons to break through White Army static defenses at the entrance to the Crimea, but a surprise conventional attack broke the White’s defense before the chemicals arrived at the front. The Red Army used chemical weapons against the Tambov peasant uprising of 1920–1921, including gassing civilians in farming villages in rebel-held areas. (The Army allegedly used chemical weapons against other insurgents, but this has not been reliably documented.)

The Soviets also used chemical weapons as pesticides: during the civil war the People’s Commissariat of Agriculture had a short-lived program that used chlorine gas to try to eradicate rodent and insect pests in agricultural areas.

Overall, however, Soviet chemical warfare agents were in little demand during the civil war period, and most were haphazardly stored in warehouses where many degraded due to lack of maintenance. Some were repurposed for use in industrial processes. After the civil war, the Soviet economy was in ruins and needed to be rebuilt. During this time, the USSR could not afford a major effort to develop chemical weapons, although they retained keen interest in them.

For many countries, chemical warfare in World War I horrified most of their citizens and many leaders. In 1925, what came to be called the **Geneva Protocol** was signed by more than 30 countries including the USSR and went into effect in 1928 among the countries that had ratified the treaty²⁴². (Most major countries of the time ratified the treaty by 1931. The two notable exceptions were Japan and

²⁴² Technically, a country had to formally “deposit” its ratification to join the protocol. Many countries which were not signatories of the 1925 treaty soon nevertheless ratified and joined the protocol.

the USA, which did not join the protocol until the 1970s.) Many countries ratified the treaty with official “reservations”, which stated the conditions in which they would act differently from the provisions of the protocol. The USSR proclaimed two reservations: it regarded the provisions as binding its actions only with countries that had joined the protocol, and it would no longer regard the provisions as binding with countries (or their allies) that violated the provisions of protocol. Many countries ratified the treaty with similar reservations. (Some countries ratified the treaty without reservations. Italy did so, but then used chemical weapons during its conquest of Ethiopia in the 1930s.)

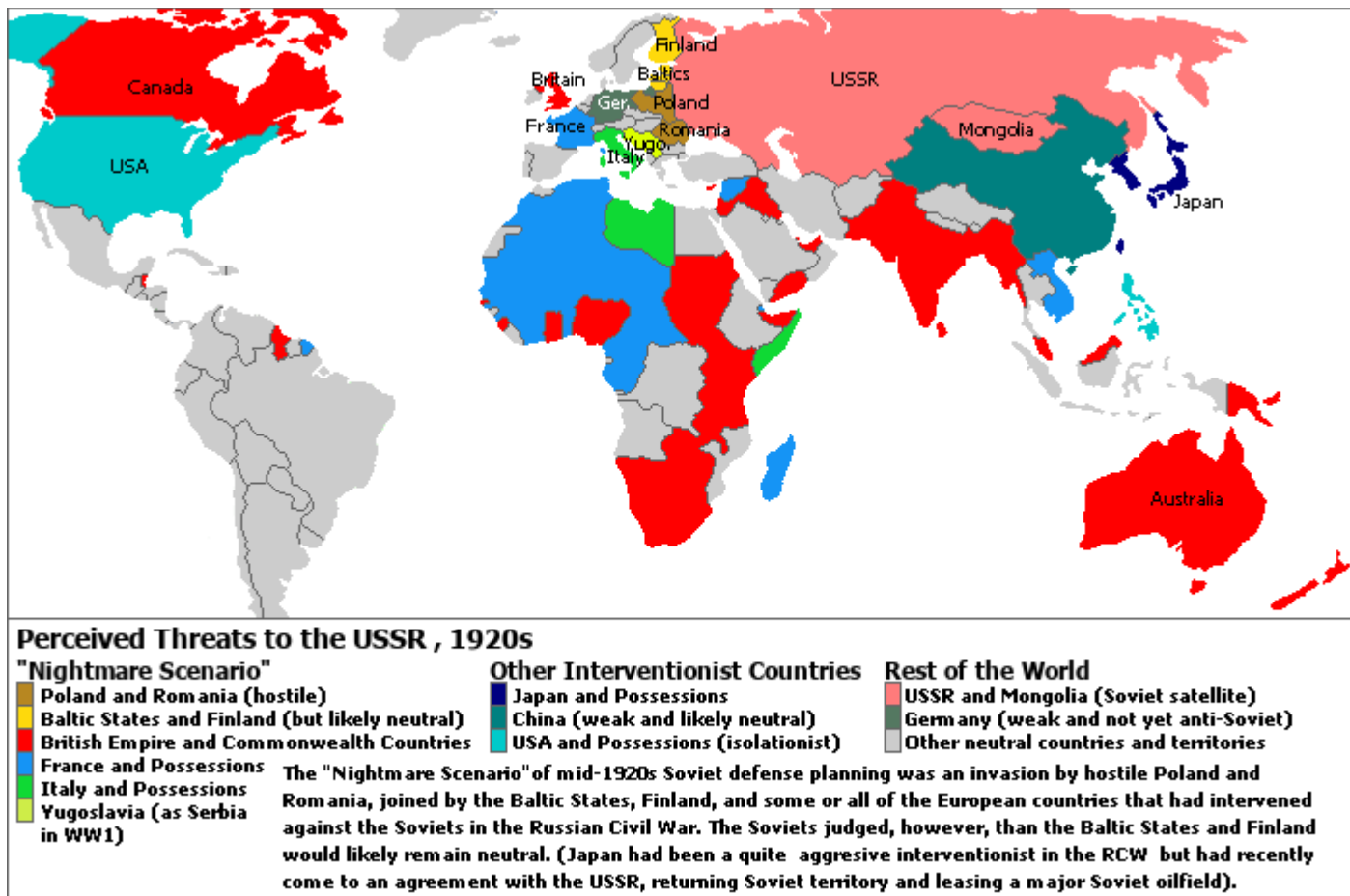
The protocol banned the use of chemical and biological weapons in international warfare. It did not ban the research, development, production, or stockpiling of chemical and biological weapons. Many major countries thus ran completely-legal chemical warfare programs and built up chemical warfare stockpiles. Even major countries with governments that did not want to use chemical weapons did this, to be able to retaliate in kind if an enemy used chemical weapons first.

As the USSR industrialized, the Soviets began ambitious, very secret programs to create offensive chemical weapons and offensive biological weapons. They built up a large chemical weapons industry, although never as big as the Red Army desired. A wide range of lethal and non-lethal chemical weapons were produced and stored across the USSR. Soviet military forces developed substantial offensive chemical warfare means, including the ability to disperse chemical weapons by artillery and naval guns, chemical mortars, vehicles, aircraft, ships, land mines, and other means. During the Great Patriotic War against Germany (1941-45) and the Soviet-Japanese War (1945), the Soviet Union did not use chemical weapons but held them in reserve for retaliation in case Germany or Japan used such weapons.

The Soviets’ biological warfare program was much smaller and less advanced than its chemical program. It worked on weaponizing serious diseases including tularemia, anthrax, and the plague. The program achieved some research successes in the World War II era, but there’s little evidence that it was advanced enough for the USSR to create a significant arsenal of biological weapons at this time. The claim that the USSR used weaponized tularemia (or any other biological agent) against the Germans during the Stalingrad Campaign of 1942 is incorrect.

While the Soviets did not use chemical or biological weapons against external enemies in the World War II era, these Soviet programs were quite dangerous to the people of the USSR. Accidents in the biological warfare program could threaten the health of cities or even the entire country. For example, pneumatic plague (the most contagious form of the disease because it can spread through the air) was accidentally released in the center of Moskva. It fortunately was contained with only three deaths on the initiative of an alert doctor, who became one of the casualties. The larger chemical weapons program caused far more damage. The Soviets almost always emphasized rapid development of chemical weapons and high production goals over safety. Many chemical factory workers were injured and some were killed by accidents involving the chemical agents and by poor working conditions in the factories. Factory ventilation and decontamination systems were inadequate and sometimes inoperable. Workers' safety equipment and tools were mostly inadequate and often in very short supply, leaving workings to handle chemical agents and dangerous byproducts with common work gloves and shovels. Poor control of pollution and negligent disposal of chemical waste led to severe chemical pollution around the factories, which typically not only were located inside cities but also next to civilian housing, typically without a sanitation zone around the factory. Entire cities were put at risk. For example, one 1930s chemical warfare factory in Moskva was making an arsenic-based agent kept releasing poorly-treated wastewater that it became a public health risk for the city²⁴³. Some cities in Russia today are still badly polluted due to these factories.

²⁴³ Rather than paying the cost to build an adequate wastewater treatment system, the Soviets simply ordered the factory to stop making that particular agent, diphenylchloroarsine. They may have moved the diphenylchloroarsine production equipment to another city, however, as a factory in Kineshma began making diphenylchloroarsine after the Moskva factory ceased production.



In the mid-1920s, lack of finances and resources meant the Red Army was relatively small for such a large and populous country. It also mostly lacked tanks, aircraft, medium and heavy artillery, and many other weapons. The Soviet economy was still recovering from the civil war and would not have much capacity for weapon production for many years. It seems most Red Army commanders, infused with Frunze's insistence on Marxist ideology such as world proletarian revolution, would have preferred an offensive orientation, but they were forced to concentrate on plans to defend the USSR. Poland and Romania were considered the main threats, as their combined military strength was on par with Soviet military strength²⁴⁴. The nightmare scenario for the Soviets was invasion by an alliance of these two countries, joined by the Baltic states, Finland, and possibly some western European countries. However, the Soviets judged the Baltic states and Finland were likely to remain neutral.

²⁴⁴ It may seem odd that the mid-1920s Soviets feared Poland and Romania given their later history with these countries.

However, Poland had recently won a war against the Soviets, and the combined military potential of Poland and Romania at least on paper seemed impressive. In reality, both countries were relatively poor and would have had difficulty sustaining a prolonged war of conquest against the Soviets.

1920s Soviet military theorists mostly believed in the value of offensive operations, as well as fighting “with little blood” and “on someone else’s territory”. As the 1920s progressed, the Soviet economy under the NEP stabilized and then grew, while at the same time the Red Army was building up a moderately large pool of trained reservists and semi-trained territorials. At least by 1927, the Red Army had added offensive options to its military planning, drawing up several sets of options for attacks on Poland and Romania.

There was a tension or partial contradiction in Soviet military thinking at this time. The little blood on someone else’s territory implied the Soviets would fight a short victorious war. However, other parts of Soviet military theory held that a major war would be prolonged. As Frunze put it:

In a collision of first-class enemies, decision cannot be reached by one blow. War will take on the nature of a long and brutal contest, subjecting to the ordeal all the economic and political foundations of the struggling sides.

This tension would only be resolved by actual events. Soviet military plans would continue to expect a short victorious war. As we will later see, the Soviet 1941 defense plan envisioned the USSR being invaded from the west, quickly halting the invaders, destroying the invasion forces, and then advancing into enemy territory. In other words, the Soviet plan was for a short victorious war. The plan failed when the Germans invaded in 1941, and the USSR was plunged into a prolonged war for its very existence, with all the ordeal Frunze had predicted.

The Soviets had inherited many problems caused by the poor policies of the Russian Empire. One major one was the overall low level of education for the masses, something the Soviets worked hard to improve. Mass, public education had been a Marxist goal from the start, with the Communist Manifesto of 1848 calling for “Free education for all children in public schools”. This had mostly been non-existent in the Russian Empire until its final years.

Sidetrip: Education in the Russian Empire

Before the reign of Tsar Pyotr I (“Peter the Great”), Russian education was mostly the domain of the Russian Orthodox Church. Wealthy people sometimes hired tutors for their children, but even most Russian nobles of that time were poorly educated. Pyotr introduced secular schools, with compulsory education for the children of nobles. Education became a requirement for government service as a military officer or civil servant. Pyotr also favored advanced learning that would benefit the Russian economy, and he founded the Sankt-Peterburg

Academy of Sciences (now the Russian Academy of Sciences). Education reform, like so many of Pyotr's works, was for the benefit of the state and tsar, not the people in general. The vast majority of the common people remained uneducated. For a long time, government policy actively opposed secular education for the serfs and the free peasants, in case that would make them resent their lot in life and lead to the disruption of agriculture. What little education serfs and peasants received came from the Church, which emphasized religious matters and obedience to the Church and tsars.



Students at a Russian school (likely a cadet school, given the uniforms and lack of female students)

Education reforms continued after Pyotr's death, by Empress Elizaveta, who founded the Imperial Moskva University (now Moskva State University), and particularly by Empress Ekaterina II ("Catherine the Great"). Ekaterina established a countrywide system of free schools open to all except serfs. However, this reform was no where as extensive as it sounds, as these schools were located only in regional capitals. Other cities, towns, and the countryside lacked public education. Even in the regional capitals, lack of sufficient funding for the schools meant they only education a portion of the city's children. This situation did not bother the Russian elite, as by this time most nobles had their children privately educated.

Ekaterina promoted female education, and the new schools were co-educational. She also founded the elite Society for the Upbringing of Noble Girls (the "Smolny Institute"). Girls there were educated for 12 years isolated from the "corrupting" influence of their families, to turn them into cultured, loyal subjects, a "new breed of people". The Soviets with their education stressing the New

Soviet Man and New Soviet Woman ideals were in one sense following the Imperial tradition of trying to mold children for the benefit of the state rather than the individual.

During the 19th Century, Russian education was stratified the way Russian society was. The nobles and the wealthy had the best educational opportunities, and the city-dwelling commoners had fair opportunities. Public education also retained its focus on turning out loyal citizens and training people to become military officers or civil servants. Most rural commoners had little or no access to public education, although some locally-funded rural schools were authorized.

The few Russians who could afford private education had elite educational opportunities. Higher education in Russia became excellent during the 19th Century, as many universities opened in cities across the country. Top Russian universities were equal to the better universities of western and central Europe, and many of these universities recruited renown professors from European countries. Talented, educated Russians became professors or researchers, making important contributions in mathematics, chemistry, electromagnetism, biology, medicine, and other fields. In the 1860s, Professor D.I. Mendeleev, for one notable example, created the periodic table of elements and correctly predicted the existence of new elements.

While the universities were necessary for the good of the state, they also became problems. 19th Century Russia was an illiberal absolute monarchy that banned all political parties, had heavy-handed censorship to prevent discussion of democracy, republicanism, or human rights (and even for a long time banned the publication of the American Declaration of Independence), and favorite the elite over the rest of the population. However, the Russian state could not keep foreign ideas and ideals from entering the country. The universities became places where liberal and radical ideas flourished among an underground of students. Despite risk of expulsion, exile to Siberia, or imprisonment, some students embraced republican or revolutionary ideas and joined nihilist, anarchist, or socialist groups.

The government used lower education as a tool to try to mold the country to the slogan of “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and *Narodnost*”, or the Russian Orthodox Church, the Tsar, and Russian patriotism. (*Narodnost* is often translated into English as “nationality”, but in this context means Russian-ness.) It was meant to

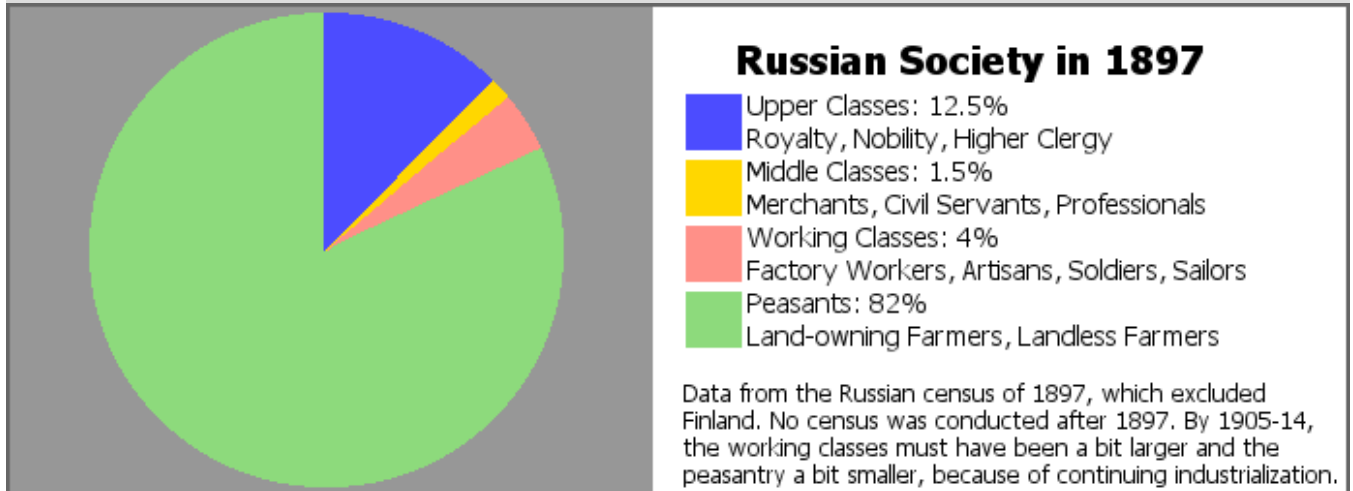
help suppress non-Russian identity, since the empire had so many ethnic groups and religions. In the empire's Polish areas, for example, Catholic schools were shut down and state schools teaching in Russian, not Polish, took over.

Even basic universal literacy was not a goal of the Russian government at this time. As one education minister put it, "To teach literacy to the whole people... would do more harm than good". However, the world was changing rapidly in the 19th Century, in ways that rewarded countries with well-educated citizens. Science, technology, and industry flourished in these countries, bringing them greater prosperity and increasing military power. In 1800, it had mattered little that the vast majority of Russian soldiers or peasants (including the serfs) were illiterate. In the army, officers would drill the soldiers to obey orders to march, fire, and charge. Peasants would grow crops in the traditional ways. It is estimated that at this time in Russia peasant literacy was 1–12%, urban literacy was 20–25%, and nobles' literacy was 84–87%. Since peasants comprised the vast majority of the population, this meant Russia's overall literacy rate was well below 20%. As the decades passed, the need became apparent for soldiers who were more than cannon fodder. Finally, the government realized that even peasants needed some education, so they could learn better farming practices and increase their agricultural output.

Russia instituted reforms that mandated better education for officers. The military also began teaching many enlisted men how to read, since most enlisted soldiers came from the illiterate peasantry. By the 1870s, half the soldiers in the Imperial Russian Army were literate (compared to about 80% in the French or German armies of the time).

Tsar Aleksandr II freed the serfs in the 1860s and instituted a system of rural government, which oversaw local child education. These and other school reforms began raising the Russian literacy rate. Peasant education emphasized the value of work; one reading lesson allegedly was, "Plowman works. Teacher works. Children work. Labor is good cause!" However, state spending on rural education was quite low: rural education was mostly funded the by the impoverished rural governments, so progress was slow. There also were no state programs for adult education, so adult literacy only rose slowly, as educated children grew up. The 1897 Russian census estimated overall literacy in Russia was about 24% (33% for men; 14% for women), with rural literacy at about 20%.

Regional literacy varied tremendously, with what is now Estonia at 95%, Finland over 75%, the Moskva region at 50–60%, the rural Pskov region at 10–20%, and the mostly-Muslim region of what is now Dagestan at under 10%.



Education would continue to improve in the 20th Century, but illiteracy remained a major problem right up until the collapse of the empire in 1917. Moderates worked to improve education; radicals fought for revolution to sweep away the old order and start things afresh.

In the 1890s and 1900s, Russia experienced rapid population growth. Primary education expanded, with many new schools being opened, but not fast enough to match the growing numbers of children. Russian education finally changed for the better after the Russian Revolution of 1905–1906. Although the revolution fizzled out, the Tsar was forced to abandon absolute rule and allow a legislature with some actual power. One chamber, the State Duma, was elected. Although elections to the Duma were partially rigged to dilute the vote of the common people, it was representative enough to express wishes of the common people. One of these was a desire for better education for their children. By 1908, the government began to greatly increase funding for education. By 1913, the last full year of peace before World War I, 147 million rubles were allocated to education, almost ten times the amount (15 million rubles) of 1903. Much of this went to primary education.

Universal primary education was still not realized in Russia, particularly in rural areas and among ethnic or religious groups with little tradition of widespread education. In most areas, female education lagged behind that of males, with typically only half as many girls as boys going to school. Nonetheless, overall

literacy rates among the young dramatically increased. While no empire-wide census was conducted after 1897, military records exist from a few regions on the literacy rate of army recruits, an indication of literacy of young adult males. They show recruit literacy was about 35–45% at the turn of the century and was about 65–80% in the early 1910s. Given that girls were less likely to be educated than boys, this implies literacy among young adult women must have been lower.

Secondary and tertiary education in Russia also increased, although from a quite low rate of participation. Few children of the working classes and peasantry went to secondary school, let alone college. In 1915–1916, in the midst of WW1, the government finally began to reform secondary education and establish vocational and technical schools, as these were now seen as necessary for the industrialization of Russia.

The government concentrated its efforts on child education, not adult education. Since most adults had grown up before the surge in primary education, the overall adult literacy rate remained low as late as 1917.

So, education in Russia was mediocre but improving when the Soviets took over in 1917. Little progress was made during the height of the Russian Civil War in 1918–1920, and education almost certainly deteriorated in regions fought over by the combatants. After 1920, the Soviets increasingly devoted resources to educate the citizens of the Soviet state. This included not only child education but also adult education. Their goals were universal child education for both boys and girls and, eventually, near-total adult literacy. Soviet propaganda trumpeted the strides the Soviets were taking in education. The 1920s Soviets are sometimes criticized for overstating their accomplishments in adult literacy, when often their efforts resulted in only primary-education levels of literacy among adults. However, even that was accomplishment and improvement over the past. The USSR at that time was quite poor, with most adults concentrating on working to obtain food, shelter, and other basic necessities for themselves and their families rather than learning to read.

Child education for the Soviets encompassed primary, secondary, and tertiary education. Despite the Soviets sincerely making great efforts in these areas, Soviet education was not altruistic. Communist ideology and the New Soviet Man and New Soviet Women concepts were woven throughout the education system, in hopes of turning children into loyal citizens who renounced selfishness and worked hard to realize the socialist ideals set by the Party leaders.

Higher education mostly remained the privilege of the elite. Instead of being for the nobles and rich as in the Russian Empire, Soviet tertiary education was now a reward for ideological loyalty. Children of Party members had far greater access to higher education than most people, and children of people labeled as class enemies were almost always excluded. Tertiary education also remained a reserve of the elite simply because so few had access to it. The 1939 Soviet census showed that about 1% of the Soviet population had university degrees, as compared to about 5.5% of the American population in 1940. Sadly, about 2% of the GULag prison population had university degrees, showing how hard Stalin's purges had fallen on the Soviet intelligentsia.

Despite the Soviets having big plans for agriculture, many of their collective farms and state farms did poorly from 1918 into the mid-1920s. Few peasants volunteered to join collective-agriculture communes, likely because of the requirements of collective ownership. (They would lose their tenure to farmland, their livestock, and their property like buildings and agricultural equipment.) It seems that impoverished peasants were the ones more willing to join communes, but their relative lack of property also tended to make the communes unviable²⁴⁵.

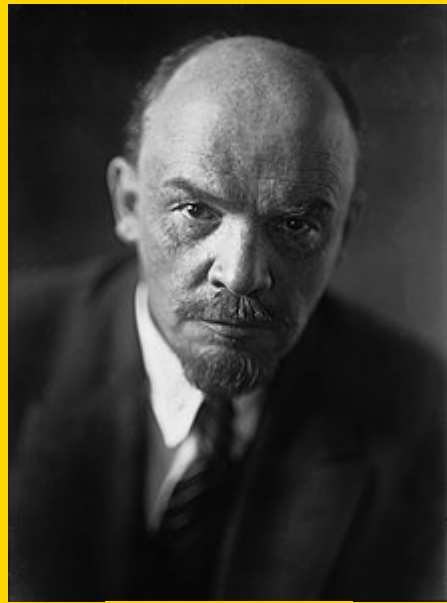
State farms, supposed to be models of socialist agriculture, also languished. Part of the problem was lack of government money to invest in them, but inattention and mismanagement also played large roles. Up through 1925–1926, the typical Soviet response to problems at state farms was simply to close them. Land under control of state farms had reached a high of 3,385,000 hectares (8,365,000 acres) in 1923 but fell to 2,316,000 hectares (5,723,000 acres) in 1926, only a bit more than the 2,090,000 hectares under management in 1918–1919. In 1926, a Communist Party investigation claimed sovkhos problems included high costs, shortages of funds, poor direction from the People's Commissariat of Agriculture, poor management at the farms, irrational use of the farm workers, and the use of outdated farming practices.

This situation was no doubt embarrassing to the Soviets leadership, who had ambitious plans for Soviet agriculture. Efforts began in 1925 to preserve the system (while acknowledging that economically unviable state farms still needed to be closed down). In 1927, the Soviet government began to revitalize the system to develop state farms as "consistently socialist enterprises in agriculture", to transform them "into large industrialized agricultural enterprises" so that they would be able to "exert the necessary

²⁴⁵ Vladimir Maksovich Efimov; *Russkaya Agrarnaya Institutsionalnaya Sistema (Istoriko-Konstruktivistskiy Analiz)* ("The Russian Agricultural Institutional System (Historical-Constructivist Analysis)"); 2013; <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/211608602.pdf> (in Russian).

influence on agriculture". What this meant in practice was to fund them better, write off their old debts, give them access to new loans, and tie workers' pay more closely to productivity. Land under management by state farms began to rise, reaching 3,347,000 hectares (8,271,000 acres) in 1927 and a new high of 3,600,000 hectares (8,896,000 acres) in 1928. More changes to state farms were in store starting in 1928 as Stalin achieved dictatorial power over the USSR.

12 The Leadership Struggle



V.I. Lenin in 1920



L.D. Trotskiy in 1924



I.V. Stalin in 1922

Vladimir Lenin was a forceful, charismatic person who commanded wide support from Party members. While the Communist Party officially did not have a post for Party leader, Lenin was unofficially but effectively its leader. He was also the official head of the Soviet state. Lenin thus had considerable power, but it was not dictatorial. While the Communists imposed a sham democracy on the Soviet state with the Party actually in full control, during Lenin's time the Party itself still had some functioning democratic systems. Local Party organizations selected deputies for the Party congresses in actual, not sham elections. The deputies at the congresses could vote as they wished. In theory, they could vote against Lenin's proposals and could choose to not elect him and his supporters to the Central Committee. The Central Committee in turn could choose to vote against Lenin's proposals and could choose to not elect him and his supporters to the Politburo.

Lenin's popularity meant he would always be in Committee and Politburo. Real opposition to Lenin's proposals did occur. For example, in 1918 several Committee members were strongly against signing the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty with the Central Powers, because of its harsh terms. Similarly, in 1920 the 9th Party Congress saw a group of delegates opposed the highly-centralized nature of the Soviet industrial economy and the use of former bourgeois managers as "specialists". They favored returning control of the factories to the workers, as had been the case in 1917–1918. Also in 1920, Trotskiy opposed Lenin over War Communism, wanting to improve the Soviet economy by allowing some market forces to

function. All these views were expressed, debated, and voted upon. Lenin's proposals won because he had wide support, not because he imposed them on the Party. Lenin was also open to reversing course when things went wrong. By 1921, War Communism was clearly failing economically and provoking open revolt. Lenin then had the New Economic Policy enacted, which abandoned War Communism and allowed a degree of market forces in the economy, like Trotskiy had advocated earlier.

On 22 April 1920, Lenin turned 50 years old. Until then, Lenin had resisted being glorified by the Soviet state, but Soviet propaganda used the occasion of his birthday to adulate him. Most likely, this was to promote Lenin as a wise, heroic figure guiding a state still beset with civil war and in a war with Poland. Lenin accepted this but showed his "dry disapproval of the eulogizing to which his comrades subjected him"²⁴⁶. The war with Poland ended in 1920, albeit with a Soviet defeat, and the civil war also ended, with a decisive Soviet victory. With Russia at peace for the first time since 1 August 1914, it seemed like Lenin now had many years ahead of him to build socialism, world revolution, and communism. This was not to be.

By 1921, Lenin was seriously ill and increasingly had to take long breaks from his duties to recover. Starting in 1922, he suffered debilitating strokes. In March 1923, a stroke left him so weak that his public appearances ceased. The Soviets began again to glorify him. When he died in January 1924, the Soviets renamed Petrograd as Leningrad in his honor. Soviet propaganda then developed a cult of Lenin and a recruitment drive for the Communist Party that increased its membership from about 440,000 in January 1924 to over one million in January 1926. Lenin's death also plunged the Party into a years-long leadership struggle. His death also led the Soviets to rename *Sankt-Peterburg* as *Leningrad*. The Soviets had started renaming places after they came to power in 1917, but it this was mostly just a minor effort until Lenin died. Many places were then renamed for political in the 1920s and reached a frenzy in the 1930s under Stalin. See the Classic Europa guidebook, [The Renaming Revolution: Soviet Place Name Changes](#), 1917–1945, for more details.

The Party's upper echelon became riven with factions and personalities not only seeking power but also disagreeing on the best ways to build socialism. Lev Trotskiy and what came to be called the **Left Opposition** faction viewed the limited capitalism of the NEP as misguided and wanted a massive, rapid drive to industrialize the country, collectivize agriculture along socialist lines, and support worldwide proletarian revolution. Agriculture

²⁴⁶ Robert C. Tucker; "The Rise of Stalin's Personality Cult"; *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 84 No. 2; 1979; <https://doi.org/10.2307/1855137>

output would be heavily exploited at the expense of the countryside not only to feed the cities and their growing worker forces but also to sell on international markets to raise foreign currency for use for industrialization. Nikolay Bukharin and the **Right Opposition** faction supported the NEP and favored treating the peasantry well and industrializing more gradually. Since the peasantry was the largest sector of the population by far, good treatment of them would secure their loyalty and enable the state to grow and prosper without heavy-handed repression. (The Right Opposition, however, was not a group of liberal social democrats. They believed in the primacy of the Party, the dictatorship of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie, and eventual, rather than immediate, worldwide proletarian revolution.)

Roughly but insincerely in between these two views was Iosif Stalin and his idea of **Socialism in One Country**. This rejected the Left Opposition's program in favor of first building up the USSR as a socialist state and later using its economic and military power to drive worldwide proletarian revolution. Socialism in One Country was controversial in that it was a major break from the internationalism of Marxism. However, Stalin's views and his apparent acceptance of the NEP seemed to make his faction closer to the Right Opposition than the Left.

Each faction had important supporters among the top Communist leaders. Trotskiy at first seemed mostly likely to prevail. Trotskiy not only was a great orator and thinker but was also the person who led the Red Army to victory in the Russian Civil War. However, Stalin was General Secretary of the Party. This originally was an administrative position in charge of appointing members to positions, setting agendas, and handling many routine matters, work that the other top Communists disdained as boring. During the power struggle, Stalin perverted the position, appointing and promoting people who favored him, removing opponents from influential posts, and setting agendas that favored his goals. This allowed him to build up his personal power base in the Party. Stalin also gain the support of some important Party leaders, such as Feliks Dzerzhinskiy, the head of the Soviet secret police. He also deftly outmaneuvered other factions, first by allying with the Right Opposition to discrediting the Left Opposition. Trotskiy was expelled from the Party and later deported from the USSR. Stalin then proceeded to adopt the collectivization and industrialization programs of the Left Opposition as part of his Socialism in One Country ideology. He then discredited the Right Opposition. By 1928, Stalin effectively controlled the Party. He would gradually over the next decade or so have most of his opponents and some of his allies executed or assassinated.



Unichtozhit gadinu!

Destroy the reptile!

Steret s litsa zemli vraga naroda Trotskogo i ego krovavuyu fashistskuyu shayku

Erase the enemy of the people Trotsky and his bloody fascist gang from the face of the earth!

This 1937 Soviet poster was one of many that abuse Lev Trotsky during Stalin's rule. Trotsky is portrayed in antisemitic fashion with reptilian and demonic features. He wears a White Army Cossack cavalry boot on his right foot and a Nazi jackboot on his left. His writings are advocating fascism, war, and the destruction of the USSR. Trotsky of course was no fascist but was seeking Communism without Stalin.

George Orwell was well aware of Soviet propaganda's constant reviling of Trotsky. In his book *1984*, the character of Emmanuel Goldstein is based on Trotsky. Goldstein is an enemy of the state, a former member of the Inner Party who, if he is not just a propaganda creation, conspires to overthrow Big Brother and the government of Oceania. The government vilifies Goldstein, including a daily Two Minutes Hate program that the public must participate in.

The exiled Trotsky proved to be a particular thorn in Stalin's side. Trotsky frequently denounced Stalin's policies in speeches and writings, and his reputation as one of the key Communists in the revolution and civil war meant his views reached a large audience of international socialists. Stalin apparently learned his lesson and never sent any other prominent Soviet figure into external exile. He also had the NKVD assassinate Trotsky in Mexico in 1940.

Stalin's power over the Party in 1928 was great but not yet absolute, and he worked hard to consolidate and increase his authority. He remain General Secretary of the Communist Party, which officially was just an administrative post. However, he became the uncontested leader of the Party and through the Party also controlled the Soviet state. Stalin himself did not officially become the head of the Soviet government until May 1941, when he became Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars and thus head of the government. Until he took over, he had his henchman V.S. Molotov as a figurehead chairman²⁴⁷. The USSR also had a head of state separate from the head of government, the Chairman of the Central Executive Committee (from 1938, the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet). The head of state was considered the second highest government post. M.I. Kalinin held this post from the creation of the USSR in 1922 until 1946. However, under Stalin's regime, the head of state had no real power and was a post used for ceremonial purposes and political theater.

Spotlight: Governing the Party, Part 4: The Communist Party under Stalin

Stalin retained the official structure of the Party including Party congresses, the Central Committee, and the Politburo. However, all these bodies became just window dressing and political theater. None of them had any ability to make decisions or set policy on their own. Instead, Stalin surrounded himself with an unofficial inner circle of officials and cronies. This group contained a shifting membership of high Party officials from the Central Committee and Politburo as well as top government officials, military commanders, and others, so the distinctions between the Party, government, and military were thoroughly blurred.

Stalin made his decisions within this inner circle, often completely informally but sometimes in formal settings of Party or government meetings. Party bodies like congresses, the Central Committee, and the Politburo were used to give formal Party legitimacy to Stalin's decisions.

This did not mean the Communist Party did not matter. Stalin counted on it as a key organization of people who were (usually) extremely loyal to Communism and the Soviet state. Members of the Party and the adult members of the Komsomol²⁴⁸ were relied on to provide leadership and set examples for the common citizens. Under Stalin, the Party in part became a way to promote

247 Molotov was also the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs from 1939.

248 The Komsomol was the Communist Youth League. People had to be aged 18 to join the Party, so the Komsomol had many young adult members.

people who demonstrated loyalty to Stalin himself. Loyalty was rewarded by promotion within the Party to higher and higher posts. Becoming a candidate (non-voting) member of the Central Committee was typically a sign of Stalin's approval for upcoming Party members and a warning to full members that they could be replaced.

Although there would be changes over time, the essential system remained in place until a major reorganization in 1952, outside the time frame of this work.



Stalin had become the Soviet nationalities expert through his 1913 work, *Marxism and the National Question*. At the time, it had helped that he was ethnically Georgian, so that it was a member of a national minority rather than a Russian was espousing the right to self

determination only in the context of a highly centralized Party. Stalin was actually a russified Georgian with no problem with Russian domination of the Party. He spoke Russian, read and wrote in that language, and admired various aspects of Russian history. For example, he admired Tsar Ivan IV (Ivan the Terrifying) for building up the Russian state and repressing dissent, later writing that Ivan was “a progressive force for his time, and the Oprichniki as his expedient instrument”. The Oprichniki was Ivan’s policy of severe repression and near-absolute rule over a region of Russia, enforced through violence, torture, and execution by Ivan’s Oprichniki, a 16th Century forerunner of a paramilitary secret police force. The parallels with Stalin’s NKVD of the 1930s are unavoidable.

It is unclear how much Stalin actually believed in his 1913 work. After he gained dictatorial power in 1928, he gave the pretense of national rights by further reorganizing the USSR along ethnic lines. In 1929, the Persian-language Tajik ASSR was separated from the Turkic-language Uzbek SSR and became a union republic of the USSR, the Tajik SSR. This technically meant that the Tajik SSR could secede from the USSR and become independent if it wanted, a right of all the union republics. In reality, the Communist Party completely controlled the union republic and would never allow it.

National (ethnic) delineation of the USSR was for show. The reality under Stalin was that ethnic groups increasingly lost the cultural autonomy they gained in the 1920s. The Soviets had hoped that their policy of cultural liberalism would reconcile ethnic minorities to Soviet rule and decrease separatist tendencies. Instead, ethnic minorities tended to want more autonomy. As usual, the Soviets blamed their victims for ingratitude rather than realizing that denial of actual political rights might be the problem.

Stalin admired the Russians for build a great state and relied on Russians to control the USSR. He reversed Soviet policy on ethnic cultural liberalism. The Russians were held up as the “elder brother” that non-Slavic groups should emulate. The Russian language, parts of Russian history, and Russian cultural figures were all promoted throughout the USSR.

Stalin with his inner circle made all important decisions regardless of formal bodies or rules of procedure. The Communist Party’s role was to legitimize Stalin’s decisions as Party policy. The Soviet government’s role was to implement them. The legislative structure (the Congress of Soviets, then Supreme Soviet from late 1936) was already a rubber-stamp body to turn Party policy into Soviet law, and Stalin dominated it. The executive structure then implemented these laws. Decisions flowed down from the Council of People’s Commissars (“Sovnarkom”) to its various commissariats, agencies, and other bodies.

Judicial structures like the Soviet courts and prosecutors punished people who violated Soviet laws. While this might not seem controversial, like the rest of the government the judicial system was dominated by the Party and did not allow fair trials in political matters. The Soviet system, especially under Stalin, also relied on extra-judicial measures, with the Soviet secret police having the power to detain, torture, imprison, and execute people.

Before Stalin became ascendant, the Communists had already gutted free and fair elections for the Soviet government in favor of one-party rule and preordained sham contests. Democracy in the Party itself had been weakened in the 1920s but was still functioning to some degree. Under Stalin, Party democracy was also gutted. The Party congresses still officially elected members to the Central Committee, which in turn still officially elected the Politburo, but everything was a foregone conclusion decided by Stalin. Membership in the Central Committee and Politburo became rewards for Communists loyal to Stalin, and demotion from these bodies or outright expulsion from the Party became punishments for Communists who crossed Stalin.

Although Stalin not officially the leader of the USSR from 1928 until May 1941, it was abundantly clear throughout the country from 1928 that Stalin was actually in charge. Unlike Lenin, who disliked being glorified as leader, Stalin himself craved this adulation. He caused Soviet propaganda develop a **cult of personality** that glorified Stalin's leadership throughout the USSR and the world. Allegedly, he even edited his own entry in an edition of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia to better list his accomplishments, while adding language on how modest he was.



Vyshe Znamya Marksa Engelsa Lenina i Stalina! (Above the Banner of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin!)

Stalin's cult of personality developed in stages. At first, he was careful to associate himself as the worthy successor to Lenin and also to the giants of Communism, Marx and Engels. Over time, Lenin's prominence was downplayed and Stalin's increased. This occurred not just in propaganda but in other areas that celebrated Lenin. For example, soon after Lenin's death, the USSR instituted a set of annual Lenin Prizes, a sort of Soviet version of the Nobel Prizes but for Soviet citizens. In the mid-1930s, Stalin simply halted the awarding of Lenin Prizes, without repealing the law authorizing the prize. A few years later, Stalin had the USSR institute Stalin Prizes, essentially being an expanded version of the Lenin Prize with more annual winners and ruble awards in addition to medals.

Soviet propaganda went on to glorify Stalin as the helmsman or captain of the ship of the USSR, as the beacon of Communism, as the wisest of all people, as the great architect of Communism, as the best friend of children, and more²⁴⁹.

249 For posters of all this and more, see "The Personality Cult of Stalin in Soviet Posters, 1929–1953" at <https://press-files.anu.edu.au/downloads/press/n2129/html/ch03.xhtml?referer=&page=9>



Капитан страны советов ведет нас от победы к победе!

Captain of the country of Soviets leads us from victory to victory!

This 1933 Soviet propaganda poster shows Stalin as the captain steering the USSR. The theme of Stalin as resolute captain, wise helmsman, father of the people, and the like was a common theme in 1930s Soviet propaganda.

Stalin was vain, insecure, and paranoid. He turned his administrative position as General Secretary into party leadership, a system many communist parties would follow. However, he wanted recognition as Party leader for himself, not for his post. In 1934, he arranged that the post was General Secretary fell vacant, without being abolished. He remained in control of Party. Later Party leaders would have themselves anointed as General Secretary, signaling that they were the actual leaders of the Party and Soviet state regardless of whatever other offices they held.

Stalin pretended to be modest while over time directing Soviet propaganda to emphasize him over Lenin. His public modesty also was a way to hide his disdain for the common people, supposedly once telling his daughter that every time “they open their mouths something stupid comes out”²⁵⁰. Nonetheless, he wanted both his ability and his modest celebrated. For example, when he edited his post-war biography²⁵¹, he had the following inserted²⁵²: “Although he performed his task as leader of the party and the people with consummate skill and enjoyed the

250 Robert Gellately; *Stalin's Curse*; 2013.

251 Iosif Vissarionovich Stalin; *Kratkaya Biografiya (Short Biography)*; 1947.

252 Robert Gellately; *Stalin's Curse*; 2013.

unreserved support of the entire Soviet people, Stalin never allowed his work to be marred by the slightest hint of vanity, conceit or self-adulation.”

Regardless of actual titles or assumed modest, Stalin ran the country and everyone knew it. Unofficially and apparently never to his face, he was sometimes called “the boss” (*vozhd*²⁵³), “the master” (*khozyain*²⁵⁴), and other names reflecting his actual status, even by the people closest to him.

Stalin proceeded to implement his socialism in one country program, developing Soviet economic and military power. The NEP was ended and central planning of the economy was instituted.

Spotlight: After the NEP: Price Controls and Rationing

Stalin’s central planning prioritized making industrial goods (also called “Type A” goods), which could be used to grow the economy, over consumer goods (“Type B” goods), which were used by the citizens. Consumer goods included food, clothing, furniture, manufactured products for civilian use, fuels for civilian use (like kerosene), and the like. Even many handicrafts and artisan products were in the system at first, as the end of the NEP turned small private factories and workshops into state-owned operations. Given the priority on industrial goods, consumer products were often in short supply. This included food for many years, due to the shortages that resulted when the Soviets collectivized agriculture.

The Soviets responded to shortages by incrementally rolling out a system of rationing by city and region in 1928–1929. According to one author, this was perhaps the first recorded instance of the *introduction* of rationing in time of peace²⁵⁵. Rations varied by occupation, with industrial workers (factory workers, miners, oil industry workers, etc.) receiving more food than other workers, and with the most important cities like Moskva and Leningrad being favored over other other cities or regions²⁵⁶. Peasants were not included in the rationing

253 *Vozhd* can mean “leader” or “boss”, but most historians claim the sense it meant regarding Stalin was “the Boss”. *Vozhd* was never used publicly or in propaganda, unlike the use of “Leader” for many fascist dictators, like Hitler (*der Führer*) and Mussolini (*il Duce*).

254 *Khozyain* can mean “head of a household”, “owner”, or “master”. The *khozyain* of a household was the person responsible for the welfare of the family. By extension a *khozyain* of an organization or place was responsible for the welfare of that organization or place.

255 Alec Nove; *An Economic History of the U.S.S.R.*; 1969. Nove’s 1969 text fully states this was “perhaps the first and only recorded instance of the introduction of rationing in time of peace”, but even what that was written some other Communist and mismanaged regimes had introduced rationing during peacetime.

256 “*Kartochnaya sistema v SSSR 1928–1935 godov*” (“[Ration] Card System in the USSR 1928–1935”); 2013; <https://navimann.livejournal.com/296762.html> (in Russian).

scheme, since they grew their own food. Various class enemies like the former nobility, the former bourgeoisie, and clerics were also not included in the system and had to purchase goods in the expensive commercial stores, unregulated farm markets, *torgsin* stores (covered below), or the black market.

In 1931, the Soviets unified the various rationing plans into a single consistent system for the entire country. They also began ending the rationing of certain goods, particularly many manufactured consumer goods but not food. Rationing continued to be lifted in stages until even food was not rationed by October 1935. Rationing was officially completely ended on 1 January 1936. Also in 1936, the Soviets allowed for private provision of minor goods and services like carpentry, hair dressing, tailoring, plumbing, and photography.

The official ending of rationing was partially motivated by political considerations. Soviet propaganda started to claim that socialism in the USSR had mostly been achieved, and Stalin himself proclaimed in 1935 that “Living has become better, comrades. Living has become happier. And when life becomes happier, work becomes more effective.”²⁵⁷ Propaganda seized on this theme, with a popular song, “Life Has Become Better” («*Zhit Stalo Luchshe*»), bombarding the citizenry in 1936 with its chorus of “Life has become better, life has become more joyous!”

In reality, many consumer goods remained in short supply, and desirable goods quickly sold out, especially at the shops with the lowest prices. Food shortages also occurred. A new system, which was rationing in everything but name, evolved in many places in response to the food shortages. When basic foodstuffs were not available, local authorities would have stores issue coupons or cards that could be redeemed later. For example, “preliminary order” (*predvaritelnyy zakaz*) cards were issued in Kostroma²⁵⁸, when a particular foodstuff was not available. The Kostroma cards, however, were only good for a limited amount of the foodstuff, below the established Soviet daily norms. The Soviets daily norm for bread at this time was 2 kg (4.4 lbs), but the Kostroma card was for just 600 grams (1.3 lbs). This was rationing in everything but name. In 1940, a survey of 50 Soviet republics and regions found that 40 (80%) were

²⁵⁷ This was from a speech given by Stalin at the First All-Union Meeting of the Stakhanovites, November 17, 1935.

²⁵⁸ “*Kartochnaya sistema v SSSR 1928–1935 godov*” (“[Ration] Card System in the USSR 1928–1935”); 2013; <https://navimann.livejournal.com/296762.html> (in Russian).

issuing these coupons or cards. Scarcity of consumer goods would frequently be a feature of the Soviet system almost throughout the entire existence of the USSR.

While details changed over time, from the late 1920s a tiered system of stores selling consumer goods was created, with the state owning the stores and setting prices. At the basic tier, workers (and their families) but not the general public had access to shops and cafeterias at the state enterprises where they worked. These closed shops sold goods, mostly just basic necessities and some food, at low prices set by the government²⁵⁹. The low prices were part of a broad system to encourage people to work, as the closed shops. (Access to housing through employment was another way to encourage people to work.)

The next tier was state-owned commercial stores, open to the general public. These sold consumer goods without rationing at prices set by the state, typically 2–4 times higher than those in the closed shops²⁶⁰. These stores often had access to a wider range of consumer goods, but even here many goods were often in short supply. In many places, commercial stores were quite small. State-run department stores with a wide range of products existed only in some cities, mostly the larger ones. Food shops often specialized in only a few types of foodstuffs, as the 1930s Soviets did not have supermarkets. Meat, bread, and produce, for example, were most sold in separate stores²⁶¹.

The shortage of goods imposed non-monetary costs on many Soviet citizens. In the cities, it became typical to spend great amounts of free time searching the various stores in search of goods. When a store did get a shipment of a desired item, people queued for considerable amounts of time to gain access to the store. Sometimes people bought items they did not actually need or want, simply because it had become available. They would keep in case of future need (“speculative stockpiling”) or try to barter it with others for other items.

259 During rationing, workers also needed to use ration coupons to purchases rationed items as these shops. As rationing was being lifted, there existed two prices for some goods in these stores: a low price when bought with a ration coupon and a higher prices when bought without a coupon. Of course, when rationing ended, the goods remain for sale at the higher prices, although there were still lower than those at the commercial stores.

260 Some prices, particularly for food, could be substantially higher at times, such as bread being 20 times more expensive in commercial stores than closed stores in 1933. See Steven M. Efremov; thesis, “The Role of Inflation in Soviet History: Prices, Living Standards, and Political Change”; 2012; <https://dc.etsu.edu/etd/1474>.

261 Supermarkets were a growing kind of store in various western countries in the 1930s but even there did not become dominant until later.

This system also bred corruption: store employees would sometimes hold back items and only sell them to people willing to bribe them. (The bribes were disguised as “fees” for special access to the item.) Store employees would sometimes withhold items to reserve them for themselves or their friends. Some items were diverted to the black market. In some stores, the Soviets fought these kinds of corruption by requiring customers to go through a three-step process to make their purchases, each step involving a different employee. This increased the amount of time citizens had to spend shopping.

Another tier was the *torgsin* or “hard currency” stores. These were typically well stocked with desirable goods but required purchasers to use foreign currency or precious metals like gold or silver, all of which the Soviets wanted in order to help pay for imported goods and services. After the mid-1920s, few common citizens had access to foreign currency, except for sailors, diplomats, and members of the Soviet elite who were allowed to travel out of the country. Common citizens might have some gold or silver coins, jewelry, or other items hidden away, which the *torgsin* stores would accept. You might expect prices at *torgsin* stores to be high, but the Soviets set them at lower levels than the commercial stores, to encourage people to part with their valuables.

Communist Party members had privileged access to various goods.

After the end of the NEP, there remained a few legal markets where prices were not set by the government. Peasants farming their tenured land²⁶² (and workers who were allotted use of small plots of land for farming) sold food to the public at farm markets without price controls. Collective agriculture introduced by Stalin, however, soon reduced most peasants to members of collective farms (*kolkhozes*) or employees at state farms (*sovkhozes*). From 1932, the farm markets became *kolkhoz* markets where both private growers and the *kolkhozes* were allowed to sell food at unregulated prices.

Outside the legal system, the black market continued to sell food and all sorts of legal and illegal goods without regulation. (Illegal goods included drugs, many types of firearms, and other products the Soviets prohibited the citizenry from having.) The black market did respond to the effects of Soviet price controls: the

²⁶² The peasants did not own their own land, as the Soviet state from its creation officially owned all land. The Soviets, however, gave the peasants tenure to the land they were farming.

persistent shortages of many goods resulted in black market prices far above those the Soviets set for their commercial prices.

While the introduction of the chervonets and the 1924 currency reform law ended hyperinflation, it turned out that the Soviets were not fully serious about having a stable currency. While Soviet budgets invariably ran a surplus from 1925 until World War II, the government cheated with chervonets banknotes. These were supposed to be fully backed up by reserves of value, but the Soviets would print more banknotes than they had reserves, although not to such an extent to rekindle runaway inflation.

Even without deficit spending from 1924, the Soviets continued to greatly expand the amount of money in circulation, arguing that this was necessary because the economy was expanding rapidly.

*Money in Circulation in the USSR (chervonets rubles)*²⁶³

Year	Millions of Rubles
1924	322
1926	1,263
1930	2,773
1932	5,677
1937	11,256

Outside the Soviet Union, many economist strongly suspected that the rapid expanding money supply must have been creating inflationary pressures. Various Soviet actions can be partially or fully seen as attempts to hide inflation from Soviet citizens and from outsiders: Rescinding the ability of Soviet citizens to convert chervonets currency to foreign currency; discouraging and then ending the ability of citizens to purchase gold; making the Soviet currency an internal currency. The Soviets also ceased to publish an index of prices from 1931 and their money supply figures from 1938.

So, did inflation occur? Yes, as both **open inflation** and **repressed inflation**²⁶⁴. The Soviets periodically increased prices in the closed, commercial, and torgsin stores throughout the

²⁶³ Michael T. Florinsky; "Inflations: Russia—The U.S.S.R."; *Current History* Vol. 15, No. 83; 1948; <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45307374>.

²⁶⁴ Repressed inflation is sometimes called commodity deficit. Besides repressed inflation, there could also be hidden inflation, in which the official price indexes, which measured open inflation, did not accurately reflect the actual, higher cost of living to the citizenry. Hidden inflation could be the unintentional result of poorly-designed indexes or the intentional result of manipulating the data to make inflation seem lower. The Soviets simply ceased publishing their price index from 1931, so I do not try to cover hidden inflation in this guidebook.

The claim that the Soviet Union did not have inflation only applies after the currency reform of 1947, following World War II. Inflation did not actually end. While open inflation was suppressed, this resulted in repressed inflation.

1930s. Open inflation also occurred in the unregulated legal markets for food, such as the kolkhoz markets. These prices also sometimes bled into the regulated economy as inflation, as the Soviets partially based some of their commercial prices on the kolkhoz market prices (such as setting these prices close to but below the market prices).

Considerable repressed inflation occurred starting in the late 1920s, when the NEP was ended, the centrally-planned economy and the five year plans were started, and the Soviets set most prices of goods through their control of production and distribution. Demand for most consumer goods consistently outstripped supply, as wages for working citizens gave them the ability to pay for more desirable goods than were available. (Some basic goods, like cabbage, were often plentiful.) In more open economies, this situation normally would have caused “demand-pull inflation”: prices would rise in response to demand until supply and demand went into balance. The Soviet system prevented demand-pull inflation from occurring, since the Soviet government set prices for political or economic goals. Price controls and the prioritization of industrial goods over consumer goods resulted in repressed inflation, characterized by frequent and enduring shortage of most desirable goods. (Repressed inflation could not be solved by one-off price increases, since these only temporarily relieved the problem. The underlying mismatch between demand and supply remained, with shortages soon resuming²⁶⁵.) Besides the Soviets deliberately shorting consumer goods in favor of industrial goods, mistakes in central planning meant unintentional shortages of goods could also occur.

Once Stalin gained power, inflationary pressures became acute due to his economic policies, particularly on agriculture and industrialization. In 1930–1933, the rapid and brutal conversion of the USSR to collective agriculture caused famine in many places and food shortages across the country. Food prices spiked in the unregulated farm and kolkhoz markets, and scarcity of food was a source of repressed inflation in the price-controlled economy. This problem was temporary, easing when agriculture output recovered.

²⁶⁵ More-permanent solutions to this problem were usually unattractive to the Soviets. One was to allow unrestrained inflation to erode the purchasing power of wages, but this risked alienating the bulk of the working population, possibly leading to widespread unrest, lower economic growth, or worse. Another solution was to increase the supply of consumer goods to match demand. However, this would have led to slower economic growth as it would have come at the expense of production of economy-building industrial goods. The Soviets’ Third Five Year Plan which started in 1938 was actually intended to increase production of consumer goods, but the growing threat of war with Germany led to the Soviets changing its emphasis to military production. Even if the third plan had been implemented as intended, I find it quite unclear if the plan would have been more than a temporary fix without actually resolving the underlying repressed inflation problem. Post-war plans, for example, failed to resolve repressed inflation.

Stalin's program of massive and rapid industrialization of the USSR was a sustained source of inflation. There were many factors contributing to this, but a major one was that the Soviets wanted a very rapid rate of industrialization. The system was thus managed to boost production of industrial goods at the expense of consumer goods.

Soviet Prices and Nominal Wages, 1928–1940
(Averaged Annual Increase in Percent)

<i>Period</i>	<i>Estimated Consumer Goods Inflation</i>	<i>Estimated Industrial Goods Inflation</i>	<i>Nominal Wage Increases</i>
1928–1937	22.5%–26.3%	12.2%	17.6%
1938–1940	8.0%–13.0%	6.5%	10.3%

Source: Domenico Mario Nuti; “Hidden and Repressed Inflation in Soviet-type Economies: Definitions, Measurements and Stabilisation”; 1985; <https://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/23103>.

Estimated Consumer Goods Inflation: The inflation rate of consumer goods (“Type B” goods) is a compilation of estimates based on known prices in closed and commercial stores, weighted by various methods to yield an overall inflation rate.

Estimated Industrial Goods Inflation: The inflation rate of industrial goods (“Type A” goods) was consistently lower than that of consumer goods, since the Soviets rigged the economic system to favor industrial goods.

Nominal Wage Increases: Nominal wages are not adjusted for inflation. The Soviet government set wages for government employees and military personnel. The government strongly influenced wages in state-owned enterprises. Stalin's rapid industrialization required massive numbers of workers, who for much of the 1920s–1930s could freely quit jobs and take new ones at other state-owned enterprises. Enterprise managers were often highly motivated to get workers, even to the point of over-staff their facilities, as they needed to achieve the ambitious production goals the government set for them. This motivated managers to raise wages and thus the prices of their goods. The Communist Party and Soviet government in turn sought to build the economy at the expense of the works. The Party controlled all labor unions and ran them to advance Party and state interests rather than the welfare of their members²⁶⁶. The government passed various laws and regulations that favor worker compensation on a piecework system, in which workers who failed to reach 100% of quota made less than half the wage for the job and only workers who achieve 150% of quota received the full wage. The Soviets then over time

266 N.M. Shvernik, the head of the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions, once proclaimed “We must fight against the attempts utilize the progressive piecework system for a mechanical increase of wages, unconnected with an increase in the productivity of labor”. In other words, the head of the Soviet labor union movement was against better pay for workers. The Soviet government later awarded Shvernik with the Hero of Socialist Labor award.

increased the quantities need to reach quota. The Soviets came up with various schemes to pay workers less than the full amount they worked, through “holidays of liberated labor” in which workers “volunteered” to work without pay on days off, and with the Soviets increasing the work day and work week with a less-than proportional increase in wages. However, the Soviets were restrained in that wages had to at least appear to be adequate, to avoid widespread worker discontent that might affect economic performance.

Starting in 1928, the Soviets began the first of a series of five-year plans to industrialize the country. The first Five Year Plan also transitioned Soviet farming to collectivize agriculture, away from individual peasant farms. Voluntary collective farming had not taken off during the NEP, and even state farms were just a minor part of Soviet agriculture: In 1928 the USSR had about 14,800 collective farms and 1,600 state farms, which together had only 2.7% of the country’s cultivated land and were worked on by only 4% of the peasantry²⁶⁷.

Collectivization was intimately connected with industrialization. The Soviet state intended to capture the agricultural surplus of the peasantry for use in industrialization. Part of the surplus would feed the millions of industrial workers, without the government having to pay the peasants a fair price for their output. However, the main goal of appropriating the surplus was to increase Soviet grain exports (particularly wheat), to earn foreign currency that was needed to pay for imports of goods and services needed for industrialization. The Soviets also expected collective agriculture would be more efficient, increasing harvests that in turn would earn even more foreign currency. Increasing industrialization in part would provide tractors and other agricultural equipment that would mechanize agriculture. This in turn would reduce the need for agricultural laborers, allowing the Soviets to send millions of peasants to become factory workers. The plan broadly worked, but at huge human cost. As we will see, the brutal way the Soviets forced collective agriculture onto the peasantry would first cause a massive famine that killed millions. Longer term, collective agriculture would turn out to be less productive than the Soviets had hoped.

What’s in a Word: Kolkhoz and Sovkhoz

A **kolkhoz** was a Soviet collective farm, a contraction of the phrase *kollektivnoe khozyaystvo* (collective farm). It was in theory a voluntary cooperative of farmers but not in practice.

A **sovkhoz** was a Soviet state farm, a contraction of the phrase *sovetskoe khozyaystvo* (soviet farm). It was owned by the state and its farmers were state

267 Vladimir Maksovich Efimov; “*Russkaya Agrarnaya Institutsionalnaya Sistema (Istoriko-Konstruktivistskiy Analiz)*” (“The Russian Agricultural Institutional System (Historical-Constructivist Analysis)”); 2013; <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/211608602.pdf> (in Russian).

employees. Sovkhoves had first been formed in 1918 using land seized from large landlord estates²⁶⁸.

The Soviet Union had evolved three types of collective farms during the NEP period: the TOZ, the agricultural artel, and the agricultural commune (see [The Start of Collective Farms](#) for more details). Although the TOZ was by far the most popular collective organization among the peasantry, it was also the least socialist in nature, as the peasants in it still own considerable amounts of private property. The Soviets in 1930 decided to phase them out, converting most of them into agricultural artels. The agricultural commune had been the most socialist in nature, but it was also by far the least popular collective organization among the peasantry. Many communes were also economically unviable. The Soviets accordingly also decided to convert the communes to artels. Most TOZes and communes had been converted by 1935 and all were gone by 1938. “Kolkhoz” during this time became synonymous with agricultural artel.

*Rise of Collective Farming*²⁶⁹

	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936
Percentage of peasants in collective farms	23.6	52.7	61.5	64.4	71.4	83.2	89.6
Percentage of cultivated land that was socialized	33.6	67.8	77.6	83.1	87.4	94.1	–

Collective farms and state farms were one component in a huge state agro-industrial complex that evolved in the USSR. Mechanized agriculture basically had not existed in the Russian Empire, and a considerable amount of Soviet industrial development concentrated on mechanized and modernizing Soviet agriculture. The huge tractors factories, which made Soviet tanks during World War II, were just the most famous face of a vast industry making equipment to support Soviet agriculture and process its output. The Soviets also invested in huge irrigation projects, transforming parts of the dry Central Asian desert lands into cotton fields, making the USSR independent of cotton from the capitalist world. (The cost of this was the eventual destruction of the Aral Sea.) The Soviet chemical industry developed in part to make fertilizers for farming.

²⁶⁸ It might seem logical and simpler if the Soviets had only collective farms or state farms rather than both, but the Soviets did not favor this. “Agroindustrial combines” (*agroindustrialnye kombinaty*) were formed in Ukraine starting in 1929. A combine united collective farms and state farms into a group using a common production plan for the growing, processing, packaging, and distribution of agricultural products (a “vertically-integrated” enterprise using modern business jargon), but these combines were too complex for the Soviet system of the time and were disbanded in 1931. The Soviets would try similar combines later, in the 1970s and 1980s (for much of this information, see <https://old.bigenc.ru/text/5047866>, in Russian).

²⁶⁹ Vladimir Maksovich Efimov; “*Russkaya Agrarnaya Institutsionalnaya Sistema (Istoriko-Konstruktivistskiy Analiz)*” (“The Russian Agricultural Institutional System (Historical-Constructivist Analysis)”); 2013; <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/211608602.pdf> (in Russian).

Spotlight: Soviet Agricultural Science, Vavilov, and Lysenko

Soviet science devoted considerable attention to agriculture, given the attractions of increasing crop yields and making farming more reliable in the many places in the USSR with cold, variable climates. N.I. Vavilov, for example, was a foremost agronomist, botanist, and geneticist who worked tirelessly to develop Soviet agricultural science in hopes of preventing famines, which has periodically struck Russia and the USSR. He became convinced of the need to preserve wild food species, many of which were in danger of extinction due to human development throughout the world.



Left: N.I. Vavilov (center back) in Uruguay, 1937²⁷⁰

Right: Illustration of wild pears collected by Vavilov in Central Asia, 1932²⁷¹

Vavilov mounted numerous expeditions to collect seeds from five continents and established the world's large seed bank in Leningrad, at the All-Union Scientific Research Institute of Plant Industry, which Vavilov headed. During the German siege of Leningrad during World War II, the institute preserved its seed bank and food experiments in Leningrad even as hundreds of thousands of Leningraders starved, including nine of the institute's scientists.

Unfortunately, Marxism and especially Stalinism infected parts of Soviet science with ideological nonsense. The Soviets with their ideas of the New Soviet Man and Woman favored the idea that people could be improved quickly through

270 Photograph from Archivos del CIAAB available at Wikimedia Commons, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nikolai_Vavilov#/media/File:Visita_de_Nikol%C3%A1_Iv%C3%A1novich_Vavilov.JPG. (The person in the center front is Alberto Boerger, a German-Uruguayan agronomist whom Vavilov came to meet.)

271 Illustration by J.S. Lawson stemming from Vavilov's meeting with Richard Wellington at the International Genetics Congress in 1932. Photograph of the illustration from Biodiversity Heritage Library.

willpower and the molding of their environment. Classical genetics with its slower, generational rate of change through Mendelian inheritance seemed an obstacle to their plans. What applied to human applied to animals and plants, and the Soviets rejoiced when agronomist T.D. Lysenko seemed to show that plants could acquire inheritable favorable characteristics from how they were treated in their lifetimes (a form of Lamarckism, as opposed to classical genetics). Lysenko claimed to have improved crops yields and cold hardiness of important crops by his means. He attracted the favor of Stalin, Soviet propaganda feted him, and Lysenko rose to become director of the Institute of Genetics in the Soviet Academy of Sciences.

Lysenko was taking advantage of the Soviets to advance his career and status through pseudoscientific ideas. Some of his work was likely outright fraudulent and much of it was contaminated by minor statistical errors (possibly deliberate) that favored his conclusions. Many Soviet scientists at first disagreed with Lysenko, who in revenge used his political connections to suppress dissent, marginalize or fire his critics, and even imprison his opponents. Vavilov, the leading Soviet plant geneticist, was arrested in 1940, imprisoned, and placed on a starvation diet during the war. Vavilov died of disease likely included by malnutrition in 1943.

Lysenkoism became mandatory for Soviet agricultural science, leading the Soviets to undertake agricultural projects that failed to live up to their promise, although Lysenko attributed failure to other factors than his theories. Lysenko's influence started to wane in 1953 with the death of Stalin and the publication of the role DNA played in genetics. However, Nikita Khrushchyov, Stalin's successor, continued to champion Lysenko, and the application of Lysenkoist theories to Chinese agriculture contributed to the massive Chinese famine of the late 1950s. Lysenko was finally denounced and demoted in the early 1960s.



Unichtozhim kulaka kak klass
Let's destroy the kulaks as a class

In this poster promoting class warfare, the kulaks are the ugly people wearing blue, trying to hold back progress, while the tractor is about to sweep them away. The message was that tractors would free the peasants from the kulaks. Tractors often featured in Soviet propaganda of the time and even became an economic weapon. From 1926, the Soviets prevented kulaks from even purchasing tractors. The official reason was that the kulaks would use tractors to increase their advantages: “a tractor, falling into the hands of a kulak, could become an instrument of exploitation of the poor and middle peasants”²⁷². Likely, another reason was to put economic pressure on the kulaks to join collective farms or lose out on mechanization.

Forced collectivization was soon accompanied by a policy of “dispossession” (*raskulachivanie*) towards the kulaks. This was the start of “dekulakization”: the liquidation of the kulaks as a class. The Soviets considered kulaks to be the property-owning petty bourgeoisie who exploited the labor of other peasants and who would always be hostile to socialism. The Soviets had oppressed the kulaks from the start of the Soviet state in 1917, but

272 P.I. Lyashchenko; *Istoriya Narodnogo Khozyaystva SSSR, Tom 2 (History of the People's Economy of the USSR, Volume 2)*; 1952.

official Soviet policy up to 1929 had been to try to get the kulaks to voluntarily join collective farms. Stalin disagreed and in 1930 had the Soviet state begin the process of dekulakization. The criteria for being considered a kulak were fluid, and many middle peasants were denounced as kulaks. The campaign involved mass murder of kulaks in the countryside and the sending of more than 1.8 million peasants to GULag forced-labor camps and colonies in 1930–1931, where hundreds of thousands died²⁷³. Kulak property was confiscated and turned over to collective and state farms or was seized by neighbors. The surviving kulaks were targeted again later in the 1930s during Stalin's Great Purge.

Collectivization was implemented rapidly and was a disaster. Most peasants did not want to be collectivized but were forced into collective farms, although Soviet authorities pretended this was voluntary. Many peasants slaughtered most or all of their livestock for food rather than lose it to the collective, resulting in a massive, abrupt decline in Soviet livestock numbers. Some peasants facing collectivization forcibly resisted Soviet authorities; many more protested or rioted: an estimated 200,000 peasants rioted in 1929 in 1,300 incidents; 1.4 million rioted in more than 6,500 incidents in 1930²⁷⁴. Soviet security forces suppressed the riots, often with heavy-handed violence. Very many peasants who were forcibly collectivized became disgruntled, indifferent workers on the collective farms, especially after it became clear that the farms were being run for the benefit of the Soviet state rather than the people working on them. Many workers on collective farms were unmotivated, realizing that there was little or no personal benefit for working hard.

By 1930, Soviet agriculture had been badly disrupted. Stalin was forced to publicly rein back collectivization, hiding the failure by claiming it was so successful that his underlings had “become dizzy with success”²⁷⁵ and committed some excesses in the rapid rush to collectivize. Unlike Lenin, who had realized that War Communism was failing and the NEP was necessary, Stalin was far more reluctant to concede a failure and change course. After a brief pause, forced collectivization was brought back with redoubled force. The result was now a massive famine, widespread starvation, and even cannibalism.

273 One goal of sending kulaks to labor colonies was to relocate them as “special settlers” in remote areas where their labor in activities like mining and logging would build the Soviet economy in places that lacked a local work force. However, the massive influx of kulaks into a system poorly prepared for them meant most kulaks only received starvation-level rations at this time. Many died of starvation or diseases brought on by malnutrition.

274 Aleh Tsyvinski, Mikhail Golosov, Sergei Guriev, and Anton Cheremukhin; “Stalin and Soviet Industrialisation”; 2013; <https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/stalin-and-soviet-industrialisation>.

275 I.V. Stalin; “Dizzy with Success: Concerning Questions of the Collective-Farm Movement”; *Pravda*; 2 March 1930; <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1930/03/02.htm>.

The disruption of agriculture coincided with droughts in 1931 and 1932. These droughts were milder than earlier ones but still contributed to the famine. On the order 7 million people died of starvation (estimates range from 5.7 million to 8.7 million). The Ukrainian SSR with its large agricultural sector was particularly hard hit, with the famine becoming known as the *Holodomor* (from the Ukrainian words *holod* [“hunger, famine”] and *mor* [“mass death, exhaustion”])²⁷⁶. An estimated 3.3–5.0 million died in Ukraine. Collectivization extended beyond traditional farming and encompassed traditional herding lifestyles. For example, in many parts of Central Asia where semi-nomadic herding of private livestock was common, the herders were forced into settlements and had their herds collectivized. In what is now Kazakhstan, the resulting famine killed an estimated 1.5 million people (estimates range from 1.1–2.3 million). Deaths among ethnic Kazakhs are estimated at about 1.3 million, representing 38%–42% of all Kazakhs and making Kazakhs a minority population in their own homeland for decades to come.

The Soviets were aware of the developing mass famine. Under Stalin’s orders, they not only did not try to alleviate the famine, they followed policies that exacerbated the death toll. Grain quotas for Ukraine were set extremely high, which most farms could not meet. The Soviets then sent in security forces and Party volunteers to forcibly collect grain. Rural areas in Ukraine were cordoned off to prevent starving peasants from fleeing to the cities to seek relief. Some Soviet officials and Party members were disturbed over the amount of suffering, informing Stalin of the situation. He could not admit his policies were at fault and promoted the view that anti-socialist peasants were deliberately starving themselves to make the USSR look bad.



Tractors with towed harvesters for the wheat harvest at Sovkhoz «Gigant» (the “Giant” State Farm in the Rostov region of southern Russia) in the 1930s

²⁷⁶ Etymology from <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Holodomor>.

Although Stalin's agricultural policies are called the "collectivization" of agriculture, Stalin had big plans for the state farms as well as the collective farms. The Soviets had allowed the state farms to languish in the mid-1920s but then began revitalizing them in 1926–1927. In 1928, Stalin decided to expand the state farm system by building huge state farms specializing in grain production. The goal was to increase the output of marketable wheat by about 250% by 1933²⁷⁷.

This ambitious plan for state farms incurred many problems. While the plan brought a large increase in marketable wheat by 1931, it was not efficient. The huge state farms did not receive sufficient tractors and other equipment for the scale of their operations. Soviet farm management was insufficient to handle such large farms, leading to large wastage of grain during harvesting and processing. Farming standards were lowered to accommodate mechanized agriculture, resulting soil degradation, weed infestation, and lowered yields. State grain farms went from about 0.34 metric tons of marketable wheat per hectare in 1929 to about 0.27 tons per hectare in 1932²⁷⁸. The Soviets only met their goals by placing a huge amount of land into the state grain farms.

The Soviets knew the state grain farms were inefficient and worked to reform the system. Things improved in the mid-1930s as equipment levels increased, the equipment itself improved, and farming standards were restored. In 1934, yields of marketable wheat per hectare finally slightly surpassed those of 1929. They reached 0.49 tons per hectare in 1935 and 0.75 tons per hectare in 1937, a substantial accomplishment. Stalin's need to do everything at breakneck speed had achieved results, but through inefficient use of resources. I suspect a slower pace of adoptions, allowing for proper equipment levels and the gaining of experience, would have used resources better and wasted less grain, albeit forgoing the impressive but unsustainable early increases.

Collectivization had insidious effects across the Soviet economy. The many unmotivated workers on the collective and state farms used the farms' agricultural tools and machinery harshly and did not maintain them well²⁷⁹. This is illustrated by the plight of Soviet tractors.

277 Soviet state farms in 1927 produced on the order of 737,000 metric tons of wheat. However, only 65% was considered marketable, about 479,000 metric tons. The goal was 1,650,000 metric tons of marketable wheat by 1933.

278 My yield figures are derived from the area of state grain farms actually under cultivation (as opposed to the total area of the farms, which was always much greater) and the amount of grain delivered to the government (which I assume is the same as "marketable" wheat). See <https://ru.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%A1%D0%BE%D0%B2%D1%85%D0%BE%D0%B7> (in Russian) and be aware that "bread" (*khleb*) in Russian can actually mean grain, not bread. My apologies for using Wikipedia rather than a more reliable source, but the figures here do seem correct.

279 Besides indifference, ignorance played a role here, too. Many workers on these farms had been peasants who had used animal power on their own farms and had no experience in using or taking proper care of equipment like tractors.

The state took pride in building huge modern tractor factories and eventually making the USSR the second-largest tractor maker in the world. While Soviet tractors had problems due to low-quality manufacturing, their problems were made much worse by their poor treatment on the farms. A tractor that in the US might last for 10 years was often in so poor shape after three years that it spend almost half its time being repaired²⁸⁰.



Pobeda revolyutsii v sotrudnichestve rabochikh i krestyan

Victory of the revolution through the cooperation of workers and peasants
(Poster; M.M. Cheremnykh; 1930)

The poster is celebrating the first two years of the first five-year plan, with farming and on the left and industry on the right. The central building being entered by the lines of peasants and workers is the Congress of Soviets. This officially was the supreme Soviet government institution, although Stalin reduced it to a rubber-stamp body and retained it for political theater.

Stalin's collectivization of agriculture was especially brutal and also reduced the rural standard of living, since agricultural surplus were being appropriated by the state to finance industrialization. However, collectivization of agriculture also released many peasants to go work at factories in the cities. Since the Soviet urban standard of living was higher (albeit certainly not generous), these new proletarians did see their living conditions improve. Many also continue their agrarian traditions in the their spare, as many workers were allowed to tend small plots of land for their personal use.

²⁸⁰ Dana G. Dalrymple; "The American Tractor Comes to Soviet Agriculture: The Transfer of a Technology"; *Technology and Culture* Vol. 5 No. 2; 1964.

Soviet Rural and Urban Population, 1926 vs. 1939, millions of people

Year	Total Population	Rural	Urban
1926	147.0	120.7 (82%)	26.3 (18%)
1939	170.5	114.6 (67%)	55.9 (33%)

Source: Sheila Fitzpatrick; "War and Society in Soviet Context: Soviet Labor before, during, and after World War II"; *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 35; 1989; <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27671803>

1939 numbers do not include territory annexed into the USSR that year.

It is estimated that about 18 million peasants migrated from the countryside into cities and towns from 1926 to 1939 and became urban workers, particularly unskilled factory workers.



Forced labor building the White Sea-Baltic Canal named for I.V. Stalin, circa 1932

The Soviets favored slave labor because it was cheap, requiring minimal resources. When building this canal, inmates worked 16-hour days using little more than hand tools and muscle power. Food and medical care were often in short supply. Some projects, particularly this canal, saw high death tolls from overwork, hunger, and disease. The building of the canal in 1931–1933 coincided with the Soviet famine caused by Stalin’s collectivization of agriculture. The prisoners’ already-scanty rations were reduced to starvation levels by 1932, and tens of thousands died.

Many projects the Soviets wanted to undertake were uneconomical due to the need to pay wages for tens of thousands of workers, or because the projects were in remote areas that lacked a work force. Stalin’s typical brutal solution was the massive use of forced labor. The building of many factories, the extraction of natural resources in remote regions, and the

construction of many infrastructure projects like canals, railroads, and dams increasingly depended on the forced labor of prisoners. Since these slave laborers were not paid, the state only had to provide them with food, accommodations, and medical care, all of which were kept minimal. The prisoners mostly worked using hand tools and animal power, which further spared the state the expense of providing expensive equipment like bulldozers, excavators, dump trucks, and so on. This made various projects economically feasible, such as the White Sea-Baltic Canal, which had previously been judged economically unviable if built using wage laborers. It also made feasible projects in remote regions with harsh climates, such as the Kolyma gold fields or the Norilsk nickel mines, both in the Siberian Arctic. Very few free (non-prisoner) workers would agree to go to these places.

Stalin's liquidation of kulaks, which started in 1929, was intended not just to remove this "rural bourgeoisie" from their farms but also to make them "special settlers" (forced laborers) in remote regions. This inaugurated a massive expansion of the existing system of forced-labor camps which the Soviets had built since 1918. This was the start of the GULag with its millions of inmates. After the kulaks came waves of other prisoners into the system.

The Soviet secret police²⁸¹ forces were also massively expanded and received sweeping extrajudicial powers. They were often given quotas of how many people to arrest for the GULag, and they filled their quotas regardless of the actual guilt or innocence of those they arrested. Ambitious secret police officers would request higher quotas, which on at least one instance caused a pleased Stalin to promote the requesting officer.

The GULag system was created in 1929 but received its name in 1930. GULag stood for **G**lavnoe **U**pravlenie **I**spravitel'no-**T**rudovykh **L**agerey, Main Directorate of Corrective-Labor Camps²⁸². "Corrective-Labor" was the Soviets' fiction that the inmates were common criminals being humanely reformed into good citizens through labor, and occasional observers from west countries were often duped into believing conditions in the GULag were benign. In reality in the camps, inmate labor was essentially slave labor, coerced under the Soviet principle "He who does not work, neither shall he eat". Hunger became the prevalent condition in the camps for most prisoners, and death resulting from malnutrition became common. The Soviets came to hide the fact that they were starving their prisoners by recording such deaths as due to "alimentary dystrophy".

Beside the forced-labor camps, the GULag also included forced-labor colonies, where prisoners with shorter sentences were sent. Colonies had a lower level of security and

281 This was the OGPU in 1929 and then became the GUGB as part of the NKVD in 1934.

282 The official name of the GULag went through several changes over time but its abbreviation was always GULag.

deprivation than the camps, but they were often in remote, low-population regions that made it difficult to escape and return home.

The GULag camp system was designed to be very self-sufficient, growing as much as its own food as practical, harvesting firewood and other resources for its use, and using prisoners in medical roles and for administrative tasks like bookkeeping. Once the GULag ramped up, many trained professionals became prisoners, and, for example, imprisoned doctors often headed the camps' rudimentary medical services, with semi-invalid prisoners being used as medical assistants to help care for the worse-off. All this meant the camps required minimal goods and professionals from the rest of the Soviet economy. However, forced labor of malnourished prisoners using hand tools was very inefficient, a fact Stalin could not grasp. The innocent people sent to the GULag would have almost certainly have contributed more to the growth of the Soviet economy had they remained free and productive in their jobs. Worse, as the GULag and Stalin's ambitions expanded, the system was assigned projects that made little sense even using forced labor, such as the Transpolar Mainline, a railroad in the Siberian Arctic. The Soviets quickly abandoned construction of this line after Stalin's death in 1953.

For a more-detailed treatment of Soviet forced labor, see the chapter "Forced Labor of Prisoners: The GULag and GUPVI" in the Classic Europe Guidebook, *Soviet Energy, Fuel, and Power in the Second World War*.

To industrialize the country, the first five-year plan required considerable amounts of foreign goods and expertise, such as advanced industrial equipment the USSR could not manufacture yet and expert guidance on how to build advanced factories and plants. Some examples include:

- The Soviets hired the American Ford Motor Company to build a state-of-the-art automotive factory at Nizhniy Novgorod (later renamed Gorkiy) that would build Soviet versions of Ford's Model A cars and trucks.
- The Stalingrad Tractor Factory was actually designed and built in the United States, disassembled, shipped to the USSR, and reassembled at Stalingrad.
- Most Soviet refineries of the 1920s used older technology that was not capable of producing high-quality gasoline in great amounts or of making advanced lubricants that engines and equipment increasingly needed. American oil companies were contracted to supply the equipment and knowledge on these matters, such as on how to make advancing cracking plants.

- The Soviets also obtained licenses to manufacture their own versions of a variety of equipment, including agricultural tractors, aircraft engines, and antitank weapons. The Soviet 45-mm tank and antitank guns, made in great quantities in the 1930s, derived from a German 37-mm antitank gun²⁸³.

When the Soviets licensed foreign equipment for manufacture in the USSR, they typically did not negotiate in good faith. Once they got a license, they would receive the manufacturing specifications for the equipment as well as expert advice on its manufacture. They would also import several foreign-made versions of the item²⁸⁴. Some would be taken apart and examined in detail by Soviet engineers to help them understand the specification. The Soviets would adapt the specifications and designs for Soviet conditions, such as for the harsh Soviet climate or the poor Soviet infrastructure (such as the lack of paved roads between cities). The Soviets would then often decide the adaptation constituted a new model beyond the scope of the license, freeing them from having to pay per-item-made licensing fees. If they did pay licensing fees for the first Soviet model of a foreign item, they would then introduce minor changes for a second model that they then declared license-free. (For example, the 82-mm Battalion Mortar M1936 was a licensed version of the French 81.4-mm mortar from the Brandt company, soon slightly modified to become a new, license-free model, the 82-mm Battalion Mortar M1937.) This saved the Soviets considerable expense. For example, they made hundreds of thousands of engines based on engines licensed from foreign countries. It does seem, however, that at least some foreign companies realized what the Soviets were doing and increased the up-front cost of a license to compensate for the lack of per-item-made revenue.

The Soviets greatly relied on American equipment, technology, and experts for industrialization, since American companies tended to be the most technologically advanced in many industries. Soviet contracts were quite welcome to American companies, particularly after the Great Depression began in 1929. One major obstacle of this Soviet-American deals was that banks outside the USSR were unwilling to issue loans to the USSR. This restricted business to what the Soviets could pay for with their limited amounts of foreign currency, while the Soviets wanted to do much more business. American companies eventually found a way around this by borrowing from the banks in their own names and

283 The German 37-mm gun was an advanced design using alloys Soviet industry could not reliably make. To match the power of the German 37-mm design when using less-advanced alloys, the Soviets had to make the gun bigger and bulkier, resulting in their 45-mm guns.

284 Some foreign items were imported in considerable quantities until the Soviet versions went into mass production. For example, the Soviet imported hundreds of some models of engines.

then lending the Soviets the money to purchase their equipment and services. (The loan typically had to be paid off in five years or less.) The companies, rather than the banks, were exposed to the risk that the Soviets would not pay back the loan. The Soviet oil industry seems to have been the first to get such a loan, from the Standard Oil Company of New York (aka Socony), but this practice soon spread to other Soviet industries.

While the Soviets extensively used American companies, they also used companies of many European industrial countries, including Czechoslovakia, France, Germany, Italy, and Sweden. I have seen no evidence, however, that the Soviets tapped British companies to any significant extent, even though British technology was often equal to and sometimes better than American and German technology. I suspect the reason for this is that until about 1935 the USSR viewed Britain as innately hostile to the USSR and its most powerful potential foe.

Sidetrip: Countries the Soviets Viewed as Major Enemies

The 1920s Communist leadership of the USSR believed that it was inevitable that capitalist and imperialist countries would try to attack and destroy the USSR²⁸⁵. They classified countries based on how dangerous the leaderships perceived them to be to the USSR.

Up to about 1935, the Soviets regarded capitalist, imperialist **Britain** as the likely biggest foreign threat. Britain was an internationally-active major capitalist country with major military forces and a proven record of hostility to the Soviets. Britain's intervention during the Russian Civil War, in which British land, naval, and air forces all fought against the Soviets at times, undoubtedly had a major influence on Soviet thinking. Likely the 19th Century rivalry between Britain and the Russian Empire influenced (perhaps unconsciously) the thinking of the Communist leaders.

In reality, after the Russian Civil War ended, Britain was not actively working to overthrow the USSR. The Soviet leadership could not believe this and thought the British were engaged in highly secret operations to undermine and overthrow the USSR. When Soviet intelligence found no evidence of this, the Soviet leadership simply concluded that British intelligence was outstanding in concealing its activities²⁸⁶. Since the Soviets themselves were secretly funding

²⁸⁵ David M. Glantz; *The Military Strategy of the Soviet Union: A History*; 1992.

²⁸⁶ In the 1930s, the Soviets had recruited the "Cambridge Five", five British citizens educated at Cambridge who believed in Communism and penetrated parts of the British government and British intelligence itself to spy for the Soviets. Ironically, during the 1930s and World War II, the Soviets were highly suspicious of them being double agents and were reluctant to

revolutionary movements in many countries, it must have been inconceivable to the Soviet leadership that other countries were not trying to do the same to the USSR.

Beside Britain, the 1920s Soviets at first regarded **Poland** and **Romania** as major threats, since the Soviet military was so weak in the immediate years following the civil war. As Soviet strength grew, the importance of these countries declined, but the 1920s–1930s Soviets always classed Poland as actively hostile.

Japan, as the country that intervened in the civil war with the most troops and for the longest time, was also regarded in the early 1920s as a major threat. Japan and the Soviet Union came to a political-economic understanding in the mid-1920s (with Japan gaining a long-term lease on an important Soviet oil center), with the result that the Soviets stopped classifying Japan as actively hostile. In the early 1930s, growing Japanese militarism and territorial expansion in eastern Asia meant the Soviet again considered Japan as actively hostile.

While the USA was the worlds' foremost capitalist country and largest economy, the US became increasingly isolationist after World War I. The Soviets accordingly did not regard the US as an urgent threat, although they thought the US might join an anti-Soviet coalition, like it had joined in the Allied intervention in the civil war.

In the 1920s, the USSR and **Germany** had secret programs of cooperation on military matters. Both countries were international pariahs for much of the 1920s: the USSR for its socialism and support of world proletarian revolution; Germany because of its role in World War I. German-Soviet cooperation at secret sites in the USSR allowed the Germans to secretly violate the provisions of the Versailles Treaty, the 1919 peace treaty that had placed many harsh limits on Germany. In return, the Soviets received German expertise and assistance on advanced military technology. This did not mean the Soviets viewed Germany as an ally or even friendly. Germany was a capitalist country and had forcibly suppressed domestic socialist and communist uprisings following Germany's defeat in World War I. The Soviets considered Germany a potentially-hostile country that might join an anti-Soviet coalition.

believe some if not much of the intelligence the Five gave them. One of the reasons they were suspected was their failure to supply the Soviets with any intelligence on the presumed British efforts to undermine the USSR. The lack of evidence was due to the fact that Britain was not attempting to undermine the USSR, something the Soviet leadership could not believe.

German hostility became actual when the Nazis came to power in 1933. The Nazis were stridently antisemitic and anti-Communist, with their propaganda portraying the USSR as a state controlled by the Jews and seeking to impose “Judeo-Bolshevism” across the world. By about 1935, the growing strength and success of Nazi Germany caused the Soviets to revise their security assessments. The “**fascist aggressor**” states of German, **Italy**, and Japan were regarded as the major threats, more than the capitalist countries. The Red Army began planning for a two-front defensive war involving Germany attacking from the west and Japan from the east. Stalin still remained highly suspicious of Britain.

Soviet diplomacy attempted to build an effective collective security system with Britain and France against Nazi aggression. These efforts failed because of mistrust between the USSR and its potential partners. The Soviets believed that Britain was trying to foment a war between Germany and the USSR. With no progress on collective security, in 1939 Stalin would instead enter a non-aggression pact and secret semi-alliance with Hitler.

The first five-year plan began on 1 October 1928 with extremely ambitious goals. It was accompanied by a huge propaganda drive to encourage Soviet laborers to work harder. As it progressed, the Soviets proclaimed that the plan had realized 50% of its goals in the first two years. This was partly a propaganda ploy, as in 1929 the Soviets revised downwards the plan's goals, a fact they did not publicize. Soviet propaganda then pushed for the other 50% of the plan to be realized in the next two years, in hopes of accomplishing the plan ahead of schedule.

Left: 2+2=5, Soviet 1931 poster exhorting workers to complete the first five-year plan in two sets of two years. “Arithmetic of ongoing industrial-financial plan:

2+2 plus enthusiasm of workers = 5”



The enormous pressure to speed up the plan resulted in inefficient shortcuts being taken. For example, the construction of the final part of the canal from the Baltic Sea to the White Sea was compromised. The canal was only dug to a shallower depth than originally intended, so that it could be completed quickly. The result was that the canal was too shallow for many cargo vessels and accordingly has a much less economic benefit than it could have had. (It was subsequently rebuilt after World War II to handle larger vessels.)

The first five-year plan also affected some prior major projects that were being implemented. The giant GOELRO electric plan was adapted and expanded to accommodate the needs of various projects of the first five-year plan. The Turkestan-Siberia Railroad (the “Turksib”), which was already under construction, became incorporated into the five-year plan.

Sidetrip: The Turksib Railroad



Commemorative poster of the building of the Turksib Railway

The Russian Empire had conquered Central Asia, which they called Turkestan, in the 19th Century and built a major railroad running northwest from the region to connect to European Russia. Once the Trans-Siberian Railroad between European Russia and the Pacific coast was built, an obvious addition to the Russian rail net

was a rail line running northeast from Central Asia to connect to Siberia. This was difficult to build since it would have to cross mountains and deserts, but the Russian Empire started on its construction in the early 20th Century. Once World War I started, constructions ended as resources were diverted to support the war effort.

The project lay abandoned for over a decade while Russia lost WW1, had revolutions, and fought a civil war in which the Soviets won. As the Soviet economy recovered following the civil war, the Soviets wanted to develop Central Asia, which would benefit the Soviet economy and help integrate the region more deeply into the rest of the USSR. This rekindled interest in the Turksib, and in December 1926 the Soviets authorized the construction of the remaining 1,445-km (898-mile) section of the rail line in what is now Kazakhstan. The project then became began part of the first five-year plan and was built in 1927–1930. Like all major Soviet projects, it was extensively publicized by Soviet propaganda, including with a 1929 documentary, *Turksib* (often called *The Steel Way* (*Turksib*) in English). The building of the Turksib was not without controversy, as it led to accusations that it was part of a Soviet plan to destroy the traditional nomadic and semi-nomadic lifestyles of the Kazakhs, which indeed happened once the Soviets began to collectivize agriculture and herding in Central Asia.

The first five-year plan was expensive, and Soviet plans to finance it proved to be unrealistic. To raise more money, the Soviets greatly increased vodka production in 1930, since alcohol sales generated considerable revenue for the state. Alcoholism, a problem of the preceding Russian Empire, would become a problem for the Soviet state for the rest of its existence²⁸⁷.

The first plan ended on 31 December 1932, having lasted four years and two months. The plan did not achieve all of its goals, but it did greatly increase the output of Soviet industry. The Soviets claimed the plan fell 6% short of its goals, but for reasons outside the control of the USSR. Stalin claimed:

287 The Russian Empire had profited from a state monopoly on vodka production and sales, so its attempts to deal with alcoholism were feeble until World War I started. Then, vodka production and sales were banned, in hopes that this would help the military fight better and the home front be more productive. The Soviets maintained the ban until the mid-1920s, when then reinstated limited (state-owned) production. Limited production and thus alcoholism had been proclaimed a triumph of the Soviet system over the old regime, so it was a potentially sensitive issue to increase vodka production. Stalin instead turned it around as “false shame” holding the Soviets back: “It is necessary to discard the false shame and openly and directly go to the maximum increase in the production of vodka”.

It is true that we are 6 per cent short of fulfilling the total programme of the five-year plan. But that is due to the fact that in view of the refusal of neighbouring countries to sign pacts of non-aggression with us, and of the complications that arose in the Far East, we were obliged, for the purpose of strengthening our defence, hastily to switch a number of factories to the production of modern defensive means.²⁸⁸

The Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931 had indeed caused the Soviets to increase military production at the expense of some industrial growth. This was more of an excuse than the cause of the shortfall, especially since the 6% shortfall claim was a lie. The Soviets exaggerated and falsified the figures to make the plan's accomplishments seem more impressive²⁸⁹. Nevertheless, Soviet industry did grow strongly at a time when the Great Depression was reducing industrial output in countries like the USA, Britain, and Germany. Soviet heavy industry did exceed plan goals, but other sectors like the chemical and textile industries did not.

The first five-year plan also saw a massive effort to collectivize agriculture. Stalin claimed great success:

The Party has succeeded in getting more than 60 per cent of the peasant farms to unite into collective farms, embracing more than 70 per cent of all the land cultivated by peasants; this means that we have *fulfilled* the five-year plan *three times over*.²⁹⁰

The fact that collectivization resulted in lower agricultural output was not mentioned. Overall output fell below that of 1928 and did not surpass 1928's level until 1937²⁹¹. Stalin not only failed to mention that collectivization caused a famine, he attempted to imply the famine did not occur:

The opinion of *The New York Times* in November 1932:

"The collectivisation campaign is of course a ghastly failure. It has brought Russia to the verge of famine."

...

288 I.V. Stalin; "The Results of the First Five-Year Plan"; report to the joint meeting of the Central Committee and Central Control Commission of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik); 7 January 1933. For the full (translated) text of the report, see <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1933/01/07.htm#1>.

289 "the statistics of this time should be treated with extreme caution: there is no doubt that they were generally falsified": <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/russia/fyp-1.htm>.

290 I.V. Stalin; "The Results of the First Five-Year Plan"; report to the joint meeting of the Central Committee and Central Control Commission of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik); 7 January 1933. For the full (translated) text of the report, see <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1933/01/07.htm#1>.

291 Holland Hunter; "Soviet Agriculture with and without Collectivization, 1928-1940"; *Slavic Review* Vol. 47, No. 2 (Summer, 1988); <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2498462>.

The opinion of a bourgeois newspaper in Poland, *Gazeta Polska*, 5 in the summer of 1932:

“The situation seems to show that in its policy of collectivising the countryside the government of the Soviets has reached an impasse.”

...

Such are the opinions of one section of the bourgeois press.

It is hardly worth while to criticise those who gave utterance to these opinions. I think it is not worth while. It is not worth while because these “die-hards” belong to the species of mediaeval fossils to whom facts mean nothing, and who will persist in their opinion no matter how our five-year plan is fulfilled.²⁹²

Each five year plan was followed by another with ambitious goals, until the third plan (scheduled 1938–1942) was canceled in June 1941 after only 3½ years because of the German invasion. (The plans would resume after the war with the fourth plan running 1946–1950.) The Soviets sometimes annually revised the goals of these plans during their execution of the plan. This was not just to hide failures but sometimes to increase the goals for an economic sector if progress there was going particularly well.

Although Soviet industrial production greatly increased in the 1930s, its accomplishments were marred by the low quality of the goods being produced. This was in part due to the Soviets’ emphasis on quantity over quality. For example, the USSR had only about 1,000 tractors in 1924 (in comparison, the USA had about 500,000 that year²⁹³) but by the start of 1941 Soviet industry had made about 684,000 tractors, representing about 40% of total world production. This was a significant accomplishment, which Soviet propaganda celebrated. However, many Soviet tractors were poorly made and often broke down. They wore out to useless far faster than tractors made in other countries.

Another factor affecting quality was the huge migration of peasants from the countryside to the factories. Many were poorly educated, a legacy of the Russian Empire, and all were inexperienced at factory work. Although these people were used to hard manual labor on farms, farm work varied in intensity across the year. Many accordingly found it hard to adjust to diligently working rigidly-scheduled shifts day after day. All this inexperience led to poor quality. While these new factory workers learned on the job over time, since Soviet industry was constantly expanding, there were always many new waves of inexperienced peasants arriving for factory work.

292 I.V. Stalin; “The Results of the First Five-Year Plan”; report to the joint meeting of the Central Committee and Central Control Commission of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik); 7 January 1933. For the full (translated) text of the report, see <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1933/01/07.htm#1>.

293 <https://eh.net/encyclopedia/economic-history-of-tractors-in-the-united-states/>.

Unlike the peasants, much of the urban work force did have experience working as wage laborers on shifts. However, many of these workers had become disillusioned and discouraged, once it became clear that the Soviets would not observe their labor laws or honor the constitutional rights granted to workers. Instead, strikes were effectively forbidden, many workplaces were dangerously unsafe, and workers' housing, living conditions, and medical care were all inadequate. Resentful workers were often careless about the quality of what they made, especially once the Soviets shifted most workers to a piecework in which full pay depended upon high output.

There were also a systemic issue that affected quality: poor quality at some factories drove down quality at others. Few Soviet factories made everything they needed. Instead, factories specializing in parts, chemicals, or other products sent their output to be incorporated in final products at other factories. Poor quality inputs in turn meant poor quality outputs.

Soviet consumer products were often notorious for poor quality, as priority was given to industrial goods used by Soviet enterprises, the government, and the military. Military goods were supposed to be the top of the line in quality, with thousands of Red Army inspectors deployed to the factories to help manage quality. However, modern military equipment of the 1930s required advanced manufacturing abilities, which the Soviets found difficult to master. For example, tank armor by now was technologically challenging, using advanced alloys and manufacturing techniques. Soviet tank armor was substandard compared to German or western tank armor, making it weaker and more prone to failure. Similarly, the manufacture of many Soviet aircraft was not as advanced as German and western aircraft, which resulted in them having higher drag and degraded performance. One of the worse areas for the Soviets was engine technology. World War II was a war of engines, with increasingly powerful engines needed for tanks and aircraft. Soviet engine technology, however, had mostly stalled by the late 1930s. Although more powerful engines were under design and development, most were stuck in prototype stage for several years, plagued by issues that made them too unreliable for service use.

Sidetrip: Soviet Aircraft Quality

The Soviet aircraft industry illustrates Soviet problems with quality. In the late 1930s, the top Soviet aircraft designers, engineers, and technicians were equal in skill to those in the western countries. They would, for example, design a new advanced fighter and hand-build prototypes that demonstrated its superior abilities. Once accepted for production, the aircraft factories simply could not duplicate the quality of the prototypes.

Sometimes, the factories could not even use the engine specified for the aircraft, as the design used a powerful, experimental engine that was stuck in development with serious problems. In these cases, the aircraft had to be refitted with a lower-powered engine, which reduced its performance. This then meant the aircraft's weight had to be reduced so that its speed would not be too badly degraded. The fighter's armament accordingly would be reduced, lowering its firepower. The end result was a production fighter that was slower and less capable than the prototypes.

To save precious metal, Soviet aircraft designers often designed fighters with fuselages, wings, and other parts made of engineered wood (similar to plywood). Engineered wood could result in high-quality aircraft, as shown by the excellent British Mosquito fighters and bombers of World War II. However, the British achieved this with high-quality manufacturing techniques, that kept weight down and gave the aircraft excellent aerodynamic properties, factors the Soviets could not match. Soviet engineered-wood aircraft were accordingly heavy²⁹⁴. The technicians who hand made the Soviet prototypes extensively smoothed the wood and applied high-quality paints and finishes, giving the fuselages and wings excellent aerodynamic surfaces. The factories did not have the advanced equipment to do this. The fuselage wood of production models was rougher, which increased drag and decreased performance. Mass-produced paints and finishes supplied by the chemical industry often were low quality, with the paint peeling off in the field, further degrading performance. Wood-frame wings were covered in fabric, which introduced more quality issues. One notorious case occurred in 1943, when a chemical factory supplied a Yak-9 fighter factory with defective paint. The paint often would deteriorate once exposed to the weather, and the flexing of the wings during flight could crack the paint and cause fabric to delaminate from the wings, a dangerous event. This problem was so serious that Stalin accused the head designer, A.S. Yakovlev, of doing "work for Hitler".

²⁹⁴ For example, they used phenol-impregnated compressed wood for airframe structural elements, which had to be thick and thus heavy to handle the stresses placed on them.

To save his career and possibly his freedom²⁹⁵, Yakovlev instituted a 3-week crash program to partially remedy the problem.

Even something as simple as aircraft bolts could be a problem, due to poor precision manufacturing. The aircraft factory would drill the threads for bolt holes to specifications. The bolts were made elsewhere, at metal-working factories that sometimes did not have millimeter-precision tools. Some batches of bolts were slightly too large for the bolt holes. During the early war years when there was huge pressure to make as many aircraft as possible, on at least two instances workers at one aircraft factory just hammered the bolts into place. These joints failed once the aircraft were in the field, with the wings falling off during flight.

The problem with precision parts not fitting was endemic throughout Soviet industry. At times, the Soviets physically relocated parts factories to be next to and under the supervision of the factories they were supplying.

The Soviets worked hard to resolve quality problems during the war and did solve many problems, but even late-war Soviet equipment did not match the quality of western or German equipment. For example, the paint issue with the Yak-9's wing was actually part of a deeper problem. The wing had been designed to save weight and was not robust enough, which caused excessive flexing. The long term solution was a redesign. The technique for attaching the fabric to wing was also deficient and had to be improved. These issues were finally resolved in 1944, but quality problems still plagued Yakovlev. In 1944, his new Yak-3 fighter also developed wing delamination troubles, which required 800 fighters to be withdrawn from the field for repair.

Even with low quality goods, industrialization grew the Soviet economy. Soviet factories began building great numbers of agricultural tractors. This allowed many collective and state farms to mechanize their operations, which in turn released peasants to go work in expanding industrial sector. Mechanization and electrification of the coal industry helped the Soviets to dramatically increase coal production, which in turn fueled the growing industrial sector. These virtuous cycles, however, did not last. By the late 1930s, the Soviet

²⁹⁵ By this time of the war, it is unlikely that Stalin would order Yakovlev executed, but the possibility of imprisonment seems possible. However, the Yakovlev organization and possibly Yakovlev himself already knew about the delamination problem before it was discovered in the field and were working on fixing it without informing the high command of the problem. It is unclear if Stalin learned that the Yakovlev organization was knowingly sending defective fighters to the field forces, as that might have indeed provoked punishment.

economy seemed to sicken (“caught a fever” in Soviet parlance) and did not grow as fast as expected. Some economic historians attribute this to the Soviets having to rebalance the economy to increase agricultural production at the expense of industrial growth:

Given the disastrous outcomes of collectivisation, the government retreated and pursued more balanced policies. Since 1935, the wedges [Soviet distortions of the economy] normalised and declined to pre-1913 levels and even lower. Agricultural TFP [total factor productivity] rose back to the long-run trends; manufacturing TFP increased but stayed substantially below the trend (actually, at the level of 1913).²⁹⁶

While this analysis may be partially correct, there’s a larger reason why the Soviet economy got sick in the mid-1930s: Stalin. After gaining absolute power by the late 1920s, Stalin’s mental state grew worse, not better. The younger Stalin had been insecure, vain, and ruthless; now he bordered on paranoia, narcissism, and sociopathic cruelty. As the decade progressed, factories, other facilities, mountains, towns, and entire cities were named for him²⁹⁷. Starting in 1928, Stalin had increasing numbers of people persecuted for mostly fictitious political and economic crimes. This grew into the Great Purge of 1936–1938, in which the Party, the military, mistrusted ethnic groups²⁹⁸, the clergy, the intelligentsia, and society in general were all persecuted. Millions were sent to the Gulag or otherwise punished, and perhaps about one million people were executed. Even Stalin’s inner circle of cronies were not spared. Some were publicly humiliated, demoted, or forced to endorse the spurious arrest of their wives. By the late 1930s, the Soviet economy was under-performing expectations, likely because so many people had become inefficient slave laborers in the Gulag and most of the rest were terrorized of being purged. Most people in fear of their jobs, liberty, and lives do not make for a productive, dynamic work force. Instead, they play it safe, rigidly follow orders, and game the system to avoid the appearance of failure. The Great Purge was finally scaled back in 1938–1939 when corrosive economic effects became evident. Even then, Stalin could not resist to periodically unleash lesser purges throughout the rest of his life.

Stalin’s purges fell heavily on the Party itself. Many Party leaders were purged, including most of the Old Bolsheviks, who had been in the Party before it took power in 1917. The

296 Aleh Tsyvinski, Mikhail Golosov, Sergei Guriev, and Anton Cheremukhin; “Stalin and Soviet Industrialisation”; 2013; <https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/stalin-and-soviet-industrialisation>.

297 Examples just of cities include Stalingrad (now Volgograd, Russia), Stalinabad (now Dushanbe, Tajikistan), Stalinogorsk (now Novomoskovsk, Russia), and Stalinsk (now Novokuznetsk, Russia).

298 Basically, any ethnic group in the USSR that also had members in foreign countries were considered potentially disloyal to the USSR. Examples include Poles in the western USSR (suspected of loyalty to Poland), Volga Germans (Germany), Koreans in the Soviet Far East (Korea), and many more.

Party was purged top to bottom, replacing people who might not be loyal to Stalin with new people more likely to feel beholden to him. Party leaders and officials who had opposed Stalin at some point, even if they later supported him, were especially at risk. Stalin was vindictive and would secretly nurse grudges until he could exact revenge. Once he achieved top power, there were few impediments to his wrath. All leaders of both the Left Opposition and the Right Opposition, the groups he contended with for Party leadership, were executed in the 1930s, other than those who had earlier died of natural causes or had fled the country.

Stalin sometimes psychologically tormented his victims by progressively demoting them before having them arrested and executed. For example, a person who was a full member of the Party's Central Committee might be demoted to candidate member status. This left the person on the committee but unable to vote on resolutions. It became a sign that the person was going to be purged, the first step in a process of demotions, expulsion from the Party, arrest, conviction, and finally imprisonment or execution.

Spotlight: Suicide in Stalin's Soviet Union

For top Communists being purged, it became obvious in the 1930s there was almost no chance of halting the process of demotion, arrest, and imprisonment or execution. Suicide became the only way to avoid the ultimate result. M.P. Tomskiy, for example, had been a factory worker, union organizer, and Bolshevik before the revolution. Afterwards, he held high positions in the Party including the Central Committee and Politburo, in the Soviet government, and as head of the country-wide trade union organization. He was one of the delegates at the 1920 party congress who supported ending the government's centralized control of the factories ended in favor of putting the workers in charge of their factories again.



M.P. Tomskiy

In the 1920s, Tomskiy helped defeat the Left Opposition but as a member of the Right Opposition soon saw Stalin demolish his faction as well. Once Stalin consolidated power, he soon began the process of purging Tomskiy. In 1930, Tomskiy lost his membership in the Politburo and was forced to resign as head of the trade unions. He then had a brief stint as head of the chemical industry and then was made head of the state publishing house. Worse was to follow. In

1934, he was demoted from full member to candidate member in the Central Committee. In the 1936 show trial that destroyed the Party members who had been the Left Opposition, some defendants falsely accused Tomskiy and other members of the Right Opposition of being involved in counter-revolutionary activities. Knowing now that arrest by the NKVD was inevitable, Tomskiy killed himself.

You might think that suicides of Old Bolsheviks like Tomskiy might please Stalin, since these acts removed people already selected for destruction, but that was not the case. Stalin allegedly regarded these suicides as “spitting in the eye of the Party”²⁹⁹, apparently because good Communists stood by the party and took their punishment, however undeserved it was.

Suicide was a problem across the entire USSR, not just confined to the Party. For example, young men would kill themselves rather than be conscripted into the Red Army. Suicide was also an ideological embarrassment to Stalin, as the Communists had regarded it as a bourgeois illness that was supposed to disappear under socialism. As with other political embarrassments, the Soviet solution was to hide it rather than implement reforms to reduce it. In 1930s, the Soviets simply stopped publicly publishing their suicide rate.

Suicide also directly affected Stalin. Nadezhda Allilueva, Stalin’s second wife, killed herself in November 1932, almost certainly over Stalin’s growing mistreatment of her and perhaps in despair of Stalin’s increasingly brutal treatment of the Soviet population. Stalin had Allilueva’s suicide covered up, no doubt because it would have been seen as a rejection of him and thus a political embarrassment. The death reported as a death to appendicitis, with Stalin hiding the suicide even from two children the couple had together. Many people speculate Allilueva’s suicide further worsened Stalin’s mental condition and thus possibly was a factor in him unleashed the Great Purge later in the 1930s.

The purge was especially severe among the upper officers of the Red Army and Soviet Navy. For officers of the rank of brigade commander or higher, about two-thirds were purged: 503 out of 767. Of the 503 purged, 444 died (419 were executed; 29 died in custody, likely due to

²⁹⁹ Sebag Montefiore; *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*; 2007. However, the book does not make clear the source of this quote. I suspect it is someone’s recollection of a private remark Stalin may have made, rather than a precise recording of his actual words. For more information on suicide in the early USSR, see: Kenneth M. Pinnow; “Suicide and Social Integration in Bolshevik Russia” in John C. Weaver and David Wright; *Histories of Suicide: International Perspectives on Self-destruction in the Modern World*; 2009.

torture; 3 committed suicide) and only 59 “returned from prison alive”³⁰⁰. K.K. Rokossovskiy was one of the survivors. He was arrested and imprisoned on false charges of being a traitor, was tortured, and was subjected to mock executions. On 22 March 1940, he thought he was going to be executed when the NKVD instead released him without explanation. He resumed service in the Red Army and rose to become a front commander and Marshal of the Soviet Union. He allegedly later told his daughter that after his release he always had a pistol with him, because he did not intend to surrender alive if the secret police tried to arrest him again.

One of Stalin’s goals in the purges was likely to terrorize the Soviet military and naval officers into near-complete obedience to him. It mostly worked, but at a high price. Many of the best and most experienced commanders were lost, replaced by inexperienced and sometimes incompetent officers. Throughout the officer corps, the fear of being arrested often resulted in rote following of orders rather than displaying initiative. This would degrade the Red Army’s performance in 1939–1942.

The secret police harshly interrogated and often tortured people they arrested for political crimes, demanding that they name their associates in these crimes. Most of the people who were arrested were innocent and often named other innocent people just to end the interrogations. People who had not been arrested would sometimes denounce people as political criminals, in several cases to get personal rivals into trouble. The secret police would often then arrest the newly-named people on charges such as treason, espionage, plotting a coup against the state, sabotaging the Soviet economy or military, or for various anti-Soviet activities, driving the purge to new heights.

Both of these situations happened with the Red Army. M.N. Tukhachevskiy’s modernizing faction of the Red Army, which advocated deep operations by mechanized forces³⁰¹, was especially decimated. Tukhachevskiy himself was executed and his views were discredited. This resulted in the Red Army breaking up its large Soviet mechanized forces into smaller units, whose main mission was to support the infantry rather than conduct deep operations. (This purge occurred in 1937, making its timing particularly bad. At the time, the German Army was developing its own large mechanized formations intended to break through, encircle, and destroy the enemy. The rapid victory of the German blitzkrieg over France in 1940 would cause the Soviets to reverse course and build large mechanized forces, but these

300 Based on work by historian O.F. Suvenirov.

301 Deep operations was a Soviet theory roughly equivalent to what came to be called the German blitzkrieg, but much better thought-out.

reforms were only partially implemented when the German blitzkrieg was unleashed against the USSR in 1941.)



*Da Zdravstouet Vozhd Narodov
Velikiy Stalin — Tvoets Konstitutsii
Pobedivshogo Sotsializma i Podlinnogo Demokratizma!*
Long Live the Leader of the People
Great Stalin — Creator of the Constitution
of Victorious Socialism and Genuine Democratism!

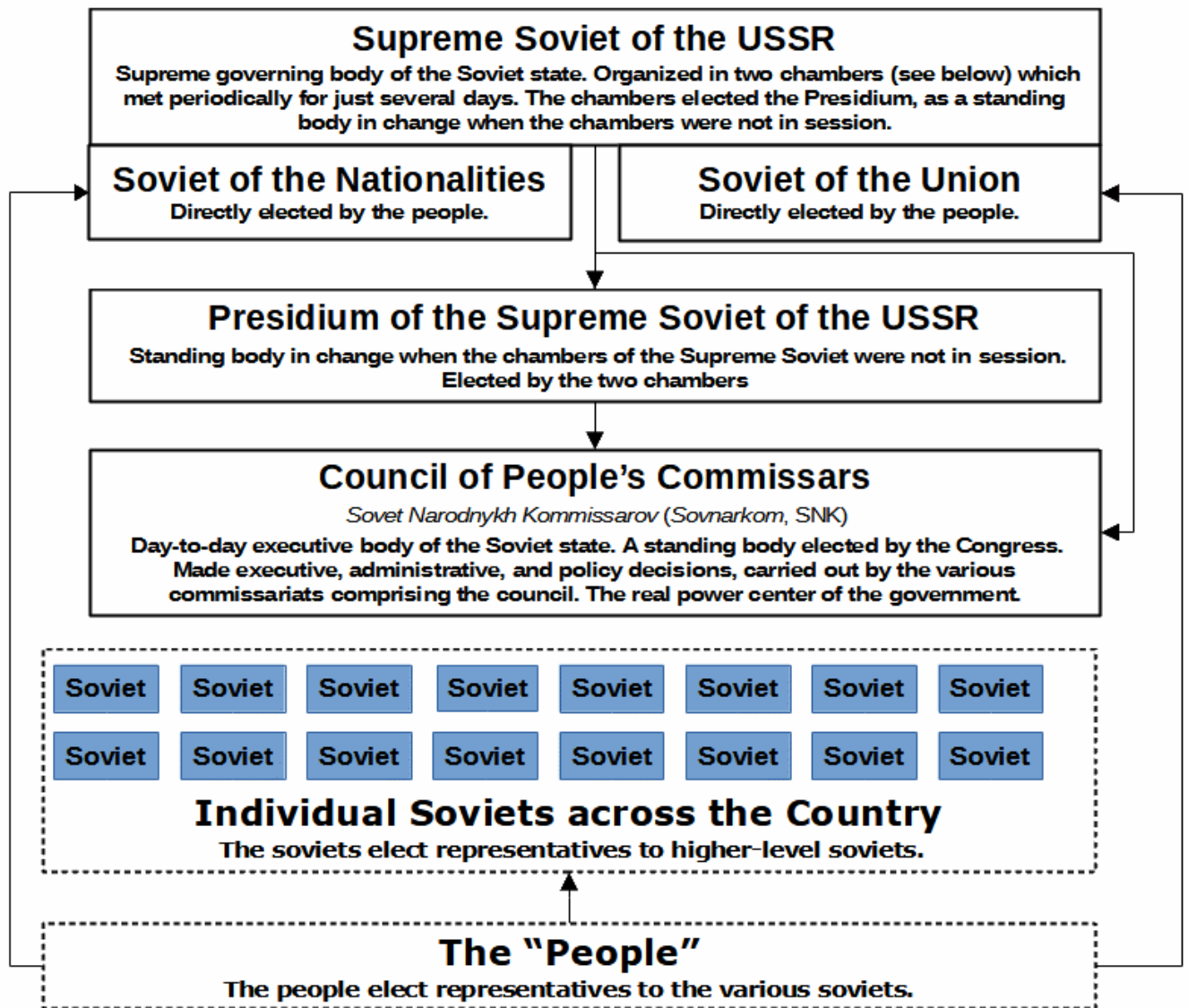
In 1936, the USSR adopted a new constitution, informally known as the **Stalin Constitution** since Soviet propaganda described it as coming from the wisdom of Stalin, “the genius of the new world, the wisest man of the epoch, the great leader of communism”³⁰². It reorganized parts of the Soviet government, such as replacing the Congress of Soviets with the Supreme Soviet, although both the former and the new body in practice remained just for political theater. It listed the rights of Soviet citizens, although in practice these rights were ignored whenever it suited the Soviet leadership. Perhaps its most important provision at the time was enshrining the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik) as the vanguard of the proletariat in developing socialism, thereby justifying its single-party rule. (Despite the USSR being a one-party state, the previous, 1924 constitution³⁰³ did not mention the Party at all.)

³⁰² From the 25 November 1936 edition of *Pravda*, the official newspaper of the Communist Party. The “new world” in this quote meant the new socialist world, not the western hemisphere.

³⁰³ The USSR was formed in 1922 but did not adopt a constitution until 1924. Until then, the 1922 treaty between the Belorussian SSR, Russian SFSR, Transcaucasian SFSR, and Ukrainian SSR served as the constitution.

Spotlight: Summary of Soviet Government Organization, 1936–1946

The new constitution was adopted on 5 December 1936. Although officially in force from that date, there was a transitional period through into 1938 as the new governmental structure took effect.



The 1936 constitution made a number of organizational changes from the [1924 constitution](#). The Congress of Soviets of Deputies was abolished. So was the Central Executive Committee. The CEC's two chambers, the Soviet of Nationalities and the Soviet of the Union, became the chambers of the new Supreme Soviet of the USSR. The Supreme Soviet was the highest governmental body, and its two chambers were now deemed equal to one another, empowered to enact Soviet laws and amend the constitution. These chambers only met

intermittently for a few days, and they elected a small Presidium of the USSR as a standing body to conduct business on behalf of the Supreme Soviet.

Sovnarkom (The Soviet of People's Commissars) remained in existence as an executive body but officially lost its power to enact legislation, which the constitution reserved for the Supreme Soviet. In practice, this actually meant little, as Sovnarkom had the ability to issue "decisions and orders on the basis and in pursuance of the laws in operation", which meant it had considerable official power to make law-like decrees. The Presidium and the Supreme Soviet in theory could annul Sovnarkom decrees but in practice did not. Indeed, by about 1939–1940 the Soviet government often would blur rights granted by the constitution, laws of the Supreme Soviet, and Sovnarkom decrees. For example, the constitution set the work day as "seven hours for the overwhelming majority of the workers", but Stalin later had the work day increased without amending the constitution.

The exclusion of bourgeois classes from the electorate was ended, with the constitution specifically stating that the right to vote was irrespective of "social origin". However, the existence enemies of the people was still enshrined: "Persons committing offenses against public, socialist property are enemies of the people". People convicted of crimes could lose the right to vote. In practice, this meant that the millions of people sent to the GULag lost the right to vote.

The constitution also changed the government structures of the union republics, mostly replicating the new Soviet government structure at union republic level.

The Soviet of Nationalities was directly elected by the people. Its composition was changed so that each union republic had 32 deputies (up from 5), each autonomous republic had 11 (formerly 5), each autonomous oblast had 5 (formerly 1), and each national okrug had 1 (unchanged).

The Congress of the Union was based on population and was now directly elected by the people.

As before, the USSR's Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom) was real governmental power center. As before, the top officials of the Communists Party were on Sovnarkom, so Party controlled the Soviet state. These Communists were dominated by Stalin and had no ability to act against his wishes. Stalin

often ruled the USSR via informal means, so that the top Party and state bodies existed to proclaim and execute Stalin's will.

The constitution also explicitly proclaimed that the Communist Party "is the vanguard of the working people in their struggle to strengthen and develop the socialist system and is the leading core of all organizations of the working people, both public and state".

This was the government structure of the USSR from 1936, although the system was not fully in place until 1938. Constitutional amendments over the next decade made some minor changes. In 1944, the structure of union republics was slightly changed in hopes that each union republic would receive its own seat at the United Nations, once that organization was founded in 1945³⁰⁴. Changes in 1946–1947 renamed "people's commissariats" as "ministries" but with no change in function. Further changes were made after 1947 and new constitution was adopted in 1977, but these are outside the scope of this guidebook.



Stalinskay Konstitutsiya - itog borby i podved Velokoy Oktyabrskoy Sotsialisticheskoy Revikoutsii. Da zapavstvuyet Konstitutsiya pobedivshogo sotsializma i podlinnogo demokratizma!

The Stalinist Constitution is the result of the struggle and victories of the Great October Socialist Revolution. May the Constitution of victorious socialism and genuine democracy prevail!

304 When faced with response that each US state could accordingly also get a UN seat, a compromise was reached in which the USSR and just the Belorussian and Ukrainian SSRs received seats.



The constitution also finished the process of organizing the USSR along major ethnic lines. The Transcaucasian SFSR was split up into the Armenian, Azerbaijan, and Georgian SSRs. The rest of Central Asia was detached from the Russian SFSR and organized into two new union republics, the Kazakh and Kyrgyz SSRs, making a total of five union republics in this region. The Turkmen and Uzbek SSRs also had their borders redrawn at this time. All these territory changes mattered little since all union republics were fully under control of the Communists. One reason for these moves almost certainly was to cement Stalin's reputation as a Marxist theorist on the rights of ethnic groups. Another was to allow international Soviet propaganda to trumpet the "progressive" way the USSR treated its ethnic groups, as opposed to the "repressive" way imperialist and colonial powers treated their minorities and people in conquered lands. Stalin likely never seriously envisioned that the USSR might

actually break up into its union republics. This is exactly what happened as the Communists lost control of the USSR in the early 1990s. After a coup by Communist hard-liners failed to replace Mikhail Gorbachyov in 1991, the USSR was dissolved and the various union republics became independent states.

The policy of having national units in the Red Army continued into the early 1930s. By 1934, these comprised 9 rifle divisions, 2 mountain cavalry divisions, 1 jaeger brigade, 5 rifle regiments, 1 cavalry regiment, and several smaller units³⁰⁵. However, it was clear that it would be militarily more efficient to have the national units completely integrated into the Red Army. 1934 thus saw the Soviet begin to get rid of national units, with the Ukrainian and Belarusian ones being converted into ordinary Red Army units. (These units already used the Russian, the language of the Red Army, rather than Ukrainian and Belarusian, so there were no language issues. Also, the fact that the Soviets regarded the Ukrainians and Belarusians along with the Russians as the loyal Slavic core of the Soviet Union likely was factor in choosing these units first.) More would be soon be converted. At first, likely to avoid needless upset, for non-Slavic units their “national” origins were retained in the full unit designations. For example, in 1936 the “1st Red Banner Georgian Mountain Rifle Division named after I.V. Stalin” of the Georgian SSR became the “47th Red Banner Georgian Mountain Rifle Division named after I.V. Stalin”, now using the Red Army’s standard rifle division numbering sequence³⁰⁶. Some if not all units later were redesignated to drop the national origin: the 47th in 1940 became the “47th Red Banner Mountain Rifle Division named after I.V. Stalin”³⁰⁷.

By 1938, fewer than 30,000 soldiers remained in the national units, less than 2% of the Red Army’s strength. That year, the Soviets enacted a new law ending national units altogether, converting them in 1938–1939 into “all-union units with extraterritorial recruitment”. This meant they became multi-ethnic units. Concentration (the grouping of a particular ethnic group like Poles inside ordinary Red Army units) was likely also ended. My sources do not

305 A.Yu. Bezugolnyy; “*Natsionalnye Formirovaniya RKKA v 1930-e gg.*” (“National Formations of the RKKA [Workers’ and Peasants’ Red Army] in the 1930s”); *Vestnik Kalmytskogo Instituta Gumanitarnykh Issledovaniy (Bulletin of the Kalmyk Institute for Humanitarian Research)*; 2016, Issue 5.

306 Mountain rifle divisions were part of the rifle division sequence rather than being their own separate numbering sequence as in the German Army.

307 I have not done enough research to be sure that all national original designations were dropped in or before 1940. Since the Soviets would bring them back in 1941 after the war had begun, this often requires finding the official designation in the short period when national origin was dropped. Many works simply use the units’ short designation, such as “47th Mountain Rifle Division”, which accordingly do not provide enough details. (Other works that go into enough detail sometimes make mistakes.) I find sorting all this out too much work for something that has only nominal importance.

state this explicitly, but the 1938–1939 policy on national units implies it did: ethnic groups were “to perform military service in common with all nationalities of the USSR”³⁰⁸.

Sidetrip: National Units in the Great Patriotic War

A new set of national units would be created starting in 1941 during the Great Patriotic War with Germany. The revival of national units likely was part of an attempt to appeal to patriotism. On 11 July 1941, Stalin gave a radio speech to the Soviet population calling for total resistance to the enemy, frequently calling the USSR “our motherland”. It seems clear Stalin thought that traditional patriotism and love of country would get the best response, rather than an ideological call to defend socialism or Communism, especially since how many Soviet citizens had suffered from forced collectivization of agriculture and at the hands of the secret police in 1930s in order to “build socialism”. Indeed, Stalin never directly mentioned Communism or socialism at all in his speech.

The appeal to patriotism was meant to apply to all the ethnic groups of the country, not just to the Russians or the other main Slavic groups. However, many members of some non-Slavic ethnic groups viewed the Red Army mainly as a Russian army, dominated by Russian officers. Problems arose especially when older men, who grew up in Imperial Russian times, were drafted from these ethnic groups. To escape Soviet service, some would deliberately wound themselves, desert, or surrender to the enemy³⁰⁹.

The national units were raised seemingly for symbolic reasons. The Germans had quickly overrun the Soviet Baltic region, conquering the Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian SSRs in the summer of 1941. These SSRs had only come into existence in 1940 after the Soviet occupation of the Baltic states. Latvian Party officials who escaped the German advance wanted to have an explicit Latvian military presence in the Red Army, to show that the Latvian peoples were still fighting for the USSR. In August, the Soviet high command approved the formation of a Latvian rifle division (later numbered the 201st Latvian Rifle Division). The

308 A.Yu. Bezugolnyy; “*Natsionalnye Formirovaniya RKKA v 1930-e gg.*” (“National Formations of the RKKA [Workers’ and Peasants’ Red Army] in the 1930s”); *Vestnik Kalmytskogo Instituta Gumanitarnykh Issledovaniy (Bulletin of the Kalmyk Institute for Humanitarian Research)*; 2016, Issue 5. Even if concentration did not officially ended at this, it would effectively cease soon after the Great Patriotic War began. The Soviets would not be picky along ethnic lines when raising new units or on rebuilding decimated units.

309 “*Natsionalnye Voinskie Formirovaniya v Gody Voyny*” (“National Military Formations of the War Years”); 2020; <http://safe-rgs.ru/6016-nacionalnye-voinskie-formirovaniya-v-gody-voyny.html> (in Russian).

Soviets almost certainly favored the Latvian request for another symbolic purpose. During World War I, Latvia had been part of Russia. When the Bolsheviks staged their revolution in 1917 and became the Soviet state, the Red Latvian Rifles protected the Soviet government itself and provided veteran field forces in the early years of the ensuing Russian Civil War.

In December, each of the other two Baltic union republics also had its own rifle division (the 7th Estonian Rifle Division and the 16th Lithuanian Rifle Division). All these divisions were numbered in the Red Army's standard rifle division sequence but received national indicators. Later, more Estonian and Latvian divisions were raised.

Since these divisions were formed only after Germany had overrun the Baltic region, personnel for the divisions mostly came from Baltic citizens of various smaller military and labor units already in existence, as well as from Baltic citizens who had been sent to labor colonies in the interior of the USSR. The divisions were also formed from members of all ethnic groups in these SSRs. For example, both the Estonian and Latvia SSR had minority populations of Russians, so a number of Russians went into these units³¹⁰. Further, when these units needed specialist personnel or replacements, any Soviet soldiers from any union republic could be sent to the units. In practice, this meant the units increasingly were filled with ethnic Russians. The 201st Latvian was mostly "Baltic speaking" at first but was just 51% Latvian by December 1941. This dwindled to about a third Latvian as losses were replaced over time.

Once the decision to form national units was made, one source claims that at least some of the national units converted to "all-union" units had their national associations restored. Other sources on national units do not mention this³¹¹.

310 "Natsionalnye Voinskie Formirovaniya v Gody Voyny" ("National Military Formations of the War Years"); 2020; <http://safe-rgs.ru/6016-nacionalnye-voinskie-formirovaniya-v-gody-voyny.html> (in Russian).

311 The source claiming that affiliations for former national units were restored is "Natsionalnye Voinskie Formirovaniya v Velikoy Otechestvennoy Voynе" ("National Military Formations in the Great Patriotic War"); <https://www.voina.com.ru/index.php?p=33> (in Russian). The units supposedly involved in this restoration were from the union republics of the Transcaucasus and Central Asia (the Armenian, Azerbaijan, Georgian, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik, Turkmen, Uzbek SSRs) plus some autonomous areas of the Russian SFSR (such as the Bashkir and Kalmyk ASSRs). However, lack of confirmation from other sources casts doubts on this claim. It may be an error based on unit designations. When national affiliations ended 1938–1939, it seems some if not all of these units still kept their now-meaningless affiliation designations in their full official designations. For example, the 1st Caucasian Mountain Rifle Division was a national unit of Georgia, with its full designation being (as of March 1936) the 1st Caucasian Orders of the Red Banner and Red Star Mountain Rifle Division named for the Central Executive Committee of the Georgian SSR. In May 1936, it became an all-union unit and its designation was changed, dropping "Caucasian" and

Starting in November 1941, the Soviets raised 20 national cavalry divisions and 15 national rifle brigades from various non-Slavic ethnic groups in the North Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Urals: Bashkirs, Chechens-Ingushes, Kalmyks, Kazakhs, Tajiks, Uzbeks, etc. Only a few of these cavalry divisions and rifle brigades actually went to the front for combat duty³¹². This seems likely due to lack of sufficient recruits to fill all the units. Some did reach full strength and were sent into combat, where they fought well, sometimes excellently. For example, the 112th Bashkir Cavalry Division fought so well it became the 16th Guards Cavalry Division and ended the war in Berlin³¹³. The units that did not go into combat were all later disbanded, like to provide replacements for existing Red Army units.

The USSR had survived the crisis of 1941, and formation of national units mostly ceased in the first half of 1942. All told, the Soviets had 19 national rifle divisions, 20 national cavalry divisions, and 15 national rifle brigades (plus smaller units regiments, battalions, etc.), for 12 union republics (the Armenian, Azerbaijan, Estonian, Georgian, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Latvian, Lithuanian, Tajik, Turkmen, and Uzbek SSRs; and for non-Slavic regions of the Russian SFSR). Only four union republics did not form national units: the Belorussian, Karelo-Finnish, Moldavian, and Ukrainian SSRs. No Slavic national units were formed, which explains the absence of any for Belorussia and Ukraine³¹⁴. The Karelo-Finnish and Moldavian SSRs were low-population regions; it is unclear if these did not have national units due to lack of personnel or because the Soviets thought it politically unimportant.

No national units were formed after 1942, and the Soviets mostly lost interest in them as they won the war. During the war, many were disbanded, lost their national identifier, or were downgraded to smaller units like regiments. When a national unit was awarded Guards status, it was almost always redesignated in

changing its number to one in the standard Red Army numbering sequence. It did retain its Georgian affiliation in its full designation: the 9th Mountain Rifle Division Orders of the Red Banner and Red Star named for the Central Executive Committee of the Georgian SSR.

312 Since many members of these ethnic groups had been anti-Soviet during the Russian Civil War, some western historians have speculated that these units were intended to hold military-age men most likely to revolt against the USSR, and this is why most were later disbanded without going into combat. Since a Chechen revolt was already in progress in the North Caucasus, there may be something to this. However, none of these units mutinied, and the ones that did go into combat fought well.

313 This was an echo of history, as Bashkir cavalry in the Imperial Russian Army had occupied Paris, capital of Napoleon's French Empire, in 1814. I do not know whether the Soviets deliberately had the Bashkirs end up in Berlin as a symbolic statement.

314 The Soviets seriously considered forming two Belorussian armies in 1942, but Stalin refused to allow this.

the Guards sequence without a national designation. The exceptions seems to have been the Baltic national units, likely for political reasons. The Baltic SSRs remained German occupied well into 1944 (and part of the Latvian SSR to the end of the war). Numerous Estonians and Latvians fought for the Germans against the Soviets, with one Estonian and two Latvian divisions eventually being formed as part of the Waffen-SS. The Soviet Baltic divisions thus symbolized that Baltic nationals were pro-Soviet and those fighting for the Germans were traitors. These divisions were thus maintained as national units throughout the war and retained their national designation even when promoted to Guards status. For example, the 201st Latvian Rifle Division became the 43rd Guards Latvian Rifle Division.

One somewhat unusual national unit was the 88th Separate Rifle Brigade. Stalin ordered this unit formed in July 1942 as the nucleus of a Communist Chinese armed force. The unit was recruited from Chinese and Koreans exiles in the USSR (mostly Communists or anti-Japanese partisans who had been interned in the USSR) plus citizens from the Soviets' own Chinese and Korean minorities. This normally should have made the unit a Soviet foreign contingent unit, like the Soviet-formed Polish and Czechoslovakian contingents that fought for their home countries, albeit under Soviet command. The 88th was different, as a full brigade could not be formed just from the Chinese and Koreans. Soviet citizens from Central Asia (Turkmens and other ethnic groups) and from the Soviet Far East (Nanais, Evenks, and others) were sent to fill up the unit, making it a Soviet national unit. The brigade participated in the Soviet offensive against Japanese forces in Manchuria in August-September 1945. One of the brigade's battalion commanders was Kim Il-Sung, who went on to become the first of a hereditary dynasty of dictators in North Korea.

In addition to fostering patriotism, the Soviets had another agenda for creating national formations. The home union republic or autonomous entity national units were affiliated with were responsible for financing and maintaining the units. This shifted some of the burden of the war away from the central government.

Personnel losses of national formations were supposed to be replaced by recruitment of soldiers from the units' home SSRs and ASSRs. This often happened, with march battalions or companies bringing newly-trained

replacements to the units in the field. Units taking heavy losses would also be withdrawn from the front for rebuilding.

However, many of these SSRs and ASSRs had relatively small populations and could not generate enough replacements for their national formations. In such cases, a variety of measures were used: 1) Replacements came from elsewhere in the USSR, seemingly often from the Slavic union republics, thereby slowing changing the composition of the unit to “Russian” (which could including Belarusians and Ukrainians as well as Russians). 2) Units would be switched to become national units of another SSR or ASSR that could provide replacements. 3) Badly under-strength units from the Transcaucasus SSRs were sometimes withdrawn to guard their southern borders with Turkey or to garrison northern Iran, where the units would slowly be rebuilt. 4) Badly under-strength units were simply disbanded.

These national formations are sometimes called “national volunteer” units, but that is a misleading term. The Soviets did encourage the inhabitants of the union republics and autonomous entities forming these units to volunteer, but the ranks of few (likely no) national units were formed just from volunteers. Instead, conscription was widely used.

During the Russian Civil War, the Soviets had proclaimed “universal” male compulsory military service, but in practice they exempted restive ethnic groups from conscription, especially the Muslims of Central Asia. With national units being ended, the Soviets now drafting men from these groups. This opened up a moderately large group of men to the Soviet draft. The ethnic composition of the Red Army accordingly changed.

Ethnic Composition of the Red Army, 1931–1941³¹⁵

Group	1 Jan. 1931	1 Jan. 1936	17 Jan. 1939	1 Jan. 1940	1 July 1940	1 Jan. 1941
Russians	64.55%	66.16%	65.73%	63.98%	60.97%	56.39%
Ukrainians	18.43%	19.39%	19.31%	18.79%	19.58%	20.24%
Belarusians	4.9%	3.69%	3.64%	3.67%	4.13%	4.35%
Central Asians	0.74%	0.79%	1.39%	2.63%	4.22%	5.32%
Armenians	1.14%	0.78%	0.78%	0.93%	0.94%	1.18%
Azerbaijanis	0.45%	0.52%	0.36%	0.54%	0.90%	1.09%
Georgians	1.23%	0.63%	0.80%	1.07%	1.20%	1.37%
Tatars						1.99%

315 A.Yu. Bezugolnyy; dissertation, *Opyt Stroitelstva Vooruzhennykh sil SSSR: Natsionalnyy Aspekt (1922–1945 gg.)* [*The Experience of Building the Armed Forces of the USSR: National Aspects (1922-1945)*]; 2019.

Jews						1.84%
Other	8.56%	8.04%	7.99%	8.39%	8.06%	6.23%

Light red rows comprises the Slavic groups; green the Central Asian ethnic groups; blue other named groups; and gold unnamed ethnic groups. The gray rows reflect a new method of tracking groups in 1941, with Tatars and Jews being broken out of the Other category.

The Central Asians category includes the Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Tajiks, Turkmens, and Uzbeks. Changes to Soviet conscription policies in 1938 resulted in a dramatic increase in the representation of these groups in the Red Army, rising from less than 1% to 5.32% in 1941.

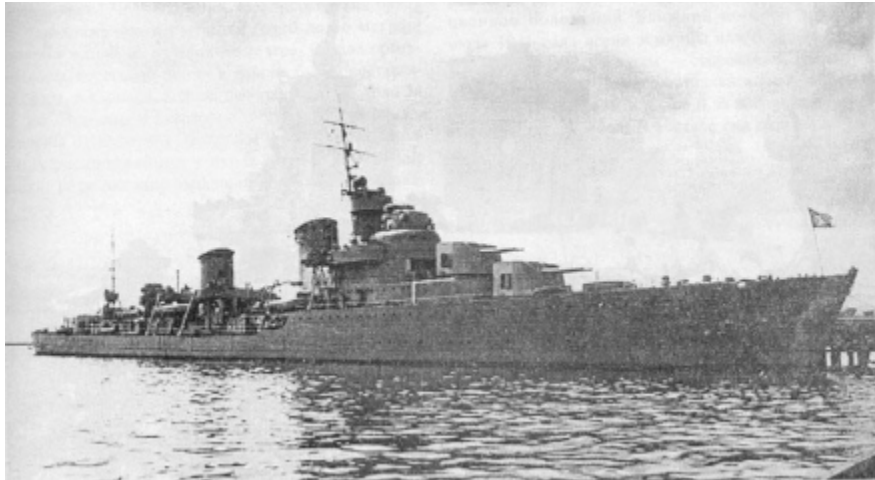
The Other category includes very many ethnic groups including the Mordovians, Chuvashes, Bashkirs, and Germans, all four of which had general populations ranging from about 820,000 to 1,120,000 in 1939.

Stalin's industrialization drive greatly concentrated on building heavy industry. While this helped to build the Soviet economy in general, it also had allowed the USSR to dramatically increase its military power. A modern military land power in the 1930s needed thousands of tanks and military aircraft, hundreds of thousands of trucks at the least, and millions of various types of weapons, radios, and other gear. When Germany invaded in June 1941, the Soviet military had well over 20,000 tanks and almost 20,000 military aircraft, by far the largest tank park and air fleet of any military in the world, although most tanks were quite vulnerable light tanks and most aircraft were already obsolescent. (Soviet strategic mistakes, operational inexperience, and the rapid German advance led to the destruction of almost all of these tanks and aircraft in 1941.)

Warships were expensive, so the young Soviet Union had been a land power with a small, mostly obsolescent navy unsuited for almost anything other than guarding the Soviet coastal waters. Until 1937–1938, the navy was not even an independent service as in most other countries but just a branch of the Red Army. The only exception to Soviet naval weakness was its submarine force, as the Soviets had many submarines from short-range coastal types to long-range oceanic ones. However, these submarines had questionable quality, and even their oceanic subs were kept in nearby waters: the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea, the Barents Sea in northern Europe, and the seas of northeastern Asia.

As the 1930s progressed, Stalin's military ambitions increased, and he decided to build a large blue water navy capable of operating far from Soviet shores. In 1937–1938, the navy became an independent service, the "Military-Naval Fleet" (*Voennno-Morskoy Flot*; VMF, which for clarity I call the Soviet Navy). A modern navy required modern naval technology, which the Soviets did not possess. Rather than trying to develop it all on their own, they worked to acquire some from other countries. Italian shipbuilders created a light cruiser

design for what became the Soviet *Kirov* cruiser class. Despite Italian input, the Soviets struggled with building the *Kirov*, the first of the class. In usual Stalinist fashion for the 1930s, one head of the project was removed and executed after accidents occurred and multiple defects were found. The next head was arrested. A further official was arrested for sabotage when the *Kirov* fired a training torpedo that circled back and hit the ship. The *Kirov* was finally accepted and several more cruisers of the class were built. A modification of the design became the *Maksim Gorkiy* class of light cruisers.



Destroyer Squadron Leader *Tashkent* in the summer of 1941

Other foreign contributions included Italy again and even Nazi Germany. The *Tashkent*, a Soviet “destroyer squadron leader” (*lider eskadrennykh minonostsev*) was a large destroyer (about twice the displacement of a standard Soviet destroyer), intended to be the command ship of a destroyer squadron. It was built in Italy and arrived without armament in the USSR in 1939. The Soviets equipped the ship with Soviet weapons and put it into service in the Black Sea Fleet. *Tashkent* was the first of a class of squadron leaders the Soviets intended to build, but the start of the war canceled these plans. The ship was damaged in August 1941 during the Axis siege of Odessa, badly damaged in June 1942 during the Axis assault on Sevastopol, and bombed and sunk at Novorossiysk in July 1942.

Following the German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact of 1939, the Soviets bought the *Lützow*/*“L”*, an incomplete German Hipper-class cruiser³¹⁶. This became the *Petropavlovsk* and was supposed to be a transfer of the most modern German naval technology, complete with technical plans and German technical assistance. However, the Germans dragged out the

316 After agreeing to sell the *Lützow* to the Soviets in October 1939, the Germans reverted to calling this incomplete ship the “L”, its original contract name. In November 1939, when the “pocket battleship” *Deutschland* (Germany), a heavily-armed and armored large cruiser, returned to port, the Germans then renamed the *Deutschland* as *Lützow*. Hitler did not want the negative symbolism that would occur if the enemy managed to sink the *Deutschland*.

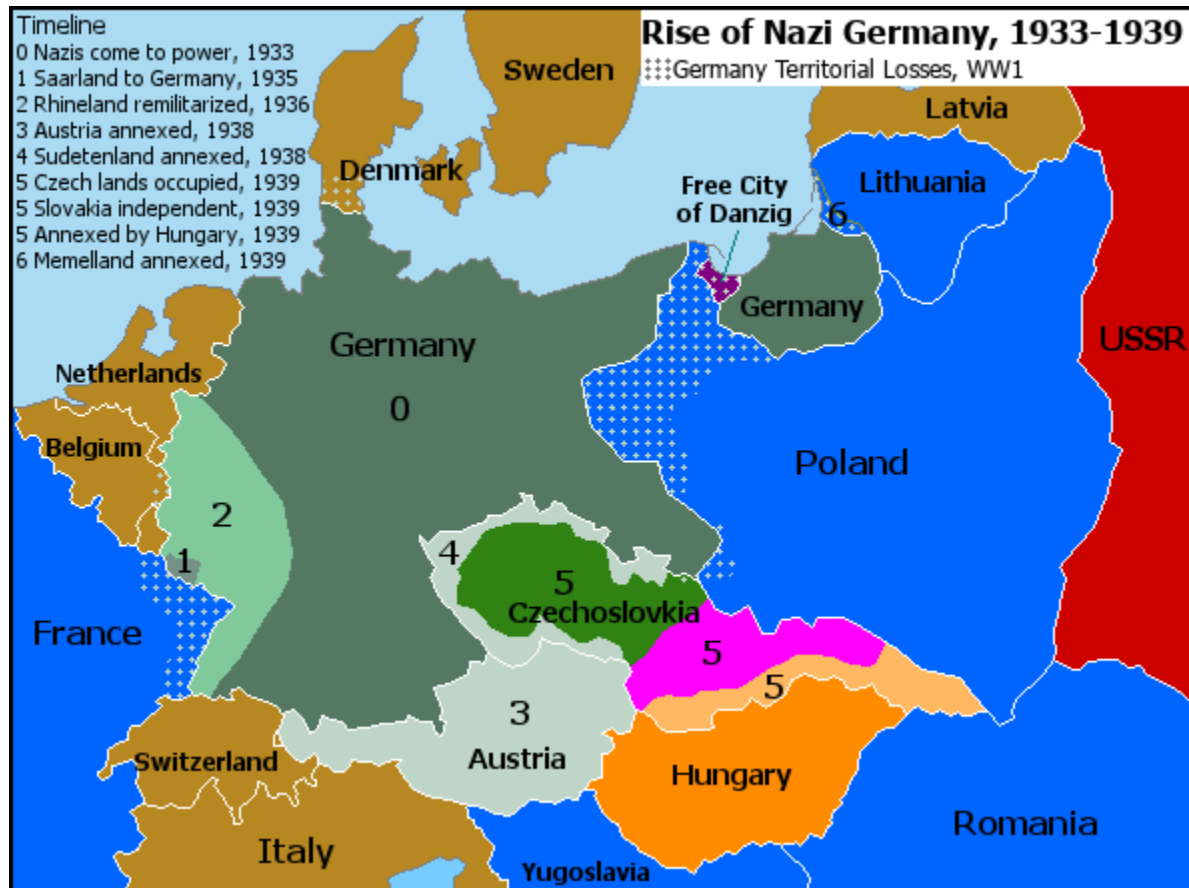
process of helping the Soviets, and the cruiser was still incomplete when Germany attacked in 1941.

The Soviet naval building program was still in its early stages when the Germans invaded the USSR in June 1941. Since the conflict was primarily a land war, the construction of many ships was suspended or canceled. The Soviets also lost their shipyards along the Black Sea, along with incomplete ships there, to the Germans. During the war, the primary missions of the Soviet Navy were to support of the Red Army and protect the coasts still under Soviet control.

14 Approach of War with Germany

14.A The Nazis Take Power in Germany

For an overview of Germany from its World War I defeat in 1918, to Hitler taking control of the country in 1933, and Nazi initial preparations for war through 1936, see the appendix, [Germany 1918–1936](#).



Nazi military parade at a 1930s Nürnberg Rally

In 1933, the far-right Nazis came into power in Germany and turned the country into a totalitarian state under Adolf Hitler, *der Führer* (“the Leader”). The Nazis were out to avenge Germany’s defeat in World War I and planned to overthrow the Treaty of Versailles, the peace treaty that had imposed many limitations on Germany. Their greater ambitions were not only to regain Germany’s WW1 territorial losses but to build a **Greater Germany** (*Grossdeutschland*) with Austria and other German regions of central Asia and to seize the lands east of Germany for German colonization. Germany only had a tiny military in 1933, so some of Hitler’s first steps were to violate the Versailles restrictions that limited German power.

A key component to destroying the Versailles limits was to rebuild all aspects of German military strength: ground, air, and naval forces. This required not only a vast industrial program to build weapons, tanks, aircraft, submarines, and warships but also a way for the Nazi government to finance rearmament through deficit spending. All this had to be kept as secret as possible in 1933–1934, lest France and its allies decide to invade Germany to force it to comply with Versailles. The 100,000-soldier army Versailles allowed Germany was simply too weak to defend the country against an intervention. It was impossible to keep rearmament preparations completely secret from the international community, given the vast amounts of financing involved. Germany countered foreign suspicions with disinformation that it was undertaking a badly-needed modernization of its forces within the Versailles limits. This did not end foreign suspicions, but no European power was willing to take action against the Nazis. By early 1935, German rearmament was well under way, and on 16 March Hitler announced Germany was reintroducing conscription, a direct violation of Versailles.



GEBT MIR 4 JAHRE ZEIT
GIVE ME 4 YEAR'S TIME, 1937 Nazi poster

The poster celebrated four year of economic achievements from the Nazi ascent into power in 1933. The German economy had greatly improved by 1937, and Nazi propaganda showcased German progress in a lavish “Give Me Four’s Time” exposition in Berlin in 1937.

Spotlight: The Nazi Four Year Plan

After taking power in 1933, Hitler in a radio address to the country said “Give me four years”, meaning Germany would be improved beyond recognition over the next four years. This gave rise to the Nazi economic and rearmament policies of 1933–1936 being called the “Four Year Plan” (later the “First Four Year Plan”). This was in imitation of Stalin’s much-trumpeted four year plans in the USSR.

Unlike the Soviet four year plans, the initial Nazi actions were not part of a detailed master plan worked out in advance. The Nazis did have major goals they wanted to achieve in the short term: economic recovery, autarky, and rearmament, but until 1933 their energies mostly went towards gaining power. Once in power, their early efforts to achieve their goals were somewhat improvised and evolved in reaction to events. The most important step in 1933 was to secretly start rearming, financed by hidden deficit spending. (For details, see the appendix, [Germany 1918–1936](#).) The Nazis also avoided taking openly radical measures at first, while their grip on power was not fully secure.

The closest they at first came to a comprehensive plan was Hjalmar Schacht's "New Plan" of 1934. Schacht was a banker and economist who, although not a member of the Nazi Party, supported many of the Nazi's nationalist goals. Hitler made him head the Reichsbank in 1933 and then also head of the Reich Ministry of Economics in 1934. Schacht's New Plan consisted of policies to improve the German economy and to promote autarky by reducing Germany's needs for imports and foreign finance. The New Plan is sometimes called the Nazi's first four year plan, based on Hitler's 1933 comment. It did not actually last for four years, as another plan would supersede it.

By 1936, Germany's economy was growing strongly, rearmament was underway, and Hitler was publicly violating terms of the Versailles Treaty. Schacht by now was quite concerned about the cost of rearmament, but his attempts to rein in Hitler led to him being increasingly sidelined in 1936–1937. The New Plan was replaced by an actual Four Year Plan (sometimes called the second four year plan) that intensified rearmament and efforts to achieve Nazi economic goals. The Spanish Civil War had started in July 1936, resulting in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy assisting the Spanish nationalists while the Soviet Union aided the Spanish republicans. Hitler became convinced that an existential war with the USSR was now inevitable, and in August issued a memorandum demanding that the German economy and German armed be prepared as fast as possible to fight this war. This view of course coincided with his expansionist intentions to create a Greater Germany and seize lands to the east as *Lebensraum* for the German people. The memo resulted in the creation of the Four Year Plan, which began on 16 Oct. 1936. Its goals, to be realized by 1940, were German autarky together with the economic and ability to fight a major war.

The goal was not total autarky for the German economy, as this was impossible. German was simply not self sufficient in certain raw materials needed for industry, and German agriculture by itself could not grow enough food to feed the population. Instead, the goal instead was to make Germany as independent as practical of materials that its potential enemies could blockade. The Allied naval blockade of Imperial Germany in World War I, for example, had starved the country and damaged its ability to fight the war. The Nazis accordingly looked to build industries with synthetic substitutes for important imported materials: They wanted a synthetic fuel industry based on German coal, since the

US, Britain, and France dominated the international oil trade. They invested in an artificial fiber industry (rayon and other viscose fabrics) to replace imported wool and American cotton. They created a synthetic rubber industry to replace natural rubber, which the British Empire controlled. They also protected German agriculture and encouraged Germans to consume German-grown foods in place of imported foods.

Hermann Göring, already in charge of building the Germany aircraft and synthetic fuel industries, was made Reich Plenipotentiary (*Reichsbevollmächtigter*) in charge of the four year plan. This gave him authority over government ministers in economic matters, and his decisions and decrees had the force of law. For the next three years, rearmament and autarky preparations dominated the German economy. German military strength rapidly increased, and the increase in industrialization eradicated unemployment — so much so that Germany had a one-million worker shortage at the start of 1939. Despite Nazi views that women should be wives and mothers, staying home to take care of children, peacetime female employment actually rose in this time, with women comprising 37.3% of the German workforce in 1939 as compare to 26.4% in England³¹⁷.

Göring in 1937 created the *Reichswerke Hermann Göring* (Reich Works Hermann Göring) as a state-owned industrial conglomerate to help implement the Four Year Plan. Like with the earlier confiscation of the Junkers factory for the German aircraft industry, the Reichswerke was partially assembled from private German heavy industrial enterprises, some of which were taken without compensation for their owners. It initially specialized in working low-quality German iron ore deposits that commercial steelmakers had resisted developing, and building an immense steelworks to process that ore into steel. Göring's access to government funding and ability to regulate the economy meant the Reichswerke could engage in such projects.

Even with the Reichswerke working the low-grade iron ore deposits, domestic iron ore production would never be sufficient to supply the German steel industry. Iron ore as always had to be imported, particularly high-grade ore from Sweden. Swedish ore was actually quite acceptable. Sweden was a neighboring, neutral country very unlikely to willingly join a blockade of Germany.

317 <https://www.theholocaustexplained.org/life-in-nazi-occupied-europe/economic-policy/economic-recovery/>.



Sweden's location along the Baltic Sea also meant the Allies would not be able to directly impose a blockade without Swedish consent, as Germany could prevent Allied navies from entering the Baltic. The one weak link was that the Baltic froze over in the winter, requiring Swedish ore to be railed to Narvik in Norway and then shipped south via Norwegian coastal waters. During the war, the Germans watched for signs that enemies might try to block the Norwegian route. When it seemed that Britain and France intended to land troops in Norway, Germany moved first, invading and occupying Norway.

Like with Sweden, Nazi Germany encouraged imports from countries and regions considered to be mostly safe, such as Denmark, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Spain, and eastern Europe. As Fascist Italy went from an opponent of Nazi expansion to a Nazi ally, trade with Italy grew. Trade with safe countries provided Germany with agricultural products and raw materials, while providing export markets for the products of German industry. This type of trade also facilitated German international goals, particularly in eastern Europe. Large volumes of trade with Germany made the economies of some eastern European countries highly dependent on Germany, furthering a Nazis goal of turning the region into a German sphere of influence. Economic dependence in turn meant they were less likely to oppose German attempts to overturn

Versailles, even though their best interests were in maintaining the international status quo. Some countries with much to lose, like Czechoslovakia and (for a long time) Romania, resisted German economic domination. Others, like Yugoslavia, fell into the German trade trap.

Yugoslavia was formed at the end of WW1 by merging the southern lands of Austria-Hungary into Serbia, an Allied country³¹⁸. It had little industry, and its economy was dominated by agriculture and raw materials such as timber, lead, and other minerals. Soon after coming into power in 1933, the Nazis offered Yugoslavia what seemed to be an excellent trade deal. The Nazi offered Yugoslavia goods access to German markets at very favorable terms, sometimes 30% higher than the goods sold on the international free market. The Nazis could through their extensive control over the German economy, which allowed them to set prices, discourage competing imports, set quotas, offer rebates, and so on. The net effect was that the German populace paid higher prices for selected Yugoslav goods. In return, German industry sold their manufactured products in Yugoslavia, often at excellent prices since Nazi business taxed subsidized exports.

Crucially, trade between the two countries was not settled in German Reichsmarks or Yugoslav dinars, avoiding the need for each country to keep reserves of the other's currency. (Trade imbalances and the Great Depression make it difficult some countries to maintain sufficient currency reserves, which impeded trade.) Instead, each country kept a clearing account in its own currency. German imports of Yugoslav goods were credited in dinars on Yugoslavia's current account, which paid Yugoslav exporters in dinars from these funds. Similarly, Yugoslav imports of German goods were credited on Germany's current account, which paid the German exporters in Reichsmarks from these funds.

This system allowed Nazi Germany to conduct a secret trade war against Yugoslavia. Almost all trade wars involve a country trying to decrease or exclude imports from the target country. The Nazi's trade war was the reverse: Germany deliberately always bought more from Yugoslavia than it sold there. This meant Yugoslavia's current account often did not have sufficient funds to

³¹⁸ The country was officially the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes at first. It was informally known as Yugoslavia until 1929, when it officially became the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

pay Yugoslav exporters. This incentivized Yugoslavia to trying to import more from Germany, to balance its account. Yugoslavia over time thus ended up even more economically dependent on Germany.

The trade war not only benefited Nazi international goals, it also helped private German exporters. Yugoslavia encouraged its importers to buy more German products at the expense of other countries' products, some of which might have been cheaper than German goods. The Yugoslav government itself sometimes purchased German construction materials for domestic infrastructure projects, like bridges, that it normally would not have done. Even the German government financially benefited at times from the trade imbalance. As German rearmament ramped up, the German Army replaced many of its older, WW1-era weapons with modern models. Normally, it would have had to bear the expense of placing and maintaining the older weapons in storage. Instead, Yugoslavia bought some of these weapons for its military. It would have been better to acquire modern weapons from other countries, but buying old German weapons helped fund the Yugoslav current account.

The Yugoslavs over time of course realized that they were becoming dependent on the German economy. There was little they could do about it. Simply trying to reduce trade with Germany would hurt Yugoslav exports and impoverish Yugoslav farmers and workers in raw materials industries. Trying to find alternative markets was very difficult, since Yugoslav products, some of which were not high-quality, sold at higher prices in Germany than they could elsewhere. The Germans also even deliberately undercut the ability of Yugoslavia to find new markets. Germany bought more Yugoslav timber than it needed and dumped the excess on international markets. Yugoslav timber companies could not compete on price in international markets due to cheap Yugoslav timber being sold by Germany³¹⁹.

International events also conspired to lock Yugoslavia into dependency on Germany. The German trade deal came during the Great Depression, when many other major countries were shielding their economies from imports. When Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935, it was placed under League of Nations sanctions. Yugoslav trade with Italy decreased, and trade with Germany increased. When Germany annexed Austria in 1938, Yugoslavia's trade with Austria now became

319 Dan Duke Borozan; thesis, "German-Yugoslav Relations 1934-1941"; 1960; <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/5200>.

trade with Germany, under the German trade terms, further increasing German domination of Yugoslav trade.

*Yugoslav Trade with Selected Countries (% of total trade), 1926-1938*³²⁰

<i>Trade</i>	1926	1928	1932	1935	1938A	1938B
<i>Yugoslav Exports</i>						
Yugoslav exports to Germany	9.27	12.09	11.28	18.65	35.94	42.00
Yugoslav exports to Austria	20.59	17.9	22.13	14.32	6.06	n/a
Yugoslav exports to Italy	25.07	26.05	23.07	16.68	6.42	6.42
Total	54.93	56.04	56.48	49.65	48.42	48.42
<i>Yugoslav Imports</i>						
Yugoslav imports from Germany	12.03	13.61	17.71	16.16	32.52	39.40
Yugoslav imports from Austria	20.08	17.29	13.43	11.92	6.88	n/a
Yugoslav imports from Italy	13.82	11.99	12.66	10.02	8.94	8.94
Total	45.93	42.89	43.8	38.1	48.34	48.34

Note: 1938A is before Germany's annexation of Austria; 1938B is afterwards. 1938B is just the addition of Austria's 1938A figures with Germany's 1938A.

In 1938–1939 as Nazi Germany took over Austria and parts of Czechoslovakia, Reichswerke Hermann Göring absorbed many Austrian and Czech heavy industry facilities. From its start in iron ore and steel, the Reichswerke would become a weapons maker, a coal miner, and a munitions manufacturer, among other pursuits. It would greatly expand during the war by taking over French, Polish, Soviet, and other enterprises. Göring did not own the Reichswerke but had access to its finances, which formed part of his vast accumulated wealth.

The Four Year Plan did accomplish much, but it failed to make Germany self-sufficient. Only modest gains in food security were made: Germany produced only 80% of its basic foodstuffs in 1933, and this rose to just 83% by 1939 despite many Nazi agricultural efforts. Even limited, blockade-proof autarky in imported materials and products was just too expensive to realize, especially since a growing economy needed more imports to sustain its industries. The plan was also sustained by hidden deficit spending, which likely would have resulted in

³²⁰ Derived from Stefan Nikolić; thesis, "New Economic History of Yugoslavia, 1919–1939: Industrial Location, Market Integration and Financial Crises"; 2016; https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/17519/7/Stefan%20Nikolic_PhD_Economics_2017_revised.pdf.

growing inflation had not World War II began in September 1939. The war would bring a new period of economic improvisation and changing goals.



Reichswerke Hermann Göring at Salzgitter

The Salzgitter facility was Reichswerke Hermann Göring's massive operation to mine iron ore and produce steel in central Germany (in what is now Lower Saxony, *Niedersachsen*). The facility grew into a massive complex, and in 1942 the Nazis reorganized the entire region around the plant to serve the facility. To this end, the town of Salzgitter and 20 other towns and villages were merged to create City-District (*Stadtkreis*) Watenstedt-Salzgitter. This was a "free city" in the sense that it was its own district and not part of a larger district. In October, the Nazis built the Drütte concentration camp in the district to provide slave labor for the Salzgitter facility.

Reichswerke Hermann Göring ended up operating its own rail and canal systems, to connect its facilities to the German transportation system. Salzgitter's size, for example, meant it needed a major connector canal (visible in the upper left of the photograph) link the facility to the Mittelland Canal, central Germany's vital east-west canal.

Reichswerke Hermann Göring Salzgitter importance meant it became a major target of British and American strategic bombing. In the later war years, it frequently sustained heavy damage. The war ended for Salzgitter on 10 April 1945 when American troops seized the region. After the war, the region was reorganized several times, and the city resumed its Salzgitter name in 1951.



One possibility of an eventual Greater Germany;

see http://classiceuropa.org/articles/gg/Guidebook_GreaterGermany_WorldWar2.pdf for details

Hitler's first steps to create Greater Germany avoided trying to recover German lands lost due to WW1. Any attempt to retake the lost lands would have meant war with the countries that took them, a situation Hitler wanted to avoid for much of the 1930s. Instead, it was actually easier to take over territory that never had been part of Germany: Austria and the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia. Both had ethnic German majorities and had many people

who wanted to be incorporated into Germany. Neither Britain nor France were interested in going to war to prevent Germany from taking over these regions.

Nazi goals for Greater Germany, however, were far larger than just Austria and the Sudetenland. Hitler's wildest ambition was to make Germany a continental-sized power by gaining *Lebensraum* ("living space") for the Germans the lands to its east, from Poland to the Urals in the USSR. This was no secret, as he public proclaimed these goals in *Mein Kampf*³²¹. It was not publicly spelled out, however, exactly what *Lebensraum* would mean once Germany acquired the eastern lands. Several comments in the book implied German colonization of some kind, but economic exploitation of the peoples of the conquered regions was also a plausible interpretation. In actual Nazi plans, *Lebensraum* mixed with their racist ideology, so that some of these regions would be germanized (for example, Estonians and Latvians be assimilated to become Germans) while "lesser races" like Slavs and Jews would be forced to make way for German colonists. At first, the Nazis intended to expel the Jews from Europe, such as to the African island of Madagascar. Slavs in lands being colonized by Germans were to be pushed to regions further east. German success in the early years of World War II instead led the Nazis to decide to exterminate the Jews, starting the Holocaust. Similarly, they had secret plans to starve instead of expel Slavs in conquered Soviet lands, a program not implemented due to Germany's failure to defeat the USSR.

Another part of the Nazi plans was to incorporate most of the "Germanic races" in Europe into Greater Germany: the Dutch, Flemings, and German Swiss in the west and the Danes, Norwegians, and Swedes in the north. This was a longer-term goal. German conquered Denmark, the Netherlands, and Norway in 1940 but made no overt move to incorporate the countries into Germany during the war. The Germans did even take back the part of Germany Denmark received after World War I. Instead, these countries were occupied, Nazism was promoted in them, and some of their citizens were recruited as volunteers in Waffen-SS units.

In addition to virulent racism and ultra nationalism, the Nazis were extremely anti-Communist. They also explicitly linked the Jews to Communism, claiming that "Judeo-Bolshevism" had enslaved the "weak" Russians and was planning to subjugate the world. All this made the rise of Nazi Germany a threat to the Soviet Union. Once the Nazis were in power, Stalin tried to build anti-German coalitions with France and Britain, but distrust

321 Volume 2 of *Mein Kampf* had an entire chapter devoted to "Eastern Orientation or Eastern Policy" with phrases like "to secure for the German people the land and soil to which they are entitled on this earth".

between the capitalist countries and the USSR prevented any effective agreement on mutual security.

In March 1935, Hitler publicly broke terms of Versailles by announcing that Germany was reintroducing conscription and was rearming. France and the USSR responded in May by signing the **Franco-Soviet Treaty of Mutual Assistance**. This was symbolic, a deliberate attempt to recall the anti-German Franco-Russian Alliance of 1892 that eventually led to the Allied Powers of World War I. The treaty was meant to deter Hitler and stated that “the U.S.S.R. and France will immediately lend each other reciprocal aid and assistance” in the event of an “unprovoked aggression on the part of a European state” on either party. This might have seemed quite impressive, but the treaty was a political gesture instead of a real alliance. The full text of the treaty was public³²². France refused to be unilaterally obligated to go to war if Germany attacked the USSR. Instead, Belgium, Britain, and Italy all had to agree that “unprovoked aggression” had occurred. None of these countries wanted another major war in Europe, so getting unanimity that unprovoked aggression had occurred was very unlikely. Events soon rendered the treaty almost totally meaningless. In October 1935, Fascist Italy invaded Ethiopia. This ruptured Italy’s relations with France and Britain and led to growing Italian-German cooperation and the creation of the Axis alliance. It was then inconceivable that Italy would agree that Germany had engaged in unprovoked aggression.

The Nazis began violating the terms of the Treaty of Versailles as soon as they came to power, with clandestine programs to expand and rearm the German military. Although the Germans tried to keep this effort secret, the major European powers quickly became aware of it. Britain was particularly concerned over German naval rearmament, as Germany and Britain had engaged in a costly and antagonizing naval arms race before World War I. The British from the 1920s also had come to believe that some of Versailles’ limits on Germany were excessive. All this made Britain receptive to negotiating with Germany: “...from the earliest years following the war it was our policy to eliminate those parts of the Peace Settlement which, as practical people, we knew to be unstable and indefensible”³²³. However, multi-lateral efforts revise Versailles failed. The French opposed weakening the terms, as they believed this would undermine French security, while the Germans rejected changes

322 The treaty was registered with the League of Nations, which published its contents as it did with all such treaties. In theory, the French and Soviets could have had a separate, secret treaty with more forceful terms, but this made no sense for purposes of deterring Germany.

323 This was the view of the British Foreign Office, per W.N. Medlicott; *Britain and Germany: The Search For Agreement 1930–1937*; 1969.

that would still leave Germany less than equal to other countries³²⁴. Britain therefore came to believe that British interests could be met by negotiating with Germany by itself, without France. This played out to Hitler's advantage.

Hitler had been angling for an agreement with Britain that would enshrine British naval superiority while allowing Germany to build up its navy beyond the Versailles limits. While this was less than full equality that the Germans usually demanded, it was appealing because it would mean that one of the victors of WW1 had explicitly agreed that Germany could ignore some of the limits of Versailles. With Germany already violating Versailles limits, Britain faced the prospect of a new naval arms race with Germany and decided it was best to get Germany to agree to voluntarily limit itself. In June 1935, the two countries agreed to the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, which allowed the Kriegsmarine to have a total tonnage of 35% of that of the Royal Navy. France, which had not even been informed of the agreement before it was signed, was appalled but only protested diplomatically. The French could have decided to resort to military action to try to enforce Versailles in full, but they were not willing to take preemptive action against Germany without a major-power ally. A significant part of the Versailles Treaty was now gutted. More violations would soon occur.

Versailles had prohibited Germany from keeping military forces in or fortifying the Rhineland, a German region next to France. Rather than deterring Hitler, the Franco-Soviet Treaty emboldened Hitler to claim that the French and Soviets had created an aggressive, hostile alliance. The Rhineland now needed to be defended to prevent a French invasion from marching into the center of Germany. So in March 1936, Hitler sent troops into the Rhineland. This was a risky move, as the French Army alone still greatly outnumbered the German Army. France was unwilling to resort to military conflict to expel the German military from the Rhineland. Hitler had won his gamble and ordered the Germans to begin building the Westwall, a network of fortifications in the Rhineland. Versailles had suffered another major breach with no adverse consequences to Germany.

France's failure to stop the remilitarization of the Rhineland also badly damaged France's strategic position. The Rhineland while undefended had indeed been the invasion route into the heart of Germany had the French Army been ordered to attack. France's failure to act against Germany on this key issue meant France's continental European allies now questioned whether France would come to their assistance in case of German aggression.

324 One German negotiating position was that the military limits on Germany were acceptable if they were also imposed on the other major countries. Otherwise, Germany should be equal to the other major powers, with no military limits. The Germans knew the major powers would not agree to limit their armies to 100,000 soldiers, to forgo conscription, and to give up many types of modern weapons, so their position was clearly a ruse to overturn the treaty.

1936 also saw the near-completion of the Maginot Line, extensive French fortifications along the border with Germany. This also caused the French allies to wonder if France might just choose to shelter behind its fortifications rather than respond militarily to German aggression elsewhere in Europe³²⁵. Belgium, which had a defense pact with France, repudiated its alliance later in 1936 and announced a policy of neutrality. Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia, members of the Little Entente, all remained in their individual treaties of friendship with France but were now unsure of French assistance.

French diplomacy tried to repair relations with their allies and create a mutual assistance pact with the Little Entente countries³²⁶, but to no real effect. Instead, other developments favored Germany. The growing alignment of Italy with Germany resulted in Benito Mussolini, the Italian dictator, proclaiming the existence of a Berlin–Rome “axis”. Germany had also become a major economic power in much of Eastern Europe, often the biggest trading partner for many countries there. All this induced various countries to come to accommodations with Germany and Italy. In March 1937, Yugoslavia and Italy agreed to a treaty of non-aggression and arbitration, signaling this Little Entente country was unlikely to oppose the Axis powers³²⁷.

14.B The Spanish Civil War

In July 1936, the Spanish Civil War began, pitting rebelling monarchists, conservatives, and fascists of the insurgent “Nationalist” right against the republicans, socialists, and anarchists of the “Republican” left. Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy quickly provided military aid to the Nationalists. German air transports ferried Nationalist troops across the straits of Gibraltar from Spanish Morocco to Spain, bypassing a Republican naval blockade. The USSR in turn supported the Republicans. Britain, France, and many other countries proclaimed “non-intervention” in the civil war in hopes that this would prevent it from growing into a bigger

325 The ongoing construction of the Maginot Line in 1934 may have been one reason why Poland negotiated a non-aggression treaty with Germany that year. Despite being in a military alliance with France, Poland was now concerned that the French would not respond to a German attack on Poland. The Franco-Polish alliance remained in existence but was now moribund.

326 For more details on the French effort and the Mutual Assistance Pact, see Brad W. Kephart; “France and the Little Entente, 1936-1937: the Work of Yvon Delbos” (thesis); 1981; https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc663535/m2/1/high_res_d/1002775954-Kephart.pdf.

327 The Yugoslav-Italian pact was not even discussed at the next conference of the Little Entente, in April 1937. This was the beginning of the end for the Little Entente. Some historians accordingly count April 1937 as the effective end of the Little Entente: “The entente lost its remaining political significance when Yugoslavia and Romania denied (April 1937) a request by Czechoslovakia, then threatened by Germany, that the entente pledge full military aid to a member that was the victim of aggression.” See <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Little-Entente>.

European war. Non-intervention was an agreement among governments and did not affect the voluntary efforts of their private citizens. Thousands of civilians from many parts of the world including British and French citizens volunteered to go to fight for the Republicans as part of the International Brigades.

Germany, Italy, and the USSR all claimed to be participants in non-intervention agreement but they all ignored it since there was no international mechanism to enforce non-intervention. Germany and Italy blatantly helped the Nationalists, not only with military aid but with their own naval forces, combat and support troops, and aircraft.

The Soviets first began by sending considerable civilian aid to Spain, including clothing, food, and medicines. They pretended this was completely financed by voluntary donations of Soviet citizens at voluntary mass rallies for the Spanish Republic. While the Soviets did raise some funds this way, most funding came from the Soviet government itself, often paid for by gold from the Spanish Republicans. The USSR soon started to supply covert military aid, using dummy corporations to secretly purchase weapons in European countries and ship them to Spain. Apparently only a small amount of mostly-obsolete arms were obtained in this way, so the Soviets soon began covertly sending Soviet-made weapons directly to Spain³²⁸, along with over two thousand Soviet “volunteers”. The fiction was that all Soviets in Spain were volunteers. In reality, they had been assigned to go there by Soviet institutions such as the government, state intelligence (a part of the NKVD), military intelligence (GRU), and the Red Army. The Soviets sent military advisors, trainers, military pilots, technicians, spies, guerrilla warfare experts, and many other people.



The USSR sent its newest models of aircraft and tanks to Spain. The Spanish Civil War thus became a huge weapons testing ground not only for the Red Army but also for Germany and Italy. Soviet advisors not only watched how Soviet equipment was performing, they also observed both foreign equipment and the effectiveness of the tactics the combatants were

³²⁸ I suspect one reason the Soviets did not openly violate the non-intervention agreement was to avoid needlessly alienating Britain and France. Stalin still hoped that these European powers would agree to a mutual security arrangement against Germany. Another likely reason was to avoid the chance that its shipments might be seized or sunk, as German and Italian ships and submarines were active around Spain to help the Nationalists.

using. Soviet pilots flew some of the Soviet aircraft on combat missions, and Soviet tank crews at times participated in combat with Soviet tanks.

Selected Soviet Aid to the Spanish Republic

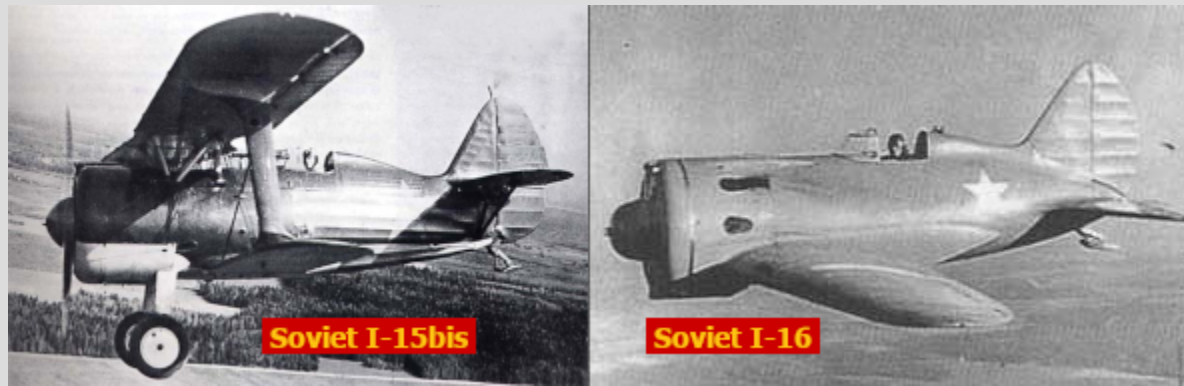
<i>Category</i>	<i>Equipment</i>	<i>Personnel</i>
Aviation	806 aircraft 110,000 bombs	772 pilots
Armored Vehicles	362 tanks 120 armored cars	351 AFV personnel
Artillery	1,555 guns 3.4 million rounds	100 artillerists
Mortars	340 mortars 500,000 rounds	
Smaller Arms	15,113 machineguns 500,000 rifles 862 million cartridges	
Other	1,500 tons explosives	222 advisors 204 translators 156 radio operators 130 technicians 77 naval personnel 52 other specialists
Total Personnel		2,064

Source: John McCannon; "Soviet Intervention in the Spanish Civil War, 1936–39: A Reexamination"; *Russian History*, Vol. 22 No. 2; 1995; <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24657802>.

Note: Western histories of the Spanish Civil War have a wide range of figures for the amount of aid the USSR sent. McCannon in his 1996 work claims to use the most up-to-date figures from Soviet sources, although his actual source comes from 1972. It may well be that more accurate figures have been published since then.

Soviet pilots operated some of the Soviet-supplied aircraft, which included some of their newest models. The Soviet I-15 biplane fighter did well against Nationalist biplanes. The Soviet I-16 monoplane fighter at first did quite well, with its excellent flying abilities earning it the Republican nickname *la Mosca* (the Fly) and the Nationalist belittled it as *la Rata* (the Rat). Its superiority lasted in Spanish skies until the Germans sent their new Bf 109B monoplane fighters to Spain.

Sidetrip: Biplanes to Monoplanes



The Spanish Civil War was a milestone in the transition of fighter combat from biplanes to monoplanes. Biplanes with their two main wings were highly maneuverable, but the two wings and their bracings suffered from considerable drag, which limited top speeds. Monoplanes with their single wing suffered less wing drag and were in theory faster, but monoplane wings were too weak to withstand the peak forces they could encounter³²⁹. 1930s technological innovations improved the strength of monoplane wings, allowing monoplanes to attain much higher speeds than biplanes and thus dictate the terms of engagement.

Not all combatants in Spain learned this lesson, however. The Italians in particular mostly continued their love affair with biplane fighters, only to see them completely outclassed by monoplanes when Italy entered World War II in 1940. The Soviet Union concluded that both fighter types were needed, biplanes when high maneuverability was needed and monoplanes when high speed was required. It would have been better had the Soviets just concentrated on monoplanes, but the Soviets thought big. They planned for a very large air force and a manufacturing base that was sufficient to make both types of fighters in quantity. The Soviets went on to mass produce both types of fighters until the German invasion of 1941 showed that biplane fighters were completely outdated.

Unlike Soviet pilots, Soviet ground warfare personnel were not supposed to take part in combat: Stalin had ordered them to “stay out of artillery range”. Their main missions were to train and advise the Republicans. The Soviets sent light tanks to Spain, including their new T-26 infantry-support tank and their new BT-5 fast tank, together with training personnel. These tank crews actually did at times operate Soviet tanks in combat against the

³²⁹ Some of the early I-16s had structural failures with their wings, which had to be reinforced.

Nationalists in 1936–1937, such as helping to defend Madrid against a Nationalist offensive. The fighting including combat between Soviet-crewed T-26s and Nationalist light tanks supplied by Italy.

The T-26s and BT-5s were armed with 45-mm guns, about equivalent to the 37-mm tank guns of other countries. In the Spanish Civil War, however, their main tank opponents only had machineguns, such as the Italian CV-33 (aka the L3/33) with one 6.5-mm MG, the Italian CV-35 (aka the L3/35) with two 8-mm MGs, and the German Panzer I with two 7.92-mm MGs. Machinegun fire against the Soviet tanks was mostly ineffective, while the Soviet 45-mm guns could easily penetrate the light armor of the Nationalist tanks, given the Soviet tanks an advantage. Tanks were not used just for tank-vs-tank combat but also to support the infantry forces. The 45-mm gun had high-explosive ammunition for attacking soft targets, and both Soviet tank models had machineguns as secondary armament.

The tanks' light armor made them vulnerable to fire from antitank guns and artillery. The Nationalists also began attacking Soviet tanks with petrol bombs. These bombs at their most primitive were glass bottles filled with gasoline. They were thrown with a flaming rag stuffed in the bottles' necks; the bottles would smash on the tank, with its gasoline catching fire. This could damage the tank or even knock it out if the burning gasoline started an engine fire or caused the gasoline fuel tank to explode. (Petrol bombs would later become world famous in 1939 as "Molotov Cocktails", a sarcastic name Finnish troops gave them when using the bombs against invading Soviet tanks.)

Soviet tanks also sometimes caught on fire when hit by antitank or artillery fire. Poor Soviet manufacturing quality meant that Soviet tanks caught fire more easily than Italian or German tanks. One defect was that Soviet armor sometimes was not sealed tightly, allowing burning gasoline from petrol bombs to seep into the vehicles. Another defect was that Soviet gasoline fuel tanks and fuel lines often leaked inside the vehicles, leading to deadly fires and explosions when flames from the petrol bombs or sparks from antitank and artillery hits ignited the leaking gasoline. The Soviet military advisors observed all this, and one important lesson the Soviets learned from the Spanish Civil War was how vulnerable their gasoline-engine vehicles could be in combat conditions. This led them to develop diesel engines, as diesel fuel was far less likely to catch fire than gasoline. All modern Soviet medium and heavy tanks in the Great Patriotic War would have diesel engines.

Soviet tanks in Spain that broke down or were damaged were often out of action for long periods of time. The Soviets had not sent sufficient spare tank parts for repair and maintenance purposes. It is unclear from what I've seen how much the Soviet advisors

noticed this problem. If they did report this, the Soviet high command back home apparently either ignored it or was unable to do anything about it. Throughout the 1930s and during the initial years of the Great Patriotic War, lack of spare parts remained a major issue for tanks and other weapons in the Red Army.

Soviet artillery experts in the Spanish Civil War noted that direct fire was much more effective than indirect fire, sometimes using only 10% of the ammunition to achieve the same results as indirect fire. In direct fire, the gunners had a line of sight to their targets and could rapidly correct their fire onto the target. Indirect fire required gunners to calculate trajectories, with artillery spotters watching the effects of the fire and call in corrections³³⁰. All this took time and wasted ammunition. These factors made direct fire attractive to the Soviets. At the time of the Spanish Civil War, Soviet factories were only making relatively limited amounts of ammunition, so they wanted to use existing stocks efficiently³³¹. Indirect fire also required gunners to have good mathematical skills, but the Soviet education system was not yet producing enough people trained well enough in math as the Red Army needed. Direct fire was less math intensive. Red Army Artillery accordingly emphasized direct fire for most light and some medium artillery. During much of the Great Patriotic War, most divisional light artillery used direct fire, reserving math-skilled gunners for the larger-caliber artillery. Direct fire, however, did come with a cost: your ability to see the enemy meant the enemy could also see and fire on you. Soviet artillery during the war took higher losses than other country's artillery, which used indirect fire more extensively.

Many Soviet military advisors gained valuable experience in Spain, which helped the USSR during the Great Patriotic War. Many Soviets who went to Spain became high-ranking, effective officers in the war, with some going on to become marshals of the Soviet Union. However, not every benefited from Spain; Stalin's crony G.I. Kulik went there, learned little, and remained incompetent for the rest of his military career. Some experiences gained in Spain was also lost due to Stalin's Great Purge. Various Red Army officers who served in Spain were arrested and imprisoned or executed following their return to the USSR.

330 Unobserved indirect fire was also possible, using aerial reconnaissance photographs, maps, and mathematical calculations, but this was typically less effective, especially if the gunners were not highly trained.

331 Artillery ammunition became more plentiful by the late 1930s as Soviet military production expanded. Shortages were then the norm in the early years of the Great Patriotic War, due to industrial disruption by the German invasion.



Front Popular! Front de Victoria i de Libertat!
Popular Front! Front of Victory and of Liberty!

This is a Catalan poster from the Spanish Civil War, featuring dramatized socialist flags, including the Soviet hammer and sickle. (The image does not depict the actual Soviet flag.) The Popular Front (*Frente Popular* in Spanish; *Front Popular* or *Front d'Esquerres* in Catalan) was an alliance of leftist Spanish political parties that won the elections of 1936, which in turn led to the Nationalist uprising and the Spanish Civil War.

Soviet participation in the Spanish Civil War was insufficient to rescue the Republicans. The Soviets did save the Republic from collapse in 1936, but Germany and Italy were far more determined to see their side win. For example, while the Soviets sent about 2,000 people to Spain (with less than one thousand present at any one time), the Italians alone sent over 70,000 including four combat divisions. Stalin also extracted a high price for his aid, and 50 metric tons of gold, 60% of the Spanish gold reserves, went to the USSR. Overall, Stalin was far more interested in exploiting the Spanish Civil War for Soviet domestic and international propaganda than in having the Republicans win. The first Soviets to go to Spain were journalists and filmmakers, resulting in a stream of propaganda about the fascist threat to Spain, Europe, and the USSR. Stalin almost certainly would have liked the Republicans to win the war, since he would credit Soviet help for the victory, but he was not willing to sacrifice significant amounts of resources to the cause.

The only thing that might have saved the Spanish Republicans was if Britain and France abandoned their non-intervention policies, which was not going to occur³³². Without a prospect for victory, Stalin cut back Soviet shipments and personnel starting in the second half of 1937. In 1939, the few remaining Soviets left the country as the Nationalists swept to victory. British and French neutrality and non-intervention in the Spanish Civil War likely was another of the many factors that increasingly convinced Stalin those two countries were unwilling to stand up to Germany.

14.C Germany Aggression 1938–1939

Britain's and France's obvious reluctance to risk a major war over Spain also encouraged Hitler. In March 1938, he sent German troops into Austria and joined the country (**the Anschluss**) to Germany. The Austrian Army offered no resistance, and many Austrian civilians celebrated the entry of the Germans. The Anschluss was yet another violation of the Versailles Treaty, which had prohibited the union of Germany and Austria. International reaction was minimal. Neville Chamberlain, Prime Minister of Britain went so far as to publicly state, "The hard fact is that nothing could have arrested what has actually happened unless this country and other countries had been prepared to use force".

Although ethnic Germans comprised the great majority of Austria's population, Austria had never been part of the German Empire of 1871–1918. The Anschluss thus was Hitler's first step in creating a Greater Germany beyond the historical borders of Germany. Its success meant he immediately turned his attention to Czechoslovakia. This country had been formed at the end of World War I out of the Czech and Slovak lands of the defeated Austro-Hungarian empire but beside Czechs and Slovaks contained numerous ethnic minorities, including Germans, Hungarians, and Ukrainians. There were about 3 million Germans in Czechoslovakia, mostly living in the Sudetenland, a region along the Czech border with Germany and Austria. In March 1938, Hitler began publicly championing the Sudeten German fascists who were publicly demanding full equality for Sudeten Germans in Czechoslovakia and autonomy for the Sudetenland. Secretly, the Nazis and the Sudeten fascists were working to detach the Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia and annex it into Germany. The **Sudeten Crisis** grew throughout the spring, summer, and autumn, with Germany preparing a military invasion to seize the Sudetenland in October.

³³² France did at times secretly provide the Republics with funds and weapons, but in insufficient quantities to change the course of the civil war.

In September 1939, the leaders of Britain, France, Germany, and Italy met at München (“Munich”) in Germany to discuss the crisis, in a series of meetings that became known as the **Munich Conference**. On 30 September, the four leaders signed the **Munich Agreement** that allowed Germany to annex the Sudetenland. This was the culmination of a policy of **appeasement**, allowing Germany to have its way in hopes that the country would not start a war. German troops moved in the Sudetenland on 1 October.

The Sudeten Crisis and the subsequent dismemberment of Czechoslovakia were key events leading to the start of World War II. The subject is accordingly covered in more detail in [Briefing: The Destruction of Czechoslovakia](#).



1938 David Low political cartoon on the lack of Stalin at the Munich Conference

Czechoslovakia had a web of treaties and alliances that was supposed to protect it from aggression, but all failed. The Czech-French alliance foundered when France agreed to German annexation of the Sudetenland. The Little Entente of Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia became moribund as the foreign policies of both Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy became highly aggressive, backed by growing military power. The Czech-Soviet alliance failed, too. Stalin wanted to stop Hitler, but he would not risk war with Germany on his own.



The loss of the Sudetenland started the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia. Poland took the opportunity of the crisis to issue an ultimatum to Czechoslovakia demanding the rest of the Teschen region, with the Czechs ceding the territory in early October.



In November, through German mediation, Czechoslovakia surrendered its southern, Hungarian-majority regions to Hungary. Worse was to come. In March 1939, German occupied the Czech portion of the country and arranged for Slovakia to become an independent state run by Slovakian fascists. Hungary annexed easternmost region of Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovakia had entirely disappeared from the map.



Hitler's March 1939 action violated the Munich Agreement and his assurance to the British to consult with them "to resolve differences". This betrayal finally galvanized Britain and France to begin to seriously prepare for war in the immediate future³³³. At the end of March, they publicly guaranteed Polish independence. Hitler believed this was just another meaningless political gesture and that they would no more fight for Poland than they did for Czechoslovakia.

Lithuania, not Poland, was the next immediate target. Later in March 1939, Germany forced Lithuania to cede the Klaipėda region (aka the Memelland), which Lithuania had acquired from Germany after World War I. Although this region was only about 5% of Lithuania's land, it contained the country's only port and a considerable amount of Lithuanian industry. Its loss hurt the Lithuanian economy and alienated the country against Germany.

The USSR had been building up its military forces throughout the 1930s. After the Munich Conference, the prospect of a war in Eastern Europe became acute. Stalin greatly accelerated the Soviet military build up. During 1939, for example, Soviet overall industrial output increased by 16% from 1938, but Soviet defense industrial output increased by 46.5%. Defense output increased by another 33% in 1940, and Soviet labor law was changed to greatly increase working times. For many industrial workers, the work day went from 7-hour to 8-hour shifts³³⁴ and the work week went from 5 days to 6. Thus, many workers went from working a nominal 35 hours per week to 48³³⁵. Preparations were made to convert

333 France had taken some earlier steps in the mid-1930s, such as increasing the term of conscription to two years and increasing military spending, but its forces still needed to be modernized with new weapons and aircraft. Britain in the mid-1930s, fearing the Luftwaffe might be able to bomb London into ruins, had started to increase its fighter and anti-aircraft defenses, but its army remained quite small.

334 Workers, like coal miners, involved in heavy manual labor in dangerous occupations kept their 6-hour work days.

335 The Soviets had almost from their start undermined the 35-hour work week by introducing occasional unpaid, "volunteer" work days that actually became almost always compulsory. The Soviets continued this system even after the 48-hour work

factories making civilian for military production if and when needed. Great amounts of weapons, tanks, and aircraft were made in 1938 through 22 June 1941, the day of the German invasion.

Over the 1930s, as the Soviet economy grew, the active strength of the Red Army rose from about 600,000 personnel to about 1,600,000 by 1938. After Munich, it soon ramped up: 1.9 million by early 1939, 3.9 million by early 1940, 4.2 million by early 1941, and 5.1 million (officially 5,080,977) on 22 June 1941, the day of the German invasion. There were millions more reservists in the civilian economy who could be mobilized for war: on 1 July 1941 the active Red Army reached 10,380,000, although many of these millions would be lost in the fighting in 1941.

The prospect of mass warfare also caused the Soviets to expand the pool of manpower subject to recruitment. Previously, men from various groups of class enemies were legally excluded from military service. The Cossacks, one excluded group, became eligible for conscription in 1935. The rest remained excluded until 1939, when the law was changed so that class enemies in general could be drafted as enlisted soldiers. They could not enter officer training schools, which kept them out of the officer corps.

In 1938–1939, the Soviets also ended the national military units, which had been volunteer military units of some union republics, for various non-Russian ethnic groups ([see above for a summary of these forces](#)). This was also part of ending the “temporary”, unofficial exemption from conscription that had been in force since Russian Civil War for the more-rebellious ethnic groups like Muslims of the Caucasus and Central Asia. It opened up a large pool of manpower: Central Asian ethnic groups went from comprising under 1% of the Red Army in 1937 to just over 5% by 1941. The ending of national military units meant all Red Army units were technically multi-ethnic ones with no special treatment for ethnic groups (other than religious-based dietary requirements). As a practical matter, since Russians and to lesser extents Ukrainians and Belarusians inhabited every union republic, almost all Red Army units had a Slavic core the Soviets counted on as being most loyal to the USSR.

14.D Stalin and Hitler Divide Eastern Europe

Stalin, however, hoped to avoid war with Germany. From 1938 to the summer of 1939, the threat to the USSR was growing as Germany expanded eastwards: annexing Austria,

week was introduced.

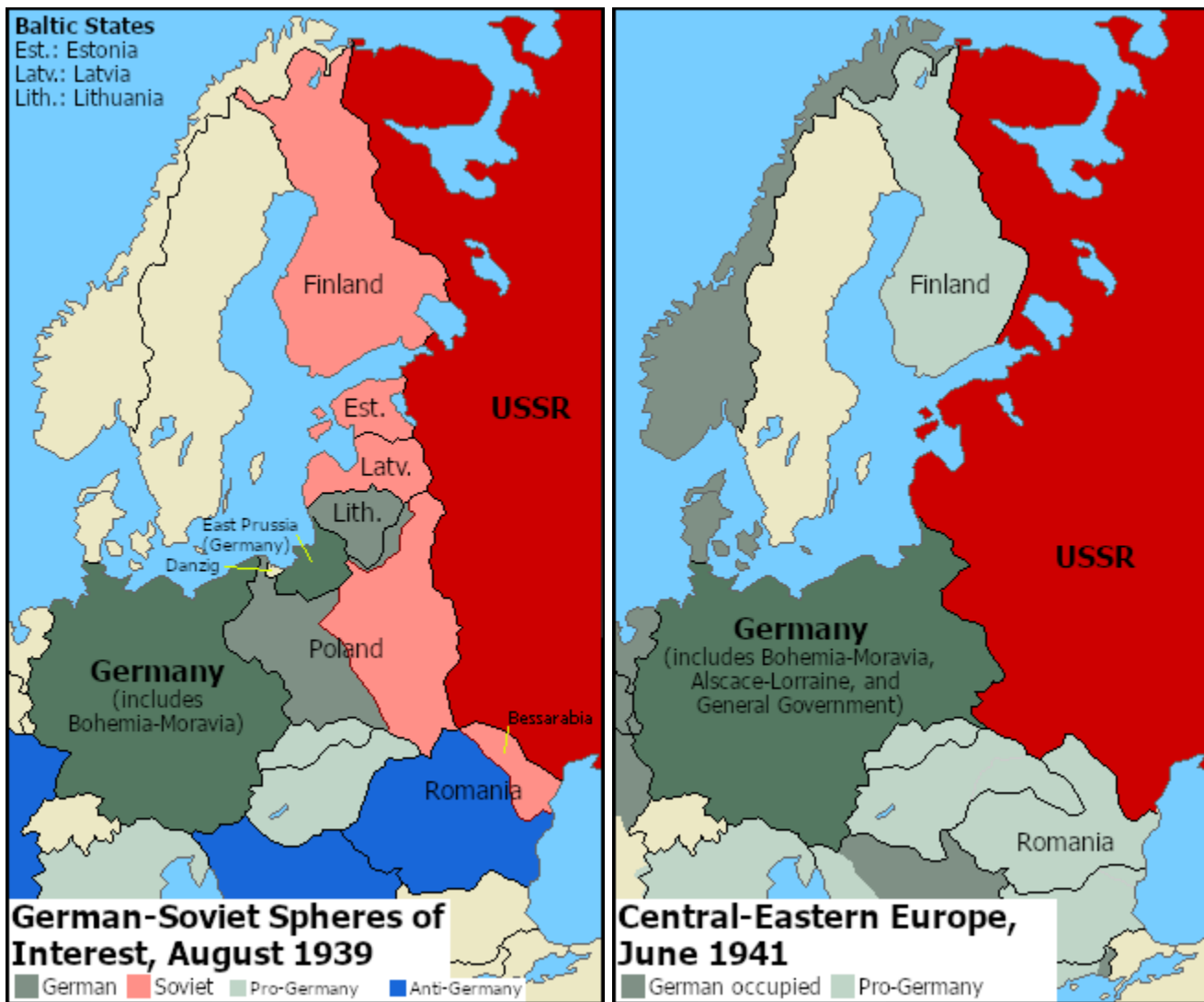
dismembering Czechoslovakia, taking part of Lithuania, and threatening Poland. Nazi Germany at first in 1939 tried to get Poland to become the junior member of an anti-Soviet German-Polish alliance, with Poland having to agree to Germany taking over the Free City of Danzig³³⁶ and building a German-controlled autobahn across western Poland to connect East Prussia with Germany proper. The Poles refused, realizing this was the first step to Hitler dismembering their country and reducing them to a German puppet. In response, Germany repudiated the German-Polish non-aggression pact in April 1939 and turned aggressive. While Britain and France had guaranteed Poland's independence, Stalin likely doubted either power would be willing to go to war, based on Czechoslovakia.

Stalin tried to strike an anti-German deal with Poland. The Poles refused to agree to Soviet offers of cooperation, realizing that if they let Soviet troops into the country Stalin would take it over. To the Soviets, Poland looked increasingly vulnerable to Germany, with Germany's most plausible next target being the USSR. Stalin also likely believed that Britain actually wanted to see a destructive war break out between Germany and the USSR, with a neutral Britain watching from the sidelines. Accordingly, when the Germans secretly proposed that Germany and the USSR could come to an understanding of mutual benefit, Stalin took this seriously.

German-Soviet negotiations resulted in three agreements. The first was an economic agreement, creating the conditions for extensive trade between the two countries. The Germans most received Soviet wheat, oil, iron ore, and other raw materials while the Soviets most received industrial goods, advanced machinery, and some modern military technology. The Soviets insisted on an economic agreement before they would consider a political one, but as it worked out the Germans almost certainly benefited more from Soviet resources than what the Soviets got in return.

The second agreement was the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of August 1939. The two countries agreed to a 10-year term of non-aggression. When the pact was publicly announced to the world, it was momentous: the hitherto anti-Communist Germany and anti-Nazi Soviet Union had agreed to get along. Rather than being tidings of peace, the news brought immediate fears across Europe and elsewhere that the Germans and Soviets were planning on carving up eastern Europe. This was correct.

³³⁶ Danzig was under the League of Nations, not Poland. However, if Poland had agreed to let Germany take control of Danzig, it is unlikely the League of Nations would have done anything effective to prevent it.



Bohemia-Moravia (much of western Czechoslovakia), General Government (central Poland), and Alsace-Lorraine (officially part of France) were not officially annexed into Germany, but in practice they effectively became part of Germany under German civil administration. Alsace-Lorraine, for example, was merged into the adjacent German civil districts, and its population was subject to conscription into the German armed forces.

The third, most important agreement was a highly-secret protocol to the pact that divided eastern Europe into German and Soviet spheres of influence. This targeted Finland, the Baltic states, Poland, and Romania. Poland in particular was to be divided between Germany and the USSR. Within days of the pact being signed, on 1 September 1939 Germany invaded Poland, starting World War II. France and Britain had guaranteed Polish independence and went to war when Germany. The USSR officially stayed neutral. On 17 September, it took its cut by invading eastern Poland under the pretense of restoring order there. The Polish Army was too weak to withstand either country never mind both and quickly collapsed. By October, the fighting was over and all of Poland was divided between the Germans and the Soviets.



"Rendezvous", 1939 David Low cartoon

The cartoon depicts Hitler and Stalin meeting over the corpse of Poland.

The USSR justified its invasion of eastern Poland in order to "protect the lives and property of the population of Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia". The Soviets claimed this was necessary as the Polish state no longer existed. This was untrue, which the Soviets well knew. The Polish central government on 17 September had not even left Poland to go into exile (although it would that night), and local government services were intact across all of eastern Poland. Soviet propaganda also claimed the Soviets were in eastern Poland to liberate the farmers from the landowners and the workers from the capitalists.

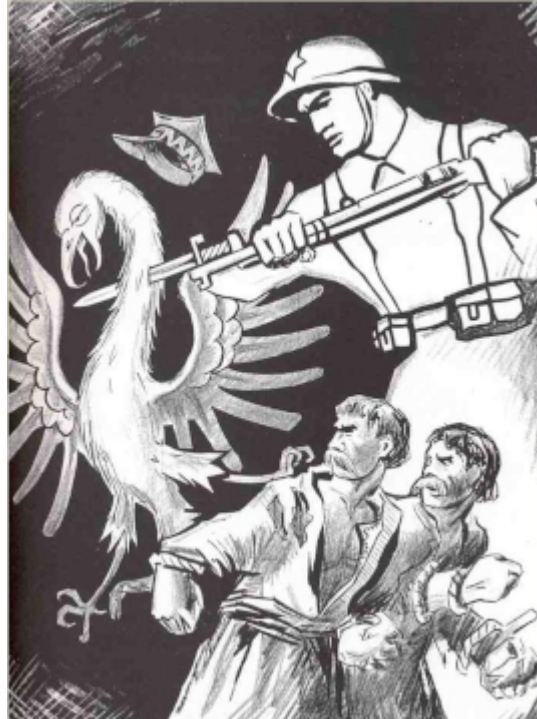


Podat ruku pomoshchi bratskim narodom Zapadnoy Ukrainy i Zapadnoy Belorussii - nasha svyashchennaya

obyazannost!

To lend a helping hand to the fraternal people of Western Ukraine and Western Belarus is our sacred duty!

The small Polish forces left in eastern Poland fought the massive Soviet invasion forces until early October. The Soviets then divided eastern Poland in two, Western Belorussia and Western Ukraine. This corresponded with another Soviet propaganda claim, that they were liberating the Belarusians and Ukrainians of eastern Poland from the oppressive, bourgeois Polish state.



Soviet propaganda poster of a Red Army soldier slaying the Polish eagle and freeing the Belarusian and Ukrainian people³³⁷

Rigged elections in each of these two areas created communist-dominated “people’s assemblies”, which petitioned to be incorporated into the USSR. The Soviet government graciously agreed. In November 1939, Western Belorussia was merged into the Belorussian SSR and Western Ukraine into the Ukrainian SSR. Of course, these petitions were just political theater to give an appearance of legality to Stalin had already decided to do.

The Allies had gone to war with Germany over Poland but took no effective action against the Soviet invasion and annexation of eastern Poland. Britain’s Prime Minister issued general verbal denunciations, but these had no effect on Stalin just like verbal denunciations of Germany’s actions in the 1930s had no effect on Hitler. Britain and France were quite

337 https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Polish_eagle_and_Soviet_soldier.JPG

concerned about Germany-Soviet economic cooperation, especially the flow of Soviet oil to Germany. This would soon lead them to consider bombing Soviet oilfields.

The Soviets were pleased with the situation in Europe in late 1939. Despite Hitler's well-known detestation of Communism and his desire for *Lebensraum* to his east, the USSR had avoided a war with Germany. Instead, the neutral USSR could now watch from the sidelines as Germany battled it out with Britain and France on the Western Front. If World War I was a guide, this would result in a years-long war of massive attrition, likely leaving any eventual victor too exhausted to take on the Soviet Union. World War I would not be a guide.

14.E Soviet Aggression 1939–1940

Stalin wasted no time going after his next target in his newly-gained sphere of influence. Even while the Red Army was still in active operations in Poland in September, the Soviets massed Soviet military and naval forces around Estonia and demanded that country allow Soviets ground, air, and naval forces to be based there. With no realistic prospect of being able to resist a Soviet invasion, Estonia agreed on 28 September.

Also in late September, the Germans and Soviets revised their secret protocol on their spheres of influence. Lithuania had been included in the German sphere. The Germans had hoped Lithuania would join in the invasion of Poland, as Lithuania had a decades-long claim to a strip of land in Poland. Lithuania, however, had no interest in cooperating with Germany, having just lost its Klaipėda region to the Germans in March 1939. Hitler reportedly was enraged with Lithuania's refusal to attack Poland. The Germans offered to assign the country to the Soviet sphere in return for Germany getting more land in Poland. Stalin agreed. (This was one of several modifications to the protocol, with the last one being agreed in January 1941.)

In October, the Soviets issued Estonian-style ultimatums to Latvia and Lithuania, with Latvia agreeing on 5 October and Lithuania on 10 October. The USSR thus gained bases in all three Baltic states. Officially, the Soviets claimed the bases were there to help the Baltics defend against Germany, but in reality they were springboards for the Soviets to occupy these lands. Before this happened, Stalin invaded Finland.



1939 “Herblock” (Herbert Block) cartoon

In November 1939, a Soviet border post by Mainila on the border with Finland was shelled by artillery, killing four Soviet border guards and wounding nine. The Soviets claimed Finland had attacked the post and used this as justification to attack Finland. In actuality, the Soviets had deliberately shelled their own border post to provide a pretext for their invasion.

The USSR started on Finland in October by demanding that Finland cede territory to the USSR, destroy some border fortifications, and allow a Soviet military base inside Finland. Finland refused, and Finnish counteroffers were not accepted. The USSR, with a population of about 171 million, invaded Finland, with a population of about 3.7 million, on 30 November 1939. The Red Army greatly outnumbered the Finnish armed and seemed to have overwhelming strength for the invasion.

The Soviet leadership expected to overrun the entire country in a few weeks of fighting. In early December, the USSR set up a puppet Finnish government, the Finnish Democratic Republic³³⁸, and pretended it was now the official government of Finland. Political theater then staged Soviet-FDR negotiations, with the FDR agreeing to an amended version of the

338 “Finnish Democratic Republic” comes from the Russian version of the state name, *Finlyandskaya Demokraticeskaya Respublika*. The state name in Finnish was actually *Suomen Kansanvaltainen Tasavalta*, “Finnish People’s Republic”, not *Suomen Demokraattinen Tasavalta*, “Finnish Democratic Republic”. (To add further confusion, Finland used both Finnish and Swedish, and the Swedish version was *Demokratiska Republiken Finland*, the “Democratic Republic of Finland”). Since this entity was a Soviet puppet, “Finnish Democratic Republic” is most often used these days.

original Soviet demands. This actually meant little unless the USSR triumphed over Finland, since the FDR did not control Finland³³⁹.

Red Army commanders also believed that Finland would be conquered quickly. Their marching orders to the invasion forces showed that they expected to cross Finland and reach the Swedish border. Instructions forbade the Red Army to cross Swedish border and included instructions how to greet Swedish border guards with respect³⁴⁰. Many of the invading Red Army soldiers, fed propaganda that they were liberating the oppressed Finnish people from the yoke of capitalism, expected that Finnish soldiers would even refuse to fight them. They were wrong.

The Finns fought ferociously, frequently halting or defeating Red Army forces and smashing entire Soviet divisions. The Red Army took more casualties than Finland had soldiers, and the Soviet air forces lost many more planes than were in the entire Finnish air force. The war became an international embarrassment for the Soviet Union, damaging its reputation and causing it to be expelled from the League of Nations.



Britain and France, already displeased with the USSR over Germany and Poland, seriously considered sending a military intervention force to Finland. The plan was for them to land in Norway, traverse Sweden, and enter northwestern Finland. The Swedish iron ore mines lay on this route, and the Allies' real aim was to cut off Germany's access to this ore. However,

339 It supposedly was in control of those small parts of Finland captured by the Red Army. It actually did not actually have real authority even in these areas, which were under Soviet administration.

340 During the war, the Finns captured copies of what is now called "the Red Army Route Planner to Finland", which is available in Finnish translation at <https://www.antikvaari.fi/k/uitto-antero/puna-armeijan-marssiopas-suomeen-1/00176854df7e793858d1cea9>.

Allied forces would have entered Finland, and there was a real threat that these troops would end up fighting the Red Army.

The British and French also redoubled their interest in bombing Soviet oilfields, since it would not only halt export of oil to Germany but also hurt the Red Army and the Soviet economy. Well over half of Soviet oil came from the Baku and Grozny oil centers, and the Allies thought they could destroy them, along with the Batumi oil refining complex. The Soviets were aware of Allied plans, as Soviet intelligence had spies in the Allied governments. The Soviets reinforced the air defenses of their vulnerable oil infrastructure with fighters, anti-aircraft guns, and searchlights. The Allied air forces probably were not strong enough to destroy the oil targets, but no country yet had sufficient experience with strategic bombing to realize this.



The Soviets kept sending reinforcements to fight the war, along with new generals, new tactics, and new weapons. The Finnish Army was worn down and began losing ground. Both sides now wanted to end the war quickly. I think it is likely that risk of war with the Allies and threat of economic harm caused Stalin to moderate his goals concerning Finland.

Historians debate whether Stalin actually wanted to take over and annex all of Finland or whether the Soviets demands at the start of the Winter War were all Stalin wanted. The creation of the Finnish Democratic Republic suggests that Stalin hoped to make all of Finland a puppet state. Since all other Soviet puppets in 1939–1940 petitioned to join the USSR, I suspect this would have happened to Finland as well. Instead, to end the war quickly, the Soviets ignored the FDR and opened negotiations with the actual government of Finland, which agreed to terms in March 1940. Finland had to cede parts of northern and eastern Finland to the USSR, including a significant part of Finnish Karelia, as well as some islands in the Gulf of Finland. The Hanko Peninsula in southwestern Finland was leased for 30 years to the USSR as a Soviet naval base. Finland lost about 11% of its territory but kept its independence. Finland evacuated the vast majority of the population in the ceded regions, about 430,000, a move that spared at least tens of thousands of them from being treated as enemies of people. In other territories annexed by the USSR, Stalin’s NKVD arrested the enemies of the people and tortured them, executed them, or sent them to do forced labor in the interior of the USSR.

The desire to end the war quickly consigned the puppet Finnish Democratic Republic to irrelevance. They were merged into the Karelian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic of the Russian SFSR. This ASSR administered Soviet Karelia (aka eastern Karelia) just east of Finland. The Soviet detached this ASSR new from the Russian SFSR and made it a union republic, the Karelo-Finnish SSR. Its territory consisted of Soviet Karelia and much of the territory Finland ceded to the USSR.

The poor performance of the Red Army in the Winter War was a wake-up call to the Soviet leadership. They began a series of reforms to improve Soviet fighting ability and leadership. Some experienced Red Army officers who had been imprisoned during the purges were released and sent back to their commands.

After Finland, the USSR consolidated and absorbed the rest of its sphere of influence with few problems and without war in 1940. In June of that year, as Germany was defeating France, Red Army forces quickly occupied all three Baltic states. The Soviets then staged sham elections³⁴¹ in each country, creating Communist-dominated “people’s” assemblies. In July, each of these declared their country to be a soviet socialist republic. These nominally-independent Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian SSRs then promptly requested to join the

³⁴¹ Only communist parties could stand for the elections. Red Army troops in the occupation forces were allowed to vote in the elections and were told how to vote. To ensure the results they wanted, the Soviets simply set the election results in advance of the elections. This was inadvertently revealed when the Soviets released the Latvian election results 24 hours before the polls in Latvia closed.

USSR, which made them union republics in August. Of course, as with eastern Poland in 1939, this was all stage-managed by the Soviet Union rather than being the true wishes of the populations of these countries.



Soviet annexation of eastern Romania, 1940

The Moldavian ASSR was an internal division of the Ukrainian SSR. It was broken up after the occupation of eastern Romania, so that the part of it with large numbers of Moldovans/Romanians went into the new Moldavian SSR and the rest with its Ukrainian majority stayed in Ukraine.

In late June 1940, the Soviets made their move on the last part of their sphere of influence: eastern Romania. Bessarabia had been part of the Russian Empire, and the Soviets had never recognized its incorporation into Romania after World War I. Bessarabia accordingly had been allocated to the Soviet sphere of influence in the secret protocol of 1939. By 1940, Stalin wanted more Romanian territory. When the USSR issued its ultimatum to Romania on 26 June, they demanded not just Bessarabia but also the northern part of Bukovina. North Bukovina had not been part of Russian Empire, but ethnic Ukrainians were the plurality population there. (This was not the case in South Bukovina.) The Romanians, with little chance of withstanding a Soviet invasion, gave in to the Soviet demands and ceded Bessarabia and North Bukovina. At the last minute, the Soviets also added the small district of Hertsza³⁴² to the territory they were taking from Romania.

342 My Soviet-based sources do not explain why the Soviets chose to take Hertsza (aka Hertzta; Herța in Romanian). It did not have a Ukrainian majority and it had not previously been part of the Russian Empire. The Soviet ultimatum to Romania demanded Bessarabia and North Bukovina but did not mention Hertsza. According to some Romanian sources (see, for example, Dennis Delatant; *British Clandestine Activities in Romania during the Second World War*; 2016), accompanying the ultimatum was a small map with a thick red line marking the border of the territories to be surrendered to the USSR. The line at the map's scale was several kilometers wide, making it hard to determine where the borders were, and it cut through the Hertsza district. The Soviet officials on the Romanian-Soviet commission that supervised the transfer of territory insisted the line meant Hertsza went to the USSR. The Romanian officials objected that the ultimatum did not list Hertsza but were ignored.

By early August 1940, the Soviets had reorganized these newly-gained territories. This time, the Soviets did not bother with any pretend elections or puppet assemblies³⁴³. Bessarabia was broken up, with its northern and southern areas becoming part of the Ukrainian SSR. Central Bessarabia was merged with most of the Moldavian ASSR, becoming the Moldavian SSR and a union republic of the USSR. The eastern districts of the Moldavian ASSR, where Moldavians were a minority population, remained in the Ukrainian SSR and lost their autonomous status. North Bukovina and Hertza became parts of the Ukrainian SSR. Soviet propaganda celebrated the annexation as the “return of North Bukovina and Bessarabia”, ignoring the fact that North Bukovina had never been part of Russia or the Soviet state.

Romania had been a neutral country favoring the Allies. Like Poland, it had its independence “guaranteed” by Britain and France in the spring of 1939, although this was aimed at German aggression, not Soviet. In any event, by late June 1940 Allied help for Romania was not possible: France had just been defeated by Germany, and Britain had no forces to spare. With no other options, Soviet aggression caused Romania to turn towards Germany, now the dominant land power in Europe. In July, Romania became pro-Axis, formally joined the Axis in November, and joined in Germany’s invasion of the USSR in June 1941.

Estimated Overall Soviet Population Gain from the 1939–1949 Annexations

<i>Category</i>	<i>Population (in millions)</i>	<i>Notes</i>
Eastern Poland, 1939	13.2	
Territory from Finland, 1940	0.0	Almost all Finnish civilians were evacuated before Finland handed the ceded territory to the Soviets; only a few thousands remained behind.
Estonia, 1940	1.1	See Note 1.
Latvia, 1940	1.9	See Note 1.
Lithuania	2.5	See Note 1.
Territory from Romania	3.8	See Note 2.
Subtotal	22.5	
Refugees in eastern Poland from western Poland, 1939	0.3	An unknown number returned to western Poland in 1939–1940; this ignored for calculation Soviet population gains.
Subtotal	22.8	

³⁴³ My sources do not saw why. Since the Soviets always claimed that Bessarabia was rightly part of the Soviet Union, I speculate they felt no elections were necessary here, which to avoid distractions was also applied to North Bukovina and Hertsa.

<i>Volksdeutsche</i> transfers to Germany	-0.3 Almost all of the ethnic German population of the annexed territories were relocated to Germany
Total	22.5

Notes:

1. A number of people fled the Baltic states after the Soviet takeover, becoming refugees. It was difficult to leave these territories, since all overland routes were blocked by Soviet- or German-controlled territory. The main viable escape route involved crossing the Baltic Sea to Sweden or Finland. I do not have reliable information on the number of people who managed to become refugees, but I suspect there were relatively few of them due to this difficulty.

2. People in the parts of Romania the Soviets occupied fled to unoccupied Romania, but others from unoccupied Romania fled to the Soviet zone. See above for a discussion of this. Overall, the net migration was likely less than 0.1 million people and hence unlikely to significantly affect the population total at the scale I am using.

The 1939–1940 annexations brought about 22.5 million new citizens to the USSR, raising its population to perhaps 198.2 million as of 1 January 1941³⁴⁴. This is what the Soviet leadership wanted, but at the same time was also a matter of concern. All the annexed territories came from capitalist states, which in the Soviet system meant they had acquired many new class enemies who would always be anti-Soviet: the bourgeoisie (capitalists, landowners, professionals, and other members of the middle class), the clergy, the petty bourgeoisie (prosperous farmers who would not want to give up their land, shopkeepers and artisans), and so on. Another issue was nationalism, as many common people favored their (former) countries and did not want to be part of the USSR. All these people had to be dealt with.

The Soviets were certainly welcome among some people in the annexed territories. Communists and many socialists favored the USSR, as did many ordinary workers and poor farmers. Also, some nationalists in ethnic minorities at first welcomed the Soviets. Southeast Poland had a large, nationalist Ukrainian population, many of whom had chafed under Polish rule with its attempts to suppress Ukrainian nationalism and identity. They saw the Soviets as liberators. However, these ethnic nationalists turned anti-Soviet once they realized that “Western Ukraine” was a sham and that their region was to be annexed into the

344 These are my calculations; see <http://classiceuropa.org/articles/sovethgroups/SovietEthnicGroups1941.html> for details. Some works claim the Soviets gained as many as 23.5 million people, but they do not document how they arrive at this figure. The exact population statistics are unknown, since the Soviets did not conduct censuses in their new territories. Further, the Soviet census of 1939 (which was conducted before any of the annexations) was deliberately falsified to increase the total, so even the pre-annexation Soviet population is in dispute.

USSR³⁴⁵. Any lingering pro-Soviet support vanished from most of these nationalists when they realized that ethnic autonomy in the Soviet system was just for show.

Most existing societal structures in the annexed territories were incompatible with the Soviet system. Governmental systems at all levels, legal systems, educational systems, and social systems all had to be sovietized. Soviet-style state ownership of all important economic assets meant factories and other enterprises were to be confiscated, farmland was (eventually) to be reorganized into collective farms, children had to be taught Communist ideology, censorship had to be imposed, the Communist Party had to be made preeminent, all other political parties suppressed, and so on.

Sovietization of eastern Poland mostly started slowly in 1939. The Soviet invasion and occupation forces were ordered to treat the civilian population decently. Confiscations of enterprises deemed abandoned by their capitalist owners did occur. Farmland confiscations also began, but instead of collective agriculture being imposed, use of land (but not ownership) was allocated to poor farmers at the expense of large landowners. The Soviets believed these measures would make most of the common workers and farmers pro-Soviet.

Spotlight: Sovietization of Farming in Eastern Poland

When the Soviets took over eastern Poland, the agricultural sector there can broadly be characterized as having four levels: large farms owned by landowners (some of whom did not work or even live on the land itself), medium farms owned by prosperous farming families, small farms owned by poorer farming families, and landless farming families who survived by working as laborers for hire on large and some medium farms. Some farming families with little land also supplemented their income by working as laborers for hire on large and some medium farms³⁴⁶.

Once the Soviets occupied the region, they almost immediately began what is sometimes described as land reform, but was what they called “liquidation of land holders as a class and proletarianization of the people working the land”³⁴⁷. Their first, rushed step was to confiscate the large farmers and parceled out their

345 While their region went into the Ukrainian SSR, it was clear this entity was run by the Communist Party for its own goals, regardless of the wishes or welfare of the Ukrainians.

346 Eastern Poland had benefited from the gradual land reform program Poland introduced soon after it achieved its independence at the end of World War I, but numerous factories caused farming reforms to lag behind the rest of the country. For a discussion on this topic, see Dimitri T. Pronin; “Land Reform in Poland: 1920-1945”; *Land Economics* Vol. 25, No. 2; 1949; <https://doi.org/10.2307/3144757>.

347 Dimitri T. Pronin; “Land Reform in Poland: 1920-1945”; *Land Economics* Vol. 25, No. 2; 1949; <https://doi.org/10.2307/3144757>.

land to farming families with little or no land. This gained the Soviets some support among these farmers, as it was intended. The Soviets did not try to create state farms³⁴⁸ out the large farms, although that would have been a logical step and would have been consistent with the development of state farms in the USSR proper. The Soviets at this time also did not require farmers to organize in collective farms, although farmers could voluntarily form collective farms. The Soviets knew from their own experience in the late 1920s and early 1930s that forcing collective agriculture could meet with widespread resistance, so they saved this step for later.

This land redistribution came without ownership rights. Land was simply confiscated from large and medium farms and passed out to the poorer farming families without title. It is unclear from my sources to what extent the people receiving this land realized that they did not own it. Redistribution was done extremely rapidly using only temporary boundary markers, which in places created considerable chaos as to whom actual got what land. Some sources claim the Soviets did this deliberately to turn farmers against one another, in order to prevent farmers from uniting in opposition to the Soviets. Redistribution was also agriculturally inefficient, as many farmers ended up two or more disconnected small parcels rather than one contiguous farm.

The Soviet's next step targeted the farmers with medium-sized farms. The Soviets regarded these farmers as "kulaks", a traditional term in Russia and the Soviet Union for well-off farmers. In Soviet ideology, they were part of the petty bourgeoisie, "village capitalists" who would always want to own their own land and thus be anti-Soviet. In the USSR proper, the Soviets had severely repressed the kulaks in the 1920s and then destroyed them as a class once Stalin gained power. The Soviets began this same program in eastern Poland. As in the USSR, the first step was to increase the poorer farmers' resentment richer farmers. In 1940, Soviet propaganda stigmatized the richer farmers as greedy kulaks, in hopes of provoking class warfare between them. This was followed by the next step, the liquidation of the kulaks. In the spring of 1941, the kulaks in the former

348 In the Soviet system, a state farm was owned by the state and worked by farmers who were state employees, paid for their labor with money and sometimes in the farm's produce. A collective farm had its land and its property like barns and equipment owned by the state, but the farmers were organized in a collective structure that, after taxes, shared the fruits of their labor among themselves. The Soviets also allowed a very few private farms and allowed various workers and rural residents the ability to farm small plots of land for their own use (including the ability to sell their produce to others).

eastern Polish territories had their farms confiscated, were arrested, and were internally deported to the interior of the USSR to work as forced laborers.

The next step was a campaign to promote collective farming. Farmers still were not forced into collective farms, but propaganda and inducements encouraged them to voluntarily form collectives. (Likely, as had occurred in the USSR proper, inducements included tax breaks as well as interest-free loans for purchase of farming equipment, but I have not researched this fully.) I am not certain when the first collective farm in the former eastern Poland opened, but it was possibly in the Kovel district of Volhynia (in the Ukrainian SSR). The farm was named after Stalin and opened on 21 June 1941. The next day, the Germans invaded the USSR. This ended the collectivization drive for years, until the Germans were driven out of the USSR.

Eastern Poland was first, since it had been annexed first. The Soviets would follow similar policies in territories they annexed in 1940. Since the process of transforming agriculture in these regions perforce started later than in eastern Poland, they mostly had not reached collectivization stage when the war with Germany started. After the war, the Soviets resumed the voluntary collectivization of agriculture in the territories annexed in 1939–1940. When this failed to cause widespread collectivization, in the late 1940s the Soviets imposed harsh repressive measures that forced most farmers there into collective farms.

Eastern Poland in 1939 had not been subjected to the brutal treatment the Soviets subjected their own people to. (There was some brutality from the start, directed against the Polish military and repression: During the Soviet invasion, some Polish Army soldiers who surrendered were summarily executed.) Once the occupation was in place (before the territory was formally annexed into the USSR), owners of large farms lost their land, which was distributed among poorer farmers. However, the occupying Soviet military and security forces were ordered to treat the civilian population fairly, likely in hopes of them coming to view the Soviets favorably. In early 1940, the Soviets realized their relatively mild policies in eastern Poland were not winning over the general populace. Communists, many socialists, some workers, and some farmers continued to support the Soviets, but most other people viewed the Soviets unfavorably. Even many people who had initially welcomed the Soviets had become disenchanted.

During 1940, the USSR progressively sovietized the annexed territories. Class enemies were removed from power, many were arrested, and some were summarily executed. Private

property like business and factories were confiscated. Agriculture was reorganized with collectivization in mind, as covered above. Extreme repression was brought to bear on two groups: refugees and the Polish elite.

An estimated 336,000 refugees (198,00 Jews and 138,000 Poles) had fled western Poland when the Germans invaded, only to be caught up in the USSR when the Soviets occupied and annexed eastern Poland. Since they were not residents of eastern Poland, they did not automatically become citizens of the USSR when the Soviets annexed that territory. Most hoped to return to their homes, which made the Soviets regard them as potentially disloyal and likely to spy for foreign powers. The refugees also included many people whom the Soviets considered to be class enemies. The refugees had been treated well at first, like the rest of the civilian population, and some were even allowed to return to German-occupied western Poland, if they so wished. By about March 1940, the Soviets prevented them from leaving the USSR and began to pressure them to accept Soviet citizenship. Since Soviet citizenship likely meant they would not be able to ever returning home and reunite with their families, many refused³⁴⁹. Finally, the limited amount of Soviet patience on this matter was used up, and all who had not accepted citizenship were arrested and sent to the GULag, where they became forced laborers. Many died in the GULag during the war under the impact of heavy work loads and starvation rations.

When the Soviets took over eastern Poland, many of the Polish elite had been trapped there: army officers, police officers, political leaders, intelligentsia, factory owners, etc. The Soviets viewed these peoples as potential leaders of a revolt. In the 19th Century, Poles had rebelled more than once against Russia, and the Soviets did not want the Polish elite fomenting an anti-Soviet revolt in their new territory. In March 1940, Stalin and the other members of the Politburo decided to get rid of Polish “nationalists and counterrevolutionaries”: members of the Polish elite. They ordered the NKVD to execute 25,700 of them, with about 22,000 actually being executed in April and May 1940. This is often called the mass execution of Polish Army officers, but they comprised only about 8,000 of the 22,000. The remaining victims were about 8,000 intelligentsia and 6,000 police officers³⁵⁰. The operation is also sometimes called the Katyn Massacre, as the international community first became aware of

349 The Soviet Union had no program or interest in allowing the refugees’ families to move to the USSR.

350 Many among the intelligentsia and police officers held reserve officer commissions in the Polish Army, but they had been arrested as civilians rather than taken prisoner as active Polish Army officers.

the murders due to the wartime discovery of a mass grave at Katyn³⁵¹ in the western USSR. The executions actually occurred at various sites throughout the western USSR.

Besides mass executions, other forms of Soviet repression ramped in 1940 in the former eastern Poland. The middle classes, “kulaks” (prosperous land-owning farmers), other class enemies, and ordinary people opposed to the Soviet takeover were targeted with mass arrests. Four waves of mass deportations from former eastern Poland occurred, from February 1940 through June 1941. This engulfed about 1.2 million people, who were sent to remote places like the Soviet far north, Kazakhstan, and Siberia. All ethnic groups were affected: not just Poles but also Belarusians, Jews, Ukrainians, etc. Very poor conditions prevailed during the travel to the resettlement sites and at the sites themselves, so many people die en route or within a year of being resettled. For example, people sent to Kazakhstan arrived with just a few personal possessions and were met with indifference or hostility by the local authorities and population, who considered them anti-Soviet criminals. They often received minimal and sometimes no assistance in obtaining shelter, food, and medical care.

From mid-1940, the Soviets also occupied and annexed the Baltic states and parts of Romania. Unlike eastern Poland in 1939, these new territories did not go through a period of relatively mild treatment at first. Instead, they were subjected to heavy repressive measures like those already underway in the former eastern Poland: confiscations of land and enterprises, mass arrests, and summary executions. Forced deportations in these territories started in late May 1941, with many being deported in June 1941. Some were sent to GULag camps and many were sent to remote settlements in the interior of the USSR. Estimates vary on how many people were relocated:

- former citizens of Lithuania: 17,000–18,000.
- former citizens of Latvia: 14,000–16,000.
- former citizens of Estonia: 10,000–11,000.
- former citizens of Romania: 24,000–30,000.

As with the case of eastern Poland, all ethnic groups in these territories were involved, and they suffered death and deprivation during their travels and in the year after their arrival at their settlement sites. The Soviets almost certainly would have forcibly relocated even more

³⁵¹ The Germans had found the mass grave at Katyn in late 1942 or early 1943 during their occupation of the region. They announced the discovery in 1943 and brought in the Red Cross to examine it, in hopes of disrupting relations between the USSR and the western Allies.

people from the annexed territories, but Germany's invasion of the USSR on 22 June 1941 interrupted the deportations.

Soviet repression meant the population acquired in the annexations of 1939–1940 fell due to executions. It must have fallen even further because of the impact on the remaining population. Likely, harsh treatment, neglect, and despair must have caused death rates to rise and birth rates to fall.

The brutal Soviet policies also alienated many people in the annexed territories, including many who not originally anti-Soviet. After Germany invaded the USSR in June 1941, many of these people welcomed the Germans as liberators. Many people from these area who had been conscripted into the Red Army deserted or surrendered. Civilian revolts against the Soviets broke out in multiple places in the former Baltic states, and Baltic partisan groups operated against the retreating Soviet forces. Almost all of the annexed territories quick fell to the invading forces, with many people there more than willing to collaborate with the Axis against the Soviets. The Soviets would regain control of these territories in 1944 and soon resumed executions and deportations there, this time focused on the people who had collaborated with the enemy.

14.F Hitler Decides to Invade the USSR

It is likely no coincidence that Stalin decided to take over the Baltic states and eastern Romania in June 1940. On 10 May 1940, Germany had launched a massive offensive against the Allies in France. German forces quickly overran Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and most of Belgium. They smashed through the French lines in the Ardennes and reached the English Channel on 20 May, pocketing substantial French forces and most of the British forces in northern France and western Belgium.

Allied forces in the pocket were unable to break out, while French forces outside the pocket were unable to open a corridor to rescue the trapped Allied troops. British naval forces and civilian ships managed to evacuate most of the British troops and some other Allied troops, while the remaining troops in the pocket surrendered to the Germans. The evacuation saved the soldiers, but they had to abandon almost all of their equipment: tanks, trucks, artillery, and most weapons. Britain had sent almost all of its modern military equipment to France and would have to rely on limited stores of older, less capable equipment for many months, until British industry replaced the losses.

German forces regrouped and in early June launched a new offensive in France against the remaining Allied forces, mostly French. The weakened Allied forces could not withstand the German assault. Italy entered the war on the side of Germany on 10 June, looking for its share of the spoils. German troops occupied Paris on 14 June and spread out across France. The French soon asked for an armistice and signed one with Germany on German terms on 22 June and another one with Italy on Italian terms on 24 June. Both armistices went into effect on the 25th. Although these were called armistices, France had actually surrendered after only about seven weeks of fighting.

This blitzkrieg in the west had knocked France out of the war and forced British forces off the European continent, at low cost to the Germans. Many anti-German countries that had expected Germany and the Allies to engage in a repeat of World War I, with years of costly attritional warfare ending in Allied victory, were alarmed. The United States declared an “unlimited national emergency” in late May, requiring that American “military, naval, air, and civilian defenses be put on the basis of readiness to repel any and all acts or threats of aggression directed toward any part of the Western Hemisphere”.

The Soviet Union was perhaps much more alarmed, as Germany was now clearly the dominant land power in Europe. The Soviets knew their semi-alliance with Germany was only a matter of convenience, and Hitler was now free to turn his war machine on the USSR in pursuit of *Lebensraum*, should he choose to do so. Some historians have suggested that Stalin chose to occupy the Baltic states and eastern Romania in June 1940 while Germany’s forces were still concentrated in the west, out of fear that waiting might allow Hitler to block try to dissuade the Soviets from taking over these territories. As it was, these Soviet actions did displease Hitler and strain German-Soviet relations to some degree.

For Stalin, the one piece of good news from the German victory in the west was that the threat of the Allies bombing Soviet oilfields was now over. Stalin’s response to German success was to bolster Soviet defenses and to avoid giving Hitler any pretext to attack the USSR. The speed of the blitzkrieg also alarmed the Soviets, showing that great amounts of territory could be lost in a matter of weeks to large mechanized forces. The Red Army had recently transitioned away from such forces as being too unwieldy but in July began recreating large armored forces, clearly inspired by the German example.

In the summer of 1940, the German Luftwaffe failed to drive the Royal Air Force from the skies of Britain, forcing Germany to postpone its plans for an amphibious invasion of Britain. Later in 1940, Hitler decided that his goal for 1941 would be the conquest of the USSR, not

Britain. Hitler's not only wanted to destroy the USSR, he coveted its European territories for his goal of *Lebensraum*, intending to replace their Slavic populations with German settlers.

14.G Soviet Preparations for War



The number of union republics in the USSR grew from 11 to 16 as the Soviets acquired territory in 1939–1940, with the Estonian, Karelo-Finnish, Latvian, Lithuanian, and Moldavian SSRs being formed. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were simply converted into SSRs. The Moldavian SSR was formed by combining most of the Moldavian ASSR (a part of the Ukrainian SSR) with territory

taken from Romania. Polish territory taken in 1939 did not become its own SSR but instead was split between the Belorussian and Ukrainian SSRs.

All these SSRs are well known except for the Karelo-Finnish, which you may never have heard of! After the Winter War with Finland, the Soviets combined most of the territory they gained from Finland with their existing Karelian ASSR, a part of the Russian SFSR. This entity became a union republic, Karelo-Finnish SSR. It likely was intended as the vehicle to take over the rest of Finland, like the Moldavian ASSR taking over Romanian territory to become the Moldavian SSR. Events in World War II instead led to the USSR making peace with Finland so that it could concentrate on defeating Germany. In 1956, likely because it no longer served as a threat to Finland, the Karelo-Finnish SSR was demoted to become the Karelian ASSR and merged into the Russian SFSR. It was the only Soviet union republic that was ever merged into another union republic.

Spotlight: The Soviet Union and the Union Republics during World War II

<i>English Name</i>	<i>Russian Name</i>	<i>Fate</i>
Union of Soviet Socialist Republics; Soviet Union; USSR	<i>Soyuz Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik;</i> <i>Sovetskiy Soyuz;</i> <i>SSSR</i>	In 1991, the USSR was dissolved with the union republics becoming independent countries.
<i>Union Republics as of 1 September 1939</i>		
Armenian SSR	<i>Armyanskaya SSR</i>	Became Armenia (<i>Hayastan</i> in Armenian).
Azerbaijan SSR	<i>Azerbaydzhanskaya SSR</i>	Became Azerbaijan (<i>Azərbaycan</i> in Azerbaijani).
Belorussian SSR	<i>Belorusskaya SSR</i>	Became Belarus (same name in English and Belarusian).
Georgian SSR	<i>Gruzinskaya SSR</i>	Became Georgia (<i>Sakartvelo</i> in Georgian).
Kazakh SSR	<i>Kazakhskaya SSR</i>	Became Kazakhstan (same name in English and Kazakh, although it might officially be spelled <i>Qazaqstan</i> by 2025 if the country changes its script from Cyrillic to Latin).
Kyrgyz SSR	<i>Kirgizskaya SSR</i>	Became Kyrgyzstan (same name in English and Kyrgyz).
Russian SFSR	<i>Rossiyskaya SFSR</i>	Became the Russian Federation, aka Russia (<i>Rossiyskaya Federatsiya</i> , aka <i>Rossiya</i> , in Russian).
Tajik SSR	<i>Tadzhikskaya SSR</i>	Became Tajikistan (<i>Tojikiston</i> in Tajik).

Turkmen SSR	<i>Turkmenskaya SSR</i>	Became Turkmenistan (<i>Türkmenistan</i> in Turkmen).
Ukrainian SSR	<i>Ukrainskaya SSR</i>	Became Ukraine (<i>Ukraina</i> in Ukrainian).
Uzbek SSR	<i>Uzbekskaya SSR</i>	Became Uzbekistan (<i>Ozbekiston</i> in Uzbek).
<i>Union Republics added in 1940</i>		
Estonian SSR	<i>Estoniskaya SSR</i>	Became Estonia (<i>Eesti</i> in Estonian).
Karelo-Finnish SSR	<i>Karelo-Finskaya SSR</i>	Disbanded as a union republic in 1956, becoming the Karelian ASSR within the Russian SFSR. Now is the Republic of Karelia within the Russian Federation.
Latvian SSR	<i>Latviyskaya SSR</i>	Became Latvia (<i>Latvija</i> in Latvian).
Lithuanian SSR	<i>Litovskaya SSR</i>	Became Lithuania (<i>Lietuva</i> in Lithuanian).
Moldavian SSR	<i>Moldavskaya SSR</i>	Became Moldova (same name in English and Romanian).

The Red Army and Soviet intelligence followed military developments and military theory throughout the world, many of which were published and publicly available. The Soviet military was thus aware of German military thought in the 1930s that explored the use of surprise attacks to gain the strategic initiative if not outright victory. With the rise of highly-mobile mechanized forces supported by large air forces, Red Army theorists realized that a country planning to invade a neighbor could use its peacetime forces to launch a surprise invasion without first ordering mobilization. Mass mobilizations like those just before the outbreak of World War I were difficult if not impossible to keep secret and thus alerted the intended victim of an invasion to mobilize its own forces before the invasion began. Instead, by using peacetime mechanized and air forces, an invasion could occur almost without warning and quickly gain a major advantage. The attacker could then mobilize after the start of the invasion, with the called-up troops being used as reinforcements in the first weeks of the conflict.

Sidetrip: German Mobilization

The 1930s Germans developed the ability to have a very flexible, fast mobilization. As World War I was breaking out in August 1914, Germany had so detailed and rigid war and mobilization plans that mobilization meant an

invasion of France, starting with violating the neutrality first of Luxembourg and then Belgium. Once mobilization began, the Germany leadership was unable to alter it in reaction to events without disrupting the Germany military with “disastrous results”³⁵². The 1930s Germans built a highly flexible mobilization system that did not presume any particular war plan.

The 1930s Germans also developed a system that allowed very rapid mobilization. (The 1914 Germans had a rapid mobilization, which they tried to use to their advantage by mobilizing and defeating France before the much-slower Russian mobilization had time to bring the Russian Army to full strength.) The Germans also had the advantage of refining their mobilization system through experience, as the mobilizations over Austria and the Sudetenland in 1938 showed deficiencies in their plans. By late 1938, the Germans had adopted a system of mobilization their forces in a set of four waves. Wave I would be fully ready by the third day of mobilization being ordered; Wave II by the fourth day; Wave III by the sixth day; Wave IV by the seventh day. The German system also allowed a secret mobilization, with the ability to call up reservists without a public proclamation³⁵³. (This would not allow complete secrecy, as the movement of reservists to their postings would likely be noticed; but it helped to preserve secrecy.)

In the 1920s, the Soviets needed economic development far more than a large army, so the Red Army had been organized to keep most military-age men in the civilian economy. It had a relatively small active army for a country the size of the USSR, a reserve force of former active-army soldiers in the civilian economy, and a large number of territorials in the civilian economy. The reserves and territorial could be mobilized in times of war or emergency. Territorials when drafted underwent a short period of training in their first year and then even shorter periods of annual training for the next four years. This allowed the Red Army to be able to mobilize several million soldiers, although many of them were poorly-trained territorials. ([Red Army organization in the 1920s](#) was covered in more detail earlier.)

In the 1930s, the rising threat of Nazi Germany meant the Red Army needed to be larger, better trained, and better equipped. The Soviets were also acutely aware that the territorials were poorly trained. Many had not even completed the minimal training Red Army

352 Marc Trachtenberg; “The Meaning of Mobilization in 1914”; *International Security* Vol. 15 No. 3; 1990;
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2538909>.

353 For many of these details, see Robert M. Kennedy; *The German Campaign in Poland (1939)*; 1956;
https://history.army.mil/html/books/104/104-20/CMH_Pub_104-20.pdf.

regulations called for, and some had never fired even a single practice shot from their rifles. In 1937–1938, the Red Army abandoned the territorial system, merging the territorials into the active/reserve system. Some became active-army soldiers while most became reservists. These new reservists were supposed to receive additional training to increase their military abilities, but this was often minimal or completely lacking. This was not due to incompetence upon the parts of the Soviet government or military. Instead, the Soviets lacked the resources to do everything they needed to bolster the defenses of the country: grow the economy and especially the defense industry, increase the size and inventory of the Red Army, and training all the new active and reserve soldiers. Training the former territorials was a lesser priority, especially since keeping them as much as possible as workers and farmers helped to grow the economy. Even at late as 1941, many of the ex-territorials minimal military skills. When Germany invaded that year, the cost for this situation was very high Soviet casualties as these former territorials entered combat against the enemy.

The Soviets increased the size of the active Army through conscription. Draftees served one to four years, depending upon the branch they were in, being trained and gaining experience. After their terms were up, they entered the reserves, where they returned to the civilian economy and received occasional training.



Soviet leaders at the May Day military parade, Red Square, Moskva, 1 May 1937

Or, here today, gone tomorrow. Tukhachevskiy would be demoted, arrested, and executed in 1937. Egorov would be demoted in 1937, arrested in 1938, and executed in 1939. Ezhov would be sidelined in 1938, arrested in 1939, and executed in 1940.

These military reforms were a great improvement over the previous system, but they did not solve all the problems of the Red Army. Worse, at about the same time as the reforms were being implemented, Stalin's Great Purge was occurring, extensively degrading the Soviet military. All levels of the Red Army and Soviet Navy were affected, and the senior officer corps in particular lost very many experienced officers. Many were sent to the GULag, but many more were executed. They were replaced with inexperienced officers, some of whom were outright incompetent. Although the Great Purge ended in 1938–1939, its effects had not been undone by the time the Germans invaded in 1941. Also, the Soviets continued to conduct lesser purges after 1938 that affected the military. In 1940–1941, government organizations overseeing the production of aircraft, ammunition, and weapons were disrupted by purges. In the spring of 1941, problems in Soviet military aviation led to a purge of aviation officers³⁵⁴. This grew into a larger purge of Red Army officers falsely accused of being spies. This would bedevil Red Army military operations in the early 1940s.

Spotlight: The Case of the Trotskiyite Anti-Soviet Military Organization

Stalin ordered public show trials with pre-ordained outcomes for people he wanted to get rid of. He also used secret trials to falsely convict and execute people when Soviet security was at stake. The most important of these secret trials was the Case of the Trotskiyite Anti-Soviet Military Organization³⁵⁵. In 1937, eight Red Army commanders, including the influential Marshal of the USSR M.N. Tukhachevskiy, were falsely tried for conspiring with and spying for Nazi Germany³⁵⁶. They were all sentenced to death and executed.

354 The problems were a rise in accidents plus an air defense lapse. Soviet military aircraft training was experienced a high rate of accidents in 1941. This was actually caused by factors: 1) The rapid increase in the size of the Soviet air forces caused training standards to fall and accidents to rise. 2) New, modern models of Soviet fighters were being introduced into the air forces. These aircraft were much more demanding to fly than earlier models, but most air units in the field were expected to convert to the new aircraft with only minimal assistance and training. The accident rate accordingly rose.

In May 1941, a German Ju 52 air transport flew from German territory through Soviet air space and landed at a Moskva air field without being detected by the Soviet air defense organization.

355 A Trotskiyite was supposedly a follower of Lev Trotskiy, Stalin's great political rival in the 1920s. Stalin had Trotskiy exiled, with Soviet propaganda excoriating Trotskiy thereafter. Being called a Trotskiyite became shorthand for calling someone a traitor and a conspirator intended to overthrow Stalin's USSR. The trial also became known as the Military Case and the Tukhachevskiy Case.

356 Besides Tukhachevskiy, the other victims were:

Ya.B. Gamarnik (first deputy commissar, People's Commissar of Defense; head, Red Army Political Directorate);
I.E. Yakir (commander, Kiev Military District); I.P. Uborevich (commander, Belorussian MD);

Tukhachevskiy was a powerful and popular top commander in the Red Army. The trial and executions thus needed to be secret to prevent the possibility that parts of the Red Army would try to stop the trial or revolt. The trial was conducted on 11 June 1937 and the executions of the defendants occurred immediately after the trial³⁵⁷. Once the executions were conducted, Soviet propaganda publicized the “conspiracy” and the USSR’s quick action to remove the “threat”.

The loss of Tukhachevskiy was widely seen in many countries as hurting the Red Army. Perhaps surprisingly today, Nazi Germany got the credit for getting rid of Tukhachevskiy. Stalin had ordered the NKVD to fabricate documents indicating Tukhachevskiy and other Red Army generals were plotting to overthrow Stalin. He had an NKVD agent pretending to be a Soviet traitor pass them to Germany, to establish a trail of false evidence that would make the “plot” seem more believable.

The Germans believed the documents were genuine and decided to use them to try to weaken the Red Army. The Germans in turn fabricated more documents meant to show the Red Army generals were conspiring with the German Wehrmacht to eliminate Stalin, overthrow the Soviet government, and create a pro-German Russian regime. The Germans then turned all these documents over to the Soviets, in hopes that Stalin would execute his top generals, which is what happened. It thus seemed that the Germans had tricked Stalin. When parts of the Soviet secret archive became public in the 1990s, it was revealed that Stalin himself had ordered the documents be passed to Germany.

Tukhachevskiy had been one of the Red Army’s top military thinkers. He had helped develop a theory of deep operations of mass mechanized forces backed by air forces, in some ways similar but superior to Germany’s blitzkrieg. His purge discredited this theory. The Red Army broke up its large mechanized units into smaller units and emphasized tank support of infantry operations instead of deep operations. Soviet armored theory thus took a wrong turn for many years. In June 1940, Germany’s blitzkrieg victory over France showed the Soviets their mistake. They soon started to rebuild large mechanized forces, but this

B.M. Feldman (deputy commander, Moskva MD); V.M. Primakov (deputy commander, Leningrad Military District); A.I. Kork (head, Frunze Military Academy); R.P. Eydemann (head, Osoaviakhim); V.K. Putna (commander and military attaché).

³⁵⁷ Gamarnik knew he was going to be purged and committed suicide just before he was to be arrested. His name was nevertheless included in the trial’s verdict.

process was still underway in 1941 when the German invaded. The inexperienced Soviet armored forces were quickly smashed in the summer of 1941.

For much of the 1930s as the threat from Germany was growing, the Soviets could console themselves that a surprise invasion by Nazi Germany was not possible, since the two countries did not share a border. This changed in September-October 1939 when Germany and the USSR divided up Poland. Worse, a surprise invasion now could be far deadlier than the 1930s Red Army had feared. With Germany at war with the Allies, the German Army was now fully mobilized. This meant a German surprise attack on the USSR could be all the more stronger. This is exactly what happened, compounded by Soviet mistakes.

German secret planning and preparations for Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of the USSR, began in December 1940. These preparations grew increasingly difficult to hide, with both British and Soviet intelligence uncovering the plans in some detail. Britain warned the USSR of the impending invasion, but Stalin was convinced that this was British disinformation with the goal of involving the USSR in a war with Germany. Stalin similarly dismissed Soviet intelligence about the impending invasion, believing that Soviet spies had been duped by the British. One conventional story, driven far too much by hindsight, is “How could Stalin be so stupid? Both Soviet intelligence and the British discovered the invasion plan, but Stalin did not heed their warnings.” The actual situation was much more complex and confusing.

Stalin was predisposed to believe the worse about Britain. When the Soviets came to power in 1917, Britain had been the most active country to intervene against the Soviets in the Russian Civil War, and British aid to the anti-Soviet Whites at times had been quite effective³⁵⁸. Afterwards, Communist ideology meant the Soviets believed that Britain, as the most active imperialist and capitalist country in the world, must be waging a secret campaign to discredit and destroy the USSR. As Nazi Germany rose in power, the Soviets believed that Britain wanted to instigate a destructive war between Germany and the USSR. After World War II broke out, the Soviets were well aware of British plans in 1940 to intervene against the Soviet Union in Finland and to bomb Soviet oilfields. British warnings of the German invasion intentions thus could easily be dismissed as more British trouble-making.

358 British intervention military or naval forces operated in the Russian far north, Siberia, the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea, Ukraine, southern Russia, the Transcaucasus, and Russian Central Asia. No other country intervene in the civil war matched this breadth of operations. British aid helped the White Movement fight the Soviets, particularly in southern Russia and the Urals.

One event even played into Soviet paranoia about Britain. In May 1941, Rudolf Hess, the “Deputy of the Führer” in the Nazi Party³⁵⁹ flew a Luftwaffe aircraft from Germany to Britain. Hess’s flight to Britain made news around the world, engendering all sorts of rumors and wild theories. Germany claimed he had become mentally ill and no longer represented Germany or the Nazi Party in any way, which simply increased the rumors. Hess also completely disappeared from public view after arriving in Britain. Was Hess there on Hitler’s orders? Were the Germans and British negotiating peace or coming to some sort of accommodation? In reality, Hess had become alarmed that Germany would lose the war if it invaded the Soviet Union while still at war with Britain. His flight to Britain was his personal attempt to try to arrange peace with Britain and perhaps even some form of British participation in the upcoming war with the USSR. The British weren’t interested and ended up imprisoning Hess.

The Soviets were alarmed over Hess and the prospect of a secret German-British deal to turn on the USSR. German propaganda and British misinformation over Hess did little to allay Soviet concerns. Beside declaring Hess mentally ill, German propaganda claimed he had undertaken an unauthorized peace mission to Britain, and that Germany remained committed to “the destruction of the British Empire”³⁶⁰. British misinformation sought to persuade the Soviets that the Germans were trying to secretly negotiate with the British. This was meant to alarm Stalin over the German threat to the USSR in hopes he would seek out British help against German aggression. However, the British government did not release this misinformation to the British public³⁶¹, which made the Soviets suspicious. One obvious

359 Some English-language works call Hess the “Deputy Führer” as if he was the number two leader of Germany itself. This is misleading. Hitler was the “Führer and Reich-Chancellor” (*Führer und Reichskanzler*) of Germany and also the Führer of the Nazi Party. Hess was Hitler’s “Deputy of the Führer” (*Stellvertreter des Führers*) in the Nazi Party. In the German government, he was a Reich-Minister (*Reichsminister*) “without portfolio” (meaning he held minister-level rank while not heading a government ministry), just one of many Reich-Ministers. The Nazi government did not have an official number two position, but for most of the war Hermann Göring had immense power and was effectively the top leader after Hitler. From 1941 he was also designated as Hitler’s successor, although this decree was rescinded in the final weeks before the surrender of Germany in 1945.

360 Jo Fox; “Propaganda and the Flight of Rudolf Hess, 1941–45”; *The Journal of Modern History* Vol. 83 No. 1; 2011; <https://doi.org/10.1086/658050>. Fox is used extensively for information on German disinformation efforts.

361 The British government did not want to tell the British public what was really going on, but neither did it want to lie to the public. Almost amusingly, the government feared that if they publicly revealed that Hess had indeed come on a private peace mission, this would help Germany. German official statements were already claiming this was exactly what Hess had done. A British statement to this effect would thus confirm that the German government was telling the German public the truth, whereas the British wanted the Germans to believe their government was lying.

Another problem was that the British government was trying to avoid giving false information to the British public. During World War I, the government had greatly exaggerated and outright lied about the extent of German atrocities and mistreatment of civilians in occupied territories, to help generate support for the war. When the truth came out after the war, the British public was greatly disillusioned, with mistrust of the government growing. The WW2 British government wished

but incorrect conclusion was that the British government did not wish the British public to know they were in secret negotiations with the Germans.

“You can’t believe everything in intelligence reports.”

Stalin’s supposed remark to G.K. Zhukov, Chief of the General Staff of the Red Army, in response to Zhukov’s using intelligence reports on the strength of German divisions, 14 June 1941³⁶².

Stalin also had good reason to believe that Soviet intelligence was mistaken about a German invasion. For example, intelligence had provided a succession of start dates for the German invasion: 6 April, 20 April, 18 May, all of which passed with no invasion. Also, the two main Soviet intelligence agencies (state intelligence under the NKVD and GRU military intelligence) often did not agree. While the GRU was detecting German troop buildup and plans, as late as early June 1941, the head of the GRU believed that Hitler did not want a two-front war and accordingly would not invade³⁶³. He made this opinion known when submitting intelligence reports to Stalin. Hitler in *Mein Kampf* had stated that Germany had lost World War I because it was had gotten caught fighting a two front war with Britain and France in the west and Russian in the east. Many political and military leaders, not just in the USSR, disbelieved that Hitler would voluntarily to war with the USSR while Germany was still at war with Britain. (What they didn’t realize is that Britain had no troops on the European mainland. To Hitler, this was meant there wasn’t an active front, and he was thus had the opportunity to invade and defeat the USSR in 1941.)

Stalin wasn’t blind to the fact that the Germans were indeed concentrating their forces along the USSR’s borders in May–June 1941. Not only did Soviet intelligence detect this, the Germans themselves told the Soviets they were sending their forces east. Various explanations were given for the move, such as to shelter the troops out of range of British bombers or to get them ready to move south to attack British forces in the Middle East. Almost certainly, Stalin did not believe these explanations. But, what were the Germans really planning? This was difficult to determine, in part because Germany was conducting a massive disinformation campaign that flooded diplomatic and intelligence channels with a

to avoid repeating this mistake. With little useful or good to say about the Hess situation, the British government released as little as possible to the public.

362 G.K. Zhukov; *The Memoirs of Marshal Zhukov*; 1971 (English-language version of *Vospominaniya i Razmyshleniya [Memories and Reflections]*; 1969). Stalin was claiming the Soviets had more divisions in the border regions than the Germans had. Zhukov was attempting to make the point that the German divisions were full strength while Soviet divisions were not mobilized and had only half the manpower as the German divisions.

363 A.I. Kolpakidi and D.P. Prokhorov; *Imperiya GRU. Ocherki Istorii Rossiyskoy Voennoy Razvedki (Empire of the GRU: Essays on the History of Russian Military Intelligence)*; 1999.

confusing array of contradictory hints of German plans. This helped to conceal their true intentions and to confuse the Soviets. The campaign even involved Hitler's direct participation: In late 1940 he met with V.M. Molotov over German-Soviet spheres of influence and other matters, in which he stated that "Germany needed territory, but as a result of the war, she was completely secured by the territory for more than a hundred years"³⁶⁴. This was meant to convey the idea that current German conquests in Poland, Scandinavia, and western Europe were more than sufficient for Hitler's goals. Of course, the Soviets almost certainly did not take Hitler's statement at face value, but it nevertheless could have influenced their thinking to some degree.

"We flooded the world with streams of rumors to such an extent that we can hardly find our own bearings in these streams ourselves."

—Notes of Joseph Goebbels for 18 June 1941, concerning German disinformation efforts³⁶⁵

Another German disinformation ruse promoted the idea that Germany was planning to issue an ultimatum to the USSR demanding economic and/or territorial concessions. The massing of German forces in the east was to lend credence to the ultimatum.

The Soviets were aware to varying degrees that the Germans were waging a disinformation campaign, but disentangling what the real plans were from misinformation remained difficult³⁶⁶. More than once, Soviet intelligence reported on German sources that claimed Germany was going to invade the USSR in 1941. However, Soviet government and military leaders—not just Stalin—believed this was German deception to hide their true plans. Admiral N.G. Kuznetsov, the head of the Soviet Navy, believed it had been deliberately released to Soviet intelligence, to see how the USSR would react³⁶⁷.

German military intelligence together with senior German Army officers used the German armed forces themselves to leak disinformation. One aspect was to create the illusion that

364 In the Russian, "*Germaniya nuzhdalas v territorii, no v rezultate voyny ona polnostyu obespechena territoriyey boleye, chem na sto let*" was Molotov's report of Hitler's statement. From "*Beseda Predsedatelya Sovnarkoma, Narkoma Inostrannykh Del SSSR V.M. Molotova s Reyhskantslerom Germanii A.Gitlerom v Berline 12 noyabrya 1940 g., Osobaya Papka*" ("Conversation of the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the USSR V.M. Molotov with the Reich Chancellor of Germany A. Hitler in Berlin 12 November 1940"); <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/102263-beseda-predsedatelya-sovnarkoma-narkoma-inostrannyh-del-sssr-v-m-molotova-s-reyhs-kantslerom-germanii-a-gitlerom-v-berline-12-noyabrya-1940-g#mode/inspect/page/3/zoom/4> (in Russian).

365 As quoted in Andrei A. Kokoshin; "The German Blitzkreig Against the USSR, 1941"; 2016; <https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/legacy/files/Blitzkreig%20Final.pdf>.

366 Individual Soviet intelligence reports could contain information on the Germans' actual plans mixed in with German disinformation, adding to the complexity and confusion.

367 According to G.K. Zhukov in *The Memoirs of Marshal Zhukov*; 1971 (English-language version of *Vospominaniya i Razmyshleniya* [*Memories and Reflections*]; 1969).

the Germany Army was being prepared for an amphibious landing in Britain in 1941. English-language instructors were attached to German units, and topographical maps of Britain were printed in quantity for the German forces. Troops and commanders were given the idea that they were being sent to the east for a rest before moving against the British Empire, either directly against Britain itself or in an offensive that would sweep through the Middle East and capture British India. German intelligence expected much of this disinformation would by human nature leak to Soviet spies in various ways.



In the spring of 1941, German troops stationed near the border with the USSR were ordered to be building field fortifications. This was meant to give the impression that the Germans planned to be on the defensive in the east. The Germans expected Soviet reconnaissance aircraft would observe the construction of the fortifications. Actual military operations in the Balkans were also used to confuse the Soviets: The occupation of Yugoslavia and Greece was supposedly the first move of a planned German offensive into the Middle East to capture the oilfields in Iraq and Iran³⁶⁸. (Note that this meshed with other disinformation suggesting a German move on British India via the Middle East.) The German airborne assault on Crete in May 1941 was spun as a dress rehearsal for an airborne invasion of Britain later that year.

May 1941 also saw direct evidence of German interest in the Middle East. Iraq had been given to Britain as a League of Nations mandate after World War I. The country became independent in 1932, but only at the cost of allowing the British to retain bases in the country and to be able to transit troops through the country. In April 1941, a coup in Iraq instilled a pro-German, anti-British government, and fighting broke out between the Iraqis and British in early May. Germany responded by sending Luftwaffe aircraft to support the Iraqis, but the British triumphed by the end of the month. Although Iraq had been a minor sideshow to Germany, German presence in Iraq could be interpreted as a sign of Germany's interest in the Middle East.

In some ways, a German offensive to take Middle East oil made more sense than attacking the USSR. The Iranian oilfields were about the same distance from Greece as the Soviet oilfields at Baku were from Poland. While each route had regions of mountains and poor communications, the path to Baku required the Germans to fight their way across the Caucasus Mountains, which rivaled the Alps. The Germans would have had to fight the Turkish Army and whatever forces the British could send to the Middle East, but these forces in total would have been much smaller than the Red Army. According to Zhukov, in the spring of 1941 Stalin believed the Germans would need to secure oil supplies before attacking the USSR. In one conversation, he pointed to the Middle East on a map and said, "That's where they will go".

German disinformation gave Stalin ample opportunity to come to the wrong conclusions about Hitler's intentions. It is likely he thought Hitler would most likely do what Stalin himself would do: use a position of strength to force concessions via an ultimatum. Stalin had used ultimatums in 1939 and 1940 to get bases in the Baltic states and then to take over

³⁶⁸ The oilfields were in Iraq and Iran but were controlled by various American, British, Dutch, and French oil companies or cooperative ventures. The fields were a major source of oil for Britain, and none of their oil went to Germany or other members of the Axis.

these states and eastern Romania. Also, Hitler so far had avoided declaring war on any major power (Britain and France had declared war on Germany when the Germans invaded Poland), which mirrored Stalin's own desire to avoid war with a major power. All this suggests Stalin thought the most likely course of action was that Hitler try to wring concessions out of the USSR with an ultimatum and threat of force, maybe including border skirmishes and perhaps even limited military operations. As long as the Soviet Union avoided actions that seemed to threaten Germany, Stalin likely believed that Hitler did not want to order a full-scale invasion of the USSR³⁶⁹. This was completely incorrect: Hitler wanted *Lebensraum* and did not need any pretense as justification to go to war with the Soviet Union.

Sidetrip: Border Skirmishes, Clashes, and Battles

There was a reason the Soviets thought Germany might resort to border skirmishes or limited military operations in 1941: they had just been through the same with Japan. The Japanese had been hostile from the Soviets' rise to power in 1917. Japan conquered Manchuria in the early 1930s, which gave Japan a long border with the USSR and Mongolia, a Soviet satellite state. Border disputes and incursions became common between the Soviets and Japanese, escalating in 1935 to low-level combat with casualties. Clashes continued to grow in frequency and size in following years. In 1938, the two countries fought the Battle of Lake Khasan over a disputed area along the Soviet-Manchurian border, each side fielding thousands of troops supported by artillery, tanks, and aircraft. In 1939, Battle of Khalkhin Gol was fought along the Mongolian-Manchurian border with even larger forces³⁷⁰.

The Soviets thus thought it possible Germany might do something similar. There had been some minor border incidents once the two countries split up Poland and thus shared a border. In the first half of 1941, however, the Germans became much more aggressive. Luftwaffe reconnaissance aircraft increasingly violated Soviet air space, observing Soviet bases, troop concentrations, and supply dumps

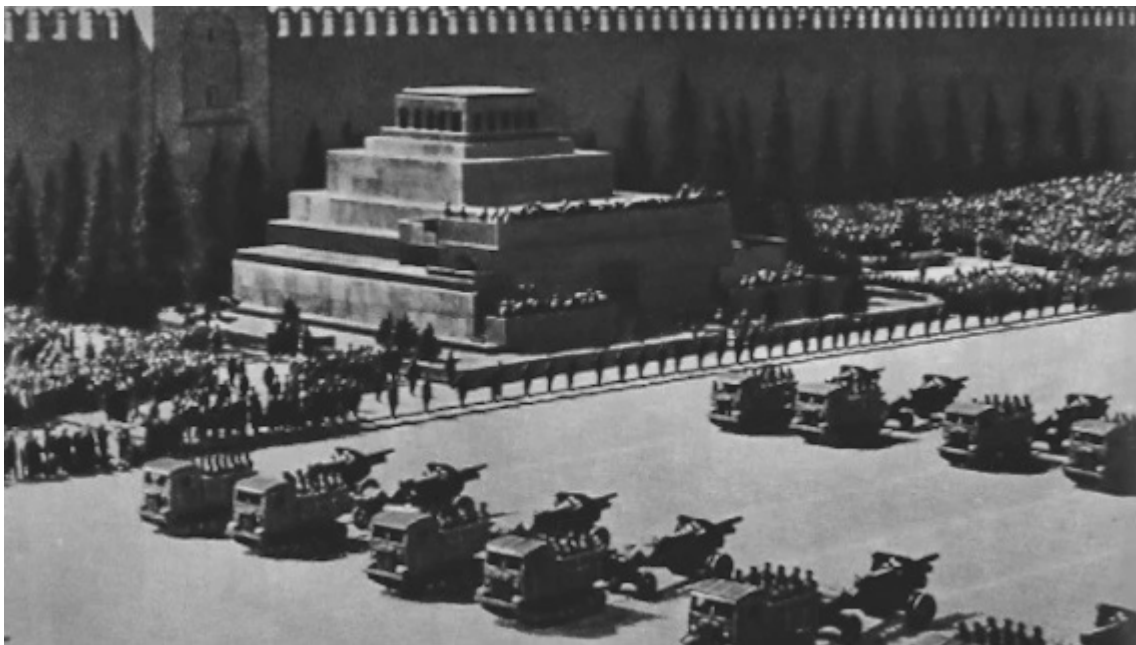
369 It is very difficult to determine what Stalin actually believed. His public statements and his even private statements with his cronies and underlings cannot be trusted to reveal what he actually thought, as he would say whatever he felt the situation required. His writings were all political propaganda for the benefit of Communism, the USSR, and Stalin himself. Immediately after the war, Soviet propaganda and censorship required the books of Soviet generals and officials to portray Stalin as a wise leader and to hide his mistakes with Hitler. Once de-Stalinization began after Stalin's death, some Soviet leaders then almost certainly misportrayed and fabricated conversations they claimed to have had with Stalin to discredit him.

370 The Soviets won both battles, dampening some Japanese enthusiasm for war against the USSR. The two countries signed a non-aggression pact in April 1941.

across the western border regions of the USSR. From April 1941, German ground reconnaissance teams started to probe Soviet territory. Perhaps the first was a team of 16 German soldiers who crossed the border disguised as Soviet engineering troops. A shootout then ensued with Soviet border guards, with the Germans withdrawing³⁷¹. Incidents like these would occur along the border throughout the spring of 1941.

The Soviets were concerned that Soviet forces might excessively respond to German-initiated border incidents. This risked events spiralling out of control and leading to war. As one directive to the Red Army put it on the eve of war, “The task of our troops is not to succumb to any provocative actions that could cause major complications”³⁷².

Hindsight show these incursions were gathering intelligence for the German invasion. At the time, however, other interpretations were also possible. High on the list must have been that they were the prelude to Germany issuing an ultimatum.



May Day military parade, Red Square, Moskva, 1 May 1941

Stalin believed that war with Germany was avoidable in 1941. This explains his insistence that the Soviets in general and the Red Army in particular had to avoid taking any action that might Hitler might see as hostile or provocative. This included ordering Soviet

³⁷¹ John Erickson; *The Road to Stalingrad: Stalin's War with Germany*; 1975.

³⁷² NKO Directive № 1 to the western border MDs on 21 June 1941, warning that a German surprise attack was possible on 22 or 23 June.

mobilization, which Hitler could interpret as the USSR was planning to attack Germany and needed to invade first. The Soviets were well aware that Russian mobilization in 1914 over the crises between Austria-Hungary and Serbia directly led Imperial Germany to declare war on Russia³⁷³. According to Zhukov, when on 14 June he requested the Red Army go to full combat readiness in the western border region, Stalin replied, “You propose carrying out mobilization... That means war!”. When M.P. Kirponos, the commander of the Kiev Special Military District, started moving troops up the border on his initiative, Stalin heard of it and countermanded the orders.

Stalin’s orders had very serious consequences. Soviet mobilization took about two weeks to complete, as reservists and equipment flowed from the civilian economy to the military. Soviet defense planning was based on the Soviets detecting unmistakable signs of a pending invasion at least two weeks before it occurred. While it was abundantly clear the German military was concentrating in the east in early June, German forces were not massing on the border. This would have been the clearest signal that an invasion was imminent, especially if the panzer troops were present. The Germans knew this and deliberately held their forces back as long as practical. The panzer divisions and other mobile forces were kept away from the border until the final day or two. This meant the various German deception plans continued to have effect, and Stalin continued to believe the Germans would not invade until almost the last moment.

Although Stalin avoided mobilization and provocations, he had undertaken considerable other defensive measures. In 1940–1941 the USSR oversaw a massive expansion of the Red Army. The western border regions were reinforced, and two echelons of reserve forces were assembled deeper in the western USSR. Although the Soviets did not order mobilization, in the spring of 1941 they did call up 800,000 reservists ostensible for training but actually to increase active army strength³⁷⁴. Some historians have argued that Stalin intended to order full mobilization when he received the expected German ultimatum, in the belief that while the resulting negotiations would give the Soviets time to mobilize.

373 For a good discussion of WW1 mobilization leading to war, see Marc Trachtenberg; “The Meaning of Mobilization in 1914”; *International Security* Vol. 15 No. 3; 1990; <https://doi.org/10.2307/2538909>. As for the Soviets knowing this, John Erickson’s work (*The Road to Stalingrad: Stalin’s War with Germany*; 1975) contains an account of a commanders’ meeting in the Soviet 4th Army (stationed on the border) on 10 June. In response to concerns on the concentration of Germany troops across the border, the army commander replied: “And what would you like us to do? Institute mobilization and start concentrating our troops on the frontier? That could equally well bring on war. As you know very well from the history of the First World War, mobilization by one state automatically leads to mobilization on the part of the opposing state and to the outbreak of war.”

374 For steps short of full mobilization taken by the Soviets, see: Louis Rotundo; “Stalin and the Outbreak of War in 1941”; *Journal of Contemporary History* Vol. 24 No. 2; 1989; <http://www.jstor.org/stable/260824>.

The 1941 State Border Defense Plan called for Red Army forces covering the border to absorb the enemy's initial attack, falling back if necessary to allow at least part of the first echelon to help halt the enemy advance. The second echelon and whatever remained of the first echelon would then counterattack, encircle, and destroy the enemy on Soviet soil. Red Army forces would then mount offensives into enemy territory until complete victory over the enemy was won. The plan was sensible albeit optimistic. Like some of the Soviet defense thinking of the 1930s, it expected a short war without massive casualties, with most of the fighting occurring on someone else's territory. In consequence, the Soviets had no detailed planning on how to defend the USSR if the plan failed, as it dramatically did.

The failure to mobilize or even bring the border forces to full readiness certainly contributed to the poor Soviet performance at the start of the invasion. However, deeper problems affected the Red Army. Stalin's purges of the military had decimated the upper ranks of the Soviet officer corps, filling it with much more inexperienced officers. Many of the remaining experienced higher officers had been thoroughly cowed by the purges, which affected their performance. For example, D.G. Pavlov, the commander of the Western Front in June 1941, had been a soldier since 1914, a unit commander in the Russian Civil War, a Frunze Military Academy graduate in 1928, an outstanding mechanized warfare commander since 1931, and the commander of what would become the Western Front since 1940. When Germany attacked on 22 June 1941, its main effort was against the Western Front, which was rapidly overwhelmed. Pavlov, likely out of fear of reporting failure, did not fully inform the high command on how bad the situation had become. This likely made the strategic situation worse, as the high command was issuing orders to the reserve echelons based on incorrect information³⁷⁵.

Measure taken in 1941 to strengthen the defense of the western border districts were:

- 800,000 reservists were called to active duty in May–June 1941.
- In May 1941, 28 additional divisions were ordered to move into the western reserve echelons from elsewhere in the USSR.
- The fortified areas along the border were reinforced with almost 40,000 soldiers in June 1941.

³⁷⁵ Perhaps Pavlov was delaying conveying the truth at the front in hopes his troops could recover and stop the Germans.

However, events spiraled out of his control and most of his troops were pocketed by 29 June. On 30 June, Pavlov was summoned to Moskva for questioning, but on 2 July he was demoted and sent back to the Western Front as deputy commander to a new front commander. He was finally arrested on 4 July and then tried, convicted, and executed on 22 July for failure to perform his official duties.

- On 19 June 1941, the headquarters of the western border military districts (MDs) were ordered to move into their field command posts and to be ready to direct operations in the field as Front HQs.
- Very late on 21 June 1941, the People's Commissariat of Defense (NKO) issued NKO Directive № 1 to the western border MDs, warning that a German surprise attack was possible on 22 or 23 June. The directive first ordered the MDs' forces "to avoid provocative actions of any kind" but then ordered the MDs' forces "to be at full combat readiness to meet a surprise blow". The directive also ordered the border fortified areas to man their firing points, to disperse and camouflage all their aircraft, and to prepare to black out cities and installations. It ended with, "Take no other measures without special permission".

The directive reached the MD HQs around 1 AM on 22 June. The HQs in turn began alerting their subordinate units to implement the order, but this took several hours. Many units did not receive their orders before the German invasion began at 3:15 AM on 22 June.

Had the Soviets ordered mobilization on 13 June as some generals wanted, it would not have had a full two weeks to run before the Germans invaded on 22 June. However, it would have allowed have brought some units up to or near full strength, it would have supplied some badly-needed transport for divisional artillery units, and it would have allowed border forces to assume better defensive positions. All this would have could have improved the performance of the Red Army in the opening days of the war. Given German experience and Soviet inexperience, it seems likely that the Germans would still break through, but perhaps the Soviet defense plan would not have failed as badly as it did³⁷⁶.

³⁷⁶ There is also another possibility. The Germans chose 22 June as the date when all forces allocated for the invasion would be prepared. However, the vast bulk of these forces were in the east by 13 June. Had the Soviets ordered mobilization on that day, the Germans might have responded by starting operations earlier than the 22nd. If these began on 15th, 16th, or 17th, the Germans would have been a bit weaker than they wanted, but the invasion would go in before substantial numbers of Soviet reservists or transport reached the border forces. In this scenario, the Germans might have done almost as well as they did historically. Even though the Germans had already decided to invade, to some people it would have seen that Soviet mobilization did provoke the German invasion, adding to the myth that "mobilization means war".

15 Concluding Remarks



The Eastern Front, 22 June 1941 to 5 December 1941³⁷⁷

As I mentioned at the start of this guidebook, the Soviet Union of World War II was a huge puzzle. **How could the largest country in the world, with a huge army and air force, a large population, vast natural resources, and a robust defense industry, do so badly in the war?**

There are many factors involved in this question, but I believe the following three explain a lot of the problems of the USSR:

- The awful social legacy of the Russian Empire.

³⁷⁷ Graphic by "Gdr", taken unmodified from Wikipedia at

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:Gdr/Gallery#/media/File:Eastern_Front_1941-06_to_1941-12.png and available under the Creative Commons Share-Alike 3 license.

- The violent, ruthless, intolerant nature of the Communists.
- Stalin's inhumanity.

All three factors caused millions of needless deaths, incurred tremendous social disruption, and lowered the human potential of the country.

The Russian Empire imposed debilitating social conditions on the vast majority of its subjects. The empire was largely run for the benefit of the state and a small elite: the monarchy, the nobility and high clergy, the rich landowners, and, from the late 19th Century, wealthy industrialists. Many of the common people in the empire in turn suffered from poor education, alcoholism, poor medical care, and poor living conditions. The lowest rungs of society were affected the worse. Russia had a relatively small industrial sector, and its wage laborers often worked in Dickensian conditions of poor pay, unsafe factories, and unsanitary housing. The vast majority of the population was in agriculture as peasants with burdensome, multi-generational debts imposed on them when the serfs were freed in the 1860s. The government deliberately kept the peasants very poorly educated, fearing rural unrest if peasants through education realized how badly they were treated. Inadequate education affected city dwellers, except for the small elite who had access to excellent schools. Significant reform only came after 1906, when an abortive revolution forced a reluctant Tsar to give up absolute power and allow the common people a limited voice in government. One of things the people wanted was good education for their children. Adult education was largely ignored, so the vast majority of the adult population remained illiterate. Since achieving a well-educated populace was the work of decades, the Soviet took over a country of mediocre education attainment.

Poor education almost certainly was a major factor in Russia's dismal performance in World War I. Despite Russian forces greatly outnumbering German forces, the better-educated, better-trained German soldiers outfought their Russian counterparts. The result for Russia was great loss of life and territory. Not only did the Russian forces suffer immense casualties, the war disrupted the civilian economy, causing hunger, disease, and many needless deaths.

Alcoholism was a major problem in Russia since the 19th Century, once cheap, mass-produced vodka began widely available. The Russian government realized a large fraction of its revenues from alcohol sales and taxes, so the state rarely did much to combat alcoholism. When World War I broke out in 1914, the government finally did try to tackle the problem, as it wanted sober soldiers fighting at the front, sober, industrious workers in the factories,

and sober, productive farmers in the fields. Russia banned the production and sale of vodka and allowed local authorities to regulate or ban wine and beer. However, near-total prohibition was unrealistic. The unintended consequence of this policy was the creation a vast black market first in alcohol and then in addictive drugs, creating more social problems.

The Russian Empire often used extreme repressive measures to stifle opposition and open discourse about its policies and actions. The tsars until 1906 were absolute monarchs, and most were more than willing to crush dissent and impose censorship across the country. For a long time, for example, it was illegal to publish the text of the American Declaration of Independence, with its talk of “all men being equal”, people having “unalienable Rights”, and governments “deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed”. Instead, until 1906 all political parties were illegal, and even peaceful calls for sensible government reforms could be severely punished. The Russian Empire did not hesitate to punish its subjects, using censorship, secret police surveillance, forced labor, exile to Siberia, torture, and extrajudicial execution. The Bolshevik revolutionaries denounced these repressive and inhumane measures. Once they were in power as the Communists, they soon embraced and expanding on all of them. Roughly speaking, whatever repressive measures the Russian Empire had done, Lenin did ten times as much, and Stalin ten times more, directly affecting the lives of millions.

The willingness to resort to extreme repressive measures was just one of many negative factors about the Bolsheviks/Communists. Before taking power, they were one of the more violent, radical groups of the various Russian Marxist and socialist parties. They were almost completely intolerant of other Marxists and socialists who did not share their violent revolutionary program. Once in power, the Communists marginalized the other Russian Marxists and socialists. They progressively outlawed every other political party, making the USSR a one-party state. They paid lip service to democracy, but they also quickly subverted democratic processes to ensure that the voters could not vote them out of power. Only the Party itself remained somewhat democratic, although Lenin’s policy of democratic centralism ensured that a small inner group of Party leaders had great power.

In the 1920s, most of the Communists were true believers in their version of Marxism, in which their party was the vanguard of the proletariat. That conveniently meant that the Communist leadership made the decisions, regardless of the actual will of the proletariat. Indeed, with vanguardism, a Communist Party decision by definition had to be the will of the proletariat. Protest and resistance to the decisions had to be crushed.

The Party leadership developed a collective, semi-paranoid mindset that they were besieged by foreign and internal enemies constantly striving, often covertly, to undermine and overthrow Communism and the Soviet state. Almost any setback could thus be attributed to the work of anti-Soviet enemies. This incurred a high human cost, as when the Soviets made mistakes or implemented poor policies, they could ignore the consequences or their actions and blame others rather than themselves.

Lenin died in 1924, and Stalin achieved dictatorial power in 1928. He stamped out the last functioning democratic features of the Party, ensuring that no other Party leader could gain support and replace him. Under Stalin, the USSR embarked on rapid industrialization and ruthless collectivization of agriculture. Almost all the faults of the Communists were greatly magnified under Stalin, epitomized by his vast GULag system of forced labor coerced by threat of starvation and his brutal secret police force that arrested, tortured, imprisoned, and executed millions of Soviet citizens.

Stalin not only wanted to build the USSR into a socialist country that surpassed the USA, the leading capitalist country, he wanted the Soviet public and the world to know this would be his accomplishment. This in part led to the somewhat peculiar Soviet concentration on quantity over quality. The ever-increasing numbers of tractors, trucks, aircraft, engines, tanks, etc., were thus signs of Soviet progress. The fact that they were poorly made, sometimes wore out quickly, and occasionally were so defective that they never worked at all mattered less. This situation led to the Red Army fighting the early part of the war with shoddy weapons. (The poor quality of Soviet manufacturing of course had many other contributing factors, including a work force with many poorly-educate former peasants.)

All these factors resulted in the USSR being much weaker in 1941 it should have been.

Could things have been different? Inhumane Soviet policies squandered the potential of their population. Millions of citizens dying due to famine from forced collectivization of agriculture, the destruction of the kulaks, arbitrary executions by the secret police, exhaustion and starvation in the GULag, and unnecessary accidents in the mad rush to industrialize at any human cost. These needless deaths reduced the potential of the Soviet economy and the potential strength of the armed forces. Soviet repression reduced the potential of the living. Forced labor in the GULag's camps and colonies was very inefficient and sometimes wasted on projects that made no economic sense. Even the potential of the people outside the GULag was reduced: Stalin's Great Purge terrorized alike common workers and skilled professionals, removing dynamism and growth potential from the

economy. The purges also degraded the military by removing experienced commanders and replacing them with inexperienced ones, some of who were outright incompetent.

The Soviets and their apologists contended that what Stalin did was necessary to industrialize rapidly and prepare for the coming war. I believe it was very likely the Soviets would have been even better prepared and militarily stronger had the USSR treated its populace better. Industrialization might have proceeded slower at first, but in return Soviet industry could have avoided much of the many destructive accidents and low-quality manufacturing that characterized it. With good results compounding over time, the economy then likely would have grown faster in the late 1930s. Avoiding all those needless deaths would have made available millions more workers to grow the economy. Better-treated workers likely would have been more productive, and the economy would have been more productive without the masses of GULag slave laborers.

Experienced commanders and millions more soldiers would have been available when Germany invaded. Weapons would have been better made and available in greater quantity. The war could have ended earlier in Soviet victory, with much less loss of life and destruction.



Red Army soldier raising the Soviet flag on top of the German Reichstag, 2 May 1945³⁷⁸

³⁷⁸ Photograph by E.A. Khaldey; *Znamya Pobedy nad Reykhstagom* (Victory Banner over Reichstag; but typically translated as Raising a Flag over the Reichstag); 1945.

16 Appendices

16.A Map History of Rus and Russia to 1895

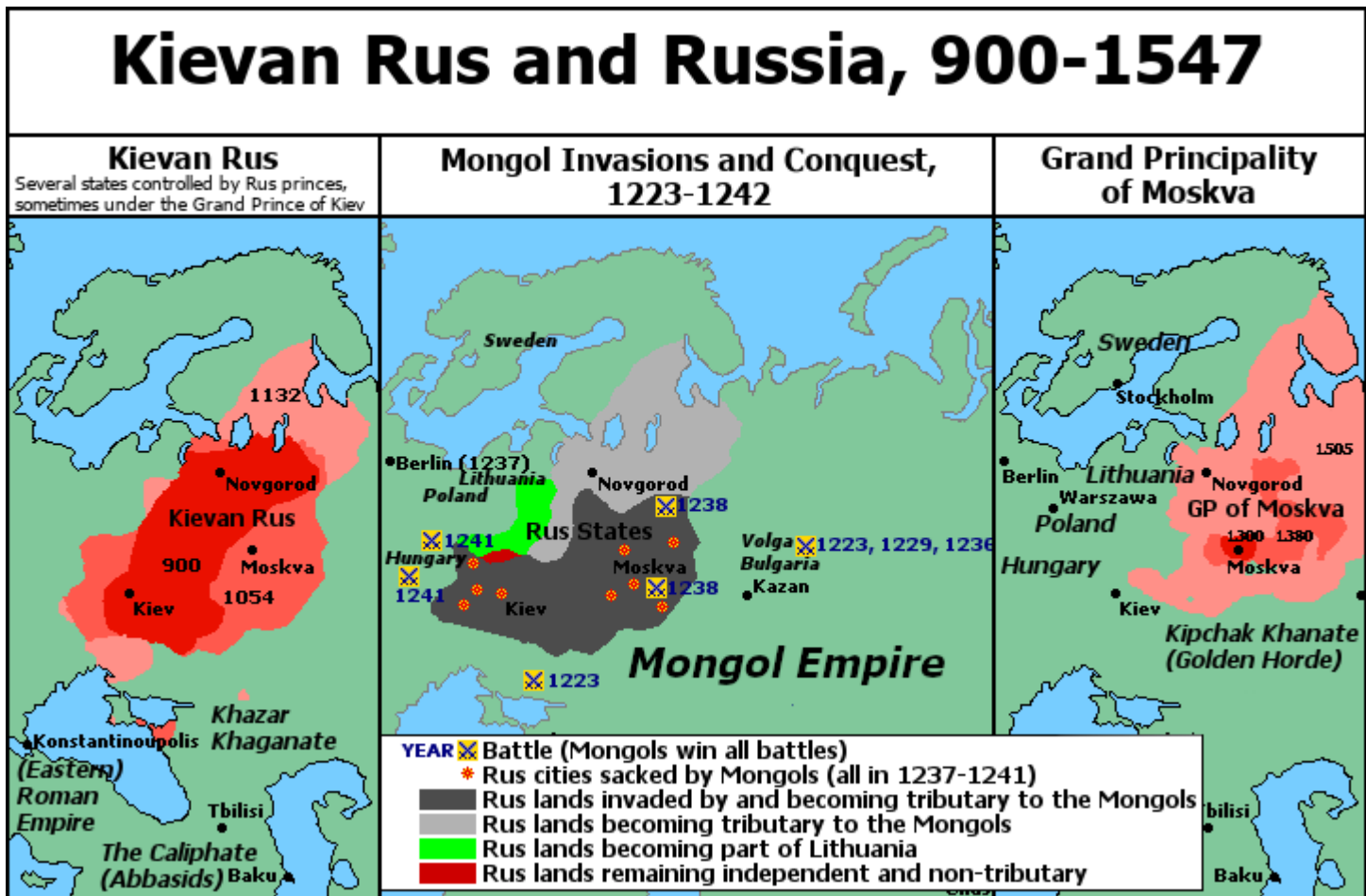
Dates by cities are the date the city was founded.

Dates on Kievan Rus and Russia territories show the extent of the countries on those dates, not the date on which the territories became part of those countries.



Nordic Varangians from Scandinavia conquered East Slavic tribes in what is now parts of Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine. They formed principalities with a Varangian ruling elite over

their Slavic subjects. Over time, the rulers and subject merged into the Slavic-speaking Rus. The Rus were not Russians did not speak Russian.



Historians call the Rus region **Kievan Rus**, as the Grand Prince of Kiev was the foremost prince over the other princes. However, Kievan Rus was not a centralized state. The princes often competed for power and wealth with one another including with the Grand Prince. Over time the authority of the Grand Prince declined most to just a symbolic basis, and Kiev itself was sacked several times by Rus princes.

Kievan Rus came to an end when the Mongols and their Turkic-speaking Tatar subject-soldiers conquered most of Rus principalities, with most of the rest submitting to the Mongols without a fight. In this disaster, the western Rus lands were lost to Lithuania, and only a small region remained free. From this time, the Rus would evolve into the Belarusians in the west, the Russians in the east, and the Ukrainians in the south, all speaking closely-related East Slavic languages.

The Mongols and Tatars did not directly rule these lands. Instead, the local princes remained as rulers but paid tribute to their overlords. Overtime, a small principality centered on Moskva grew in influence. Prince Ivan “Moneybags” of Moskva became the Russian tribute collector to the Golden Horde, the Tatar successor to the Mongol Empire in this region. This made Ivan the Grand Prince and quite wealthy, as he kept all tribute above what the Tatars demanded for himself. Moskva eventually shook off the “**Tatar yoke**”, ending tribute payments to the Golden Horde. However, freedom for most Russian principalities was short lived, as the Grand Principality of Moskva soon conquered most of them and became the dominant power in Russian lands. The Belarusian and Ukrainian lands developed on their own, mostly as parts of Poland or Lithuania. The steppes south of Kiev were controlled by the Golden Horde or other Turkic horse empires.

Spotlight: The Rise and Fall of the Horse Empires



The great Eurasian Steppe stretched from Manchuria in eastern Asia to Hungary in eastern Europe. For centuries, this steppe was the home and highway of tribes, confederations, and “horse empires”, comprised of nomadic or semi-nomadic peoples skilled in horsed warfare. These empires and confederations were unstable, at times growing into mighty but temporary states and at other times collapsing into warring small groups. For example, the Mongol Empire, a Mongol-led array of Mongols, Tatars, and peoples from around Mongolia, burst onto the scene in the 13th Century to dominate the steppe and to conquer many other lands in Asia and Europe. By the end of the century, however, this empire had splintered into four pieces, many of which themselves later broke up or were conquered.

In what is now Kazakhstan, Russia, and Ukraine, numerous horse empires succeeded the Mongols, often fighting one another while extracting tribute, loot, and slaves from nearby lands. Their traditions of animal herding and disdain of

settled agriculture meant that little farming occurred in their lands or in the nearby border areas that they frequently raided.

The military strength of horse empires was largely based on their warrior cultures and their highly-mobile warfare by their mounted archers and cavalymen with traditional weapons such as lances and swords. As military technology advanced, the increasing importance of firearms and cannon turned the tide against horse empires. They would acquire the new weapons, but they did not have the economic base to produce them in great quantities, nor did they have the large population to raise big infantry armies equipped with these weapons. In contrast, Russia with its agricultural base developed cities that supported craftsmen making gunpowder weapons. Russian agriculture also fueled population growth, which enabled the country to field large infantry armies not only for conquest but also to build and hold extensive fortified lines that held back the raids from the horse empires.

Some key events in Russian history revolved around confrontations with the horse empires. In the late 15th Century, Ivan III, Grand Prince of Moskva, defied the Golden Horde and ended its ability to collect tribute from Russia. The Golden Horde soon fell apart, and Russia grew in strength and expanded. As Russia conquered the fertile, fallow steppelands from the horse empires, they were quickly settled by farmers. This became a virtuous cycle in the Russian conquest of the steppes: newly-gained lands were settled by farmers, the increase in agriculture allowed more cities to develop and the population to increase, the military power of Russia increased, and the Russians then repeated the cycle by conquering more of the steppe. This conquest of the horse empires was mostly completed in the 18th Century, when the Crimean Khanate, long a powerful rival to Russia, was completely conquered, opening up southern Ukraine and the Crimea for settlement.

Tsardom of Russia, 1547-1595

Ivan IV, Grand Prince of Moskva from age 3, proclaimed himself Tsar of All Rus at his coronation in 1547. His state thus became the Tsardom of Russia. "Tsar" was Russian for "Emperor", and Ivan's realm was multi-ethnic empire. He would greatly expand his after 1547, but expansion slowed and troubles began after his death in 1584.



Ivan IV (Ivan the Terrifying)
Ivan's ruthless paranoia caused tremendous suffering. He was called "Groznyy" (actually meaning "Terrifying" rather than "Terrible").

Grand Prince Ivan IV declared himself to be Tsar of All Russia³⁷⁹ in 1547, making his realm the Tsardom of Russia. He greatly expanded his empire but became notorious for his cruelty to conquered Muslims and to his own people, earning him the epithet "the Terrifying". His Oprichniki were his personal paramilitary forces and forerunners to the Russian and Soviet secret police forces. Ivan ordered the Oprichniki to loot, imprison, torture, and kill his subjects, and Ivan himself would participate in torturing his victims. He also killed his competent son and heir in an uncontrollable rage. This led to his other, incompetent son

³⁷⁹ "Tsar" like the German "Kaiser" derived from "Caesar" and meant emperor. While "Caesar" in English is pronounced "Seezer" but in Latin the "C" was a "K" sound and the "ae" was a long "i" ("aye") sound, which helps explain the origin of the Russian "Tsar" and German "Kaiser".

"All of Russia" and similar phrases like "All of the Rus" and "All of the Russias" was the claim by the Grand Princes of Moskva to be the right ruler of the lands deriving from Kievan Rus.

inheriting the throne, and he died childless, ending Ivan's Rurik dynasty that stretched back to Kievan Rus times.



The Time of Troubles was a calamitous 20-year period for the Tsardom of Russia, with the country being weakened by starvation, revolts, and foreign invasions. The troubles began in earnest in 1601, when a volcanic eruption in Peru caused cold summers in Russia in 1601–1603, resulting in massive crop failures. Famine killed an estimated one third of the tsardom's population. Public order broke down, and numerous revolts by peasants and other Russian subjects broke out.

As Russia weakened, the country became a target of foreign invasions. From the south and east, steppe empires and tribes looted Russia and took slaves. From the northwest, Sweden

attacked and gained Russian land in the Baltic. The most serious threat was from the west. The Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania invaded several times, took Moskva in 1610, and tried to merge Russia with Poland-Lithuania. A Russian resurgence, including the raising of a volunteer People's Militia, regained most of the country by 1612. A final campaign saw Poland-Lithuania besiege Moskva in 1618, but the city held. In the subsequent peace agreement, Russia lost land to Poland-Lithuania but gained time to recover its strength.

During this time, 16-year-old Mikhail Romanov became Tsar in 1613, establishing the Romanov dynasty that would rule Russia until 1917.



Russian recovered under the Romanovs and began expanding again. Pyotr I (“Peter the Great”) became Tsar in 1682 and soon began modernizing Russia based on his personal experience in visiting central and western Europe. Pytor won a significant victory in a war with Sweden, gaining control of the northeastern Baltic Sea coast for Russia. In 1721, he declared himself Emperor of Russia and his realm the Russian Empire, although he and his successors would also continue to be called tsars.

Pyotr I was also quite cruel to his subjects and family, although not to the extent that Ivan IV had been. Pyotr did have his son executed, but Russia did not undergo a dynastic crisis like it did after Ivan.



Pyotr founded Sankt-Peterburg in his newly-conquered lands on the Baltic. This city and sea port became his new capital and Russia's "Window to the West". Russia kept expanding, taking what became southern Russia and southern Ukraine. Ekaterina II ("Catherine the Great") colonized their lands with loyal subjects, including not only Russians and Ukrainians but also immigrants from central Europe, primarily Germans.

Russia was now a major European power and frequently fought in European wars. Napoleon invaded Russia in 1812 but retreated after taking Moskva. Russia and a coalition of European states then destroyed Napoleon's French Empire, with the Russian Army occupying Paris in 1814. This left Russia the 19th Century equivalent of a superpower. However, the Russian Empire was experienced growing problems by the end of that century and the start of the 20th, as covered in the [main text](#).

16.B Russian and Soviet Central Asia

SFSR: Socialist Federative Soviet Republic; from 1936, Soviet Federative Socialist Republic.

SSR: Socialist Soviet Republic; from 1936, Soviet Socialist Republic.

ASSR: Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic; from 1936, Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic.

AO: Autonomous Oblast (an oblast corresponded to a province, a lower level than an ASSR).

PSR: People's Soviet Republic (used for Soviet puppet states that pretended to be independent).

Central Asia was a mix of ethnic groups, most of them Muslim. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Soviets with their policy of organizing union republics, autonomous republics, and other autonomous entities along ethnic lines would determine the borders that still exist for the present-day countries of Central Asia.



- Steppe (Temperate Grasslands)
- Dry Steppe and Semi-Desert
- Desert
- Agricultural Land
- Foothills
- Mountainous

Kazakh: Turkic Group
Tajik: Iranian Group
Russian: Other Group

Location of major ethnolinguistic groups is approximated before extensive Russian settlement in the region and before the 1930s demographic disaster in Kazakhstan.

Extent of steppe, dry steppe, and desert vary over time due to weather, climate, and water diversion. Extent of agricultural land varies over time based on climate and irrigation systems. Caspian and Aral Seas shorelines are approximately those of the 1930s.

The Russian Empire had pushed into the Kazakh Steppe³⁸⁰ in the north of Central Asia, conquering lands there and subduing the Kazakh Khanate, the horse empire that had been the dominant power in this region. The northern part of this steppe fell to Russia in the 1700s, and most of the rest was conquered in the early 1800s. Throughout the 19th Century, Russia conquered the Muslim lands in the central and southern parts of Central Asia. By the end of the century, the remnants of the Khanate of Khiva and the Emirate of Bukhara were protectorates of Russia whose rulers only remained on their thrones as long as they did not displease the tsars. The rest of Central Asia was made part of Russia itself, divided between the General-Governorate of the Steppes in the north and the General-Governorate of Turkestan (aka “Russian Turkestan”³⁸¹) in the south.



Despite the appearance of Khiva and Bukhara dividing Russian Turkestan in two, the Russians could enter and cross these territories as they wished. As they built railroads connecting Russian Turkestan with Russia proper, one line would cross the Emirate of Bukhara, allowing the Russians to rapidly move people, goods, troops, and supplies throughout Russian Turkestan.

The northern part of the Kazakh Steppe had considerable arable lands that were not being farmed under the Kazakh Khanate. As the Russian Empire conquered the region, Russian and Ukrainian farmers settled this part of the steppe. New cities arose in this region, with Russian-Ukrainian majorities. To this day, the northern part of Kazakhstan is a Russian-Ukrainian majority region³⁸².

380 The Russians at times called the Kazakh Steppe the “Kirgiz Steppe” (which made it way into English as the “Kirghiz Steppe”), since the 19th Century Russians considered the Kazakh and Kyrgyz languages of this steppe region dialects of one language. For simplicity, I only used “Kazakh Steppe”.

381 Russian Turkestan was also at time called West Turkestan. To the east, the Chinese region of Xinjiang at that time was a Muslim-majority area (mostly Uyghurs with some Kazakhs and other Turkic groups), which was sometimes called East Turkestan. The word “Turkestan” (land of Turkic peoples) itself was coined in the Persian language and adopted by many other languages. The ordinary Turkic inhabitants of Central Asia did not call their region “Turkestan”, as it was never a unified region either in its own right or as part of one empire.

382 Many works simplify things by just concentrating on the Russians, who comprise the largest segment of the population in northern Kazakhstan. Ukrainians are still present, too. The Ukrainian component used to be large: in the 1926 census, Kazakhstan overall was roughly 59% Kazakh, 21% Russian, and 14% Ukrainian, with many of the Russians and Ukrainians

South of the arable parts of the steppe, the rest of Central Asia saw lower levels of colonization, but Russian and Ukrainian farmers also settled in many places there, aided by Imperial policies that transferred agricultural land to these settlers³⁸³. This situation caused long-term resentment in the local populations against the Russian state and the “Russian” settlers³⁸⁴. Unlike horse empires in the steppes with their disdain for agriculture, the southern part of Central Asia was home to civilizations based on agriculture. This region also had many cities, some of which had existed since ancient times. These cities saw an influx of Russians and other subjects considered loyal to the Russian Empire³⁸⁵, as officials and their families were brought in for government positions throughout the region. Few Muslims were allowed to serve in government. Turkestan had a long history of Muslim states with little in common with Russia in religion or culture, so the Russian Empire regarded the local peoples in the region as likely disloyal to the Russian state and potentially rebellious.

Central Asia retained a sizable Russian military garrison after the conquest. They were there to defend the borders with other countries in the region. Russia and the various empires based in Iran, for example, had fought numerous wars over the centuries. The troops were also there for internal security purposes, as an occupation force to guard against Muslim revolts. The troops were all brought in from other parts of the Russian Empire. Local Muslims were seen as untrustworthy and were not allowed to serve in the Russian military³⁸⁶. This military exemption was a state of affairs that many locals actually preferred rather than chafed against.

World War I started in 1914, and like most combatants in that war the Imperial Russian Army suffered heavy casualties. By 1916, the Russians decided they needed to conscript men from Central Asia. They were not to be used as soldiers but as laborers, freeing up men considered more loyal to go fight as soldiers. Even this limited form of conscript was met with protests that quickly turned into a major revolt by Muslim in many parts of Central

must have been in the northern part of country. In modern times, the Ukrainian share of the population is much smaller, partly caused (I suspect) by Ukrainians assimilating with the Russian population.

383 Most of the conquered land in Central Asia became the property of the Russian state. While local families were allocated some land for their personal use, considerable amounts of land remained for Russian settlers.

384 The local Muslims regarded all foreign settlers as “Russians” regardless of their actual ethnic status.

385 Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Russian-speaking members of other Christian ethnic groups like Moldovans and Baltic Germans.

386 The Russian military did contain some Muslim troops, but they came from ethnic groups that had been conquered by Russia much earlier and had eventually come to accept the Russian state, often after numerous rebellions. The Muslims Bashkirs, for example, provided Russia with hard-fighting cavalry beginning with the Napoleonic Wars, and Bashkir cavalry participated in the Russian conquest of Central Asia.

Asia. Local resentment of the Russian settlers and Imperial policies that gave them land at the expense of Muslims, resulted in rebels attacking Russian farmers. Russian troops had to be sent to Central Asia to put down the rebellion, which took months and resulted in the deaths of about 270,000 people³⁸⁷, the vast majority of them Muslims. As the revolt was suppressed, perhaps 300,000 Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and others fled Russia, most of them going to Xinjiang, the Muslim region of western China. The Russians also expelled many thousands of Kazakhs and Kyrgyz as a collective punishment for the revolt, most of whom also went to Xinjiang. The rebellion was crushed in urban and agricultural areas by the end of 1916, but elsewhere some rebels continued to operate in remote mountainous and desert regions.

In March 1917, the first, “February” Revolution of 1917 caused the Tsar to abdicate and saw a new, more-democratic government run the country, the Russian Provisional Government. This revolution roiled Central Asia like the rest of the Russian Empire, but it did not rekindle the revolt. Instead, various Central Asia Muslim groups organized and sought local rights and autonomy. However, the new government was weak and was opposed by revolutionary soviets, including some in Central Asia. The Marxist Soviets came to power in November 1917 in the second, “October” Revolution of 1917 but soon were fighting a civil war for control of the entire country. Central Asia became its own special battleground within the wider Russian Civil War. The Red and Whites fought over Central Asia, with local groups seeking autonomy and sometimes independence. The surviving rebels of 1916 were now joined by a new wave of insurgents, forming the Basmachi³⁸⁸ movement that hoped to expel the Soviets from Central Asia.

The Tashkent Soviet was the main soviet in Central Asia that seized power in much of southern Central Asia. It was dominated by Russian-speaking socialists and supported by the Russian-speaking workers of Central Asia, particularly the railroad workers. The Tashkent Soviet quickly enacted radical policies that alienated many Central Asian Muslims, such as declaring Islamic law (sharia) invalid, dismantling Muslim law courts and religious bodies, and confiscating *waqf* land (land that had been donated for Muslim religious or charitable purposes). While these measures were similar to the Soviets’ policies restricting religion elsewhere in Russia, to many Muslims they represented a fundamental attack on their religion and culture. The Tashkent Soviet also, again for ideological reasons, came to

387 Estimates of the death toll range from 100,000 to 500,000. Many of these deaths were caused by disease and famine resulting from the chaos of the rebellion and its suppression.

388 Basmachi derives from a Turkic word. Its meaning is contentious and is claimed by some to mean “bandits” and others as “raiders”. The Soviets used Basmachi in a negative sense. According to some works, the rebels called themselves *Mujahideen* (meaning those who struggle for jihad; in the Central Asian context it meant warriors in a holy jihad against the Soviet state).

exclude all Muslims from their government, since Muslims “were not organized on a proletarian basis”³⁸⁹. This emphasis on Marxism ideology drove away pro-Soviet Muslim groups who could have helped reconcile some of the Muslim population with the Soviets. Instead, these groups proclaimed their autonomous Turkestan state in the Fergana Valley, at the ancient caravan city of Kokand.



The Central Asian Soviets were frequently isolated from the rest of Soviet territory, as both the Trans-Aral and Trans-Caspian Railways were often blocked by enemy forces. In January 1918, the Soviets managed to temporarily open the Trans-Aral Railway, allowing them to send weapons and supplies to the Tashkent Soviet. This actually made the situation in Central Asia worse, as the reinforced Tashkent Soviets attacked the Muslim separatists in the Fergana Valley. Although they destroyed this nascent Turkestan state, they also unleashed a

389 David Ray Johnson; "Soviet Counterinsurgency" (thesis); USN Naval Postgraduate School; 1990;

<http://hdl.handle.net/10945/37523>. In other words, per Marxist theory the Tashkent Soviet regarded the Muslims as being in a pre-capitalism stage of development. This meant there was no substantial Muslim proletariat, but the proletariat was the bedrock of socialism and communism. Thus, Muslims were excluded from the organs of power.

massacre in Kokand that killed perhaps 10,000–25,000 Muslim civilians³⁹⁰. This atrocity further alienated Muslims in Central Asia, and the Basmachi grew into a major insurgency. The Basmachi would fight the Soviets in Central Asia throughout the civil war, along with the Whites, Allied interventionist forces, anti-Soviet Russian settlers, and other groups. The main Soviet forces in Russia proper finally broke through to the Turkestan Soviet Federative Republic (as the Tashkent Soviet had become) in the autumn of 1919 and gained control of most of Central Asia in 1920. Basmachi rebels, however, would continue to wage guerrilla war against the Soviets well into the 1920s.

The nominally-independent Russian “protectorates” of Khiva and Bukhara were enmeshed in the Russian Civil war. The Khanate of Khiva fell under control of a Basmachi leader (who ruled through a puppet khan placed on the throne). The Emirate of Bukhara remained under control of its emir, Sayyid Mir Muhammad Alim Khan, who sought true independence for Bukhara. The Soviets, while they were weak in Central Asia, insincerely recognized these states’ independence. Once the Soviets gained the upper hand in the region in 1920, they took over these states. Officially, the small local communist parties in Khiva and Bukhara launched people’s revolutions that toppled the governments and established the Khorezm People’s Soviet Republic and the Bukharan PSR. In reality, Red Army forces overran these states and set up puppet states with the local communists following directives from the Soviets.

In addition to setting up Khiva and Bukhara as people’s Soviet republics, in 1920 the Soviets reorganized the rest of Central Asia. The region was part of the Russian SFSR but, per Soviet policies of giving the appearance of autonomy to ethnic minorities, it was configured as two autonomous entities. In the south, the Turkestan Soviet Federative Republic became the Autonomous Turkestan Socialist Soviet Republic (commonly called the Turkestan ASSR). In the north, the rest of the region became the Kyrgyz ASSR.

Sidetrip: Kazakh and Kyrgyz

This Kyrgyz ASSR of 1920 contained territory that is now Kazakhstan and did not include any part of what is now Kyrgyzstan. This was due to how the Russians and the early Soviets viewed the Kazakh and Kyrgyz languages and peoples. As the Russian Empire pushed into northern and central Central Asia, they encountered a spectrum of peoples speaking many similar dialects and languages. They classified the tongues of the Kazakh Steppe as a collection of

³⁹⁰ The true death toll of the massacre is not known, with works claiming many different figures, including 5,000, 10,000, 14,000, 25,000, 40,000, and 50,000.

dialects comprising one overall language, which they called “Kirgiz-Kaysak” (which became “Kirgiz-Kazak” in the English of the time, “Kyrgyz-Kazakh” in modern spelling). The Russians often just called these people “Kirgiz” (in English of the time, “Kirgiz” or “Kirghiz”, now “Kyrgyz”).

Further south was another group of people speaking dialects of a language the Russians called “Kara-Kirgiz”. “Kara” was the Kyrgyz word for “Black”, and it came from the traditional black color of the tents of these nomadic people.

The Soviets inherited these names from the Russians and at first simply continued to use them. Hence the name, Kyrgyz ASSR, for what is now Kazakhstan. The peoples of Kazakh Steppe, however, called themselves Kazaks (*Qazaqs* in some modern spelling systems), which in Russian was rendered as Kazaks and then as Kazakhs. They did not call themselves Kyrgyz, a fact had become known in Russia, Europe, and elsewhere during the time of the Russian Empire. For example, the 1911 *Encyclopedia Britannica* entry on “Kirghiz” explains this in some detail³⁹¹. As peace and economic recovery came to the USSR in the 1920s, the Soviets began using the actual names of their ethnic groups. This process resulted in the “Kyrgyz” ASSR becoming the “Kazak” ASSR and later the “Kazakh” SSR, today’s Kazakhstan.

Despite the Soviets’ decisive victories in Central Asia in 1920, the Basmachi remained a problem for the Soviets. In 1921, the Soviets recruited Enver Pasha³⁹², a Turkish leader from the Ottoman Empire, which the Allies had defeated in World War I. Enver Pasha was sent to Bukhara to help pacify the area, in the hopes that he, as a Turkish nationalist, could convince the Turkic-language Basmachi to end their struggles. Instead, Enver Pasha defected to the Basmachi. He revitalized the movement, became the Basmachi’s supreme leader, and reorganized their fighters into a small but effective army. The Basmachi went on to capture much of the region around Bukhara. Enver Pasha issued a call for Central Asian Muslims to join a jihad or holy war against the Soviets. His personal ambitions caused him to overstep his situation, as it became clear he planned to create an Emirate of Turkestan with himself as the emir. This caused the rulers of Bukhara and Afghanistan to Enver Pasha as a threat to their continued rule, so they stopped providing support to the Basmachi. In 1922, the Soviets

391 See the 1911 *Encyclopedia Britannica* entry on “Kirghiz”: https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/1911_Encyclop%C3%A6dia_Britannica/Kirghiz.

392 Enver Pasha’s personal name was Ismail Enver. He followed the Ottoman tradition of using just his last name and his Ottoman title for public purposes. As he had rose in status in the Ottoman Empire, he was successive known as Enver Efendi, Enver Bey, and then Enver Pasha, pasha being the title of a high official.

in turn reinforced Central Asia with veteran Red Army troops, Soviet security forces, and aircraft to attack the Basmachi. They also weakened local support for the Basmachi by instituting political and cultural concessions to the Central Asian Muslims. The Red Army overran many Basmachi-controlled areas, and Enver Pasha was killed in combat. The remnants of Basmachi reverted to guerrilla warfare but no longer threatened Soviet control of Central Asia.

The Russian Civil War had been hard on Central Asia, as the contending armies often looted farms for food and confiscated anything they needed. It was a particular tragedy for what is now Kazakhstan. Even after the Soviets gained control of Kazakhstan, their policy of War Communism meant they confiscated considerable amounts of grain and other agricultural products, with grossly inadequate compensation for the farmers. This situation was exacerbated by intermittent droughts that decreased agricultural output. Kazakhstan descended into famine, and estimates of the death toll from this calamity range from 400,000 to 750,000, or about 19% to 33% of the region's population. This disaster would later be eclipsed by a worse famine caused by Stalin.



Although regional names had changed in Central Asia since 1914, the situation was in some ways the same: Khiva and Bukhara remained puppet states, with the rest of Central Asia part of Russia. The borders were only slightly different from those of the Russian Empire. Considerable change, however, would occur in the 1920s and 1930s.

The Soviets capped the end of the civil war by creating USSR as a union of the four socialist states they controlled: the Russian and Transcaucasian SFSRs and the Belorussian and Ukrainian SSRs. The Khorezm and Bukharan People's Soviet Republics officially were not part of the USSR, as the Soviets continued to maintain the fiction that these puppet states were independent. Soviet Central Asia remained part of the Russian SFSR and retained its 1920s organization of the Kyrgyz and Turkestan ASSRs.

Central Asia became more pacified and reconciled to Soviet rule as the 1920s progressed. In 1923–1924, the Red Army attacked the remnants of the Basmachi holding out in the Fergana Valley and in the mountains of Tajikistan. The valley was soon secured, as its open, agricultural land provided little natural refuge for the Basmachi. The Soviets also made progress in the mountains, but their rugged nature allowed some Basmachi to continue to hold out. In Soviet Central Asia, however, popular support for the Basmachi declined as they were driven out.

The ruler of Afghanistan was anti-Soviet and usually supportive of the Basmachi and other Muslims in Soviet Central Asia. Afghanistan accordingly became a prime destination of Basmachi and other Muslims fleeing into exile from the Soviets. Alim Khan, the deposed emir of Bukhara went into exile in Afghanistan and became a rallying point for exiled Basmachi as he sought support to regain his throne. Alim Khan and the Basmachi would use Afghanistan as a base to launch raids into Soviet territory. These were occasional violent disturbances in the Soviet border regions rather than any serious threat to Soviet control of Central Asia.

Greater security in Central caused the Soviets to end the charade that Khiva and Bukhara were independent. The official process remained one of political theater, with the Soviets pretending the local people and communists were acting on their own initiative. The two states in 1920 had been designated “People’s Soviet Republics”; note the lack of “Socialist” in their names. This supposedly was due to Marxist ideas of economic and political development, with the Central Asian Muslims not being developed enough for socialism³⁹³. In 1923–1924, to prepare for their incorporation into the USSR, the Soviets now pretended that the local inhabitants had achieved sufficient political development³⁹⁴. The puppet states renamed themselves the Khorezm Socialist Soviet Republic and the Bukharan SSR. Finally, these two SSRs voted to join the USSR. In reality, everything was decided by the Russian Communist Party, with the local communist leaders following their instructions.

393 More likely, the Soviets realized that proclaiming Khiva and Bukhara as socialist states would make clear their fate was to join the Soviet state rather than being independent. This likely would have increased rebellion in the region.

394 The following is typical of Soviet ideological writing on the topic: “During the years of socialist construction, with the help of all the peoples of the USSR, the Karakalpak made the transition to socialism, bypassing the capitalist stage of development”. This is from the (Russian-language) entry on the Karakalpak ASSR from the third edition of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia; <https://www.booksite.ru/fulltext/1/001/008/058/953.htm>. The Karakalpaks were a Central Asia group in the norther region of Khiva.



The disappearance of the Khiva and Bukhara puppet states occurred as part of a wider reorganization with the Turkestan ASSR in 1924–1925. Parts of these territories formed the Uzbek SSR, a union republic of the USSR, in October 1924. Uzbekistan was internally divided with a Tajik ASSR being created in the southeast. The rest of the territories became another union republic, the Turkmen SSR, in May 1925.

***Sidetrip:* The Non-Contiguous Uzbek SSR**

The creation of the Uzbek SSR in 1924 resulted in a political entity with two large, disconnected regions: an enclave around the city of Khiva in the northwest was not directly connected to the rest of the SSR. This was a fairly common practice in parts of the Central Asia and the Caucasus. For example, the Nakhchivan ASSR was an enclave separated from its home entity, the Azerbaijan SSR, by the Armenian SSR.

For all practical purposes, it did not matter during Soviet times if a union republic had some non-contiguous territories. Other union republics had no legal power to block or otherwise hinder the passage of people into or out of the various enclaves. The Soviet authorities also ran the Soviet economy as an integrated whole, so again enclaves did not matter.

This situation changed with the breakup of the USSR in the 1990s. The union republics became independent countries, and the non-contiguous enclaves often became scenes of tension and border clashes in modern times between these countries. For example, Tajikistan has three small enclaves in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, while Uzbekistan has four small enclaves within Kyrgyzstan.

The Kyrgyz ASSR was a huge region with multiple ethnic groups, and parts of it were subdivided into two autonomous oblasts (AOs). In October 1924, the Kara-Kyrgyz AO was

created in the southeast. The territory south of the Aral Sea becoming the Kara-Kalpak AO³⁹⁵ in February 1925. Beside Karakalpaks, this AO also contained significant numbers of Kazakhs and Uzbeks (per the 1926 census, about 116,000 Karakalpaks, 86,000 Kazakhs, and 84,000 Uzbeks).

The 1924–1925 round of reorganizations was finished later in 1925 with a couple of name changes to reflect that the main ethnic group of Kazakhstan called themselves Kazaks, not Kyrgyz: the Kara-Kyrgyz AO was renamed the Kyrgyz AO in May, and the Kyrgyz ASSR was renamed the Kazak ASSR in June. (In Russian, the “Kazak” spelling was used at first, switching to the “Kazakh” form in 1936.)

The Central Asian SSRs and ASSRs had further subdivisions, most which I don’t cover. One exception is that the Tajik ASSR (of the Uzbek SSR) itself contained its own autonomous area for the people of the Pamiri Mountains. This was the Autonomous Gorno-Badakhshan Oblast, a large but sparsely-populated high-mountain region nestled between Afghanistan and China³⁹⁶.



In 1926, the Soviets upgraded the Kyrgyz AO to ASSR status. To do this, the region had to be removed from the Kazak ASSR, as by the logic of Soviet political organization, an ASSR could not contain a subsidiary ASSR but only smaller autonomous entities like an autonomous oblast or a national okrug (district). It was accordingly directly subordinated to the Russian SFSR, becoming the Kyrgyz ASSR. Note that this meant that Soviet Central Asia in the 1920s USSR had two completely different Kyrgyz ASSRs at different times: the original Kyrgyz ASSR in the north and the new Kyrgyz ASSR in the southeast. The existence of two different Kyrgyz ASSRs has caused ongoing occasional confusion in historical works!

³⁹⁵ “Kara-Kalpak” meant “Black Hat”, a reference to the traditional black wool hat worn by the local people. (The Soviets from the 1960s would render “Kara-Kalpak” as “Karakalpak”.) The Kara-Kalpak Autonomous Oblast was part of the Kyrgyz ASSR, which in turn was part of the Russian SFSR. The Karakalpak language was closely related to the Kazakh language.

³⁹⁶ The Autonomous Gorno-Badakhshan Oblast was organized in 1925. In 1941, it was renamed the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast, to conform with the usual word order for autonomous oblasts.



In 1929, a third Central Asian union republic was organized. The Tajik ASSR was hived off from the Uzbek SSR as the Tajik SSR³⁹⁷. This separated Tajikistan with its majority of Iranian-language speakers from Uzbekistan with its majority of Turkic-language speakers. The Autonomous Gorno-Badakhshan Oblast remained part of the Tajik entity.



In 1930 the Kara-Kalpak AO was removed from the Kazak ASSR, itself subordinated to the Russian SFSR, and was placed directly under the Russian SFSR. I have not yet found a reason for this move, but I speculate it was done to prepare for a future reorganization. This move was somewhat contentious, as the leaders of the Kazak ASSR wanted to retain parts of the Kara-Kalpak AO in the Kazak ASSR³⁹⁸. The Soviet central authorities refused. In 1932, the Kara-Kalpak AO was promoted to become the Kara-Kalpak ASSR³⁹⁹.

All these reorganizations and name changes were mostly meaningless, as the autonomous entities had no true political autonomy, and the Soviet Communist Party controlled everything that mattered⁴⁰⁰. Of far more importance were the Soviet policies and actions that caused famine in Central Asia in the early 1930s. The Kazak ASSR in particular experienced

397 The Khujand district (the modern-day Sughd province) of the Uzbek SSR proper was transferred to Tajikistan as part of this process.

398 Specifically, the Kazak ASSR wanted to keep the Kara-Kalpak's eastern Tamdy [Tomdi] District and the region of the Kara-Kalpak AO around the Aral Sea. See <https://moluch.ru/archive/18/1817/> (in Russian). These were low-population areas where Kazakhs were the largest ethnic group.

399 This could explain the 1930 transfer, as an ASSR could not contain another ASSR.

a demographic disaster. Most Kazakhs were animal herders⁴⁰¹. Once Stalin gained dictatorial power in the late 1920s, he began a program to force farmers and herders into collectivize agriculture. For the Kazakhs, this meant they would lose ownership of almost all of their livestock and would be forced into settlements, ending their nomadic traditions. Their response was widespread resistance to collective agriculture, at times violent. The Soviets responded with harsh repression, and hundreds of thousands of Kazakhs migrated to other places in the Soviet Union and nearby countries, despite Soviet attempts to stop them. Many Kazakhs slaughtered their animals for food rather than allowing the Soviets to confiscate them, and many more animals died of neglect. This reduced the Kazakhs' herds from 7 million cattle to 1.6 million and from 22 million sheep to 1.7 million. Since meat was a major part of the Kazakh diet, the loss of the animals caused a famine, leading to over a million deaths. Famine also caused more hundreds of thousands of Kazakhs to migrate, again to other places in the Soviet Union and to nearby countries. In the USSR, Soviet security forces forcibly returned many Kazakhs back to the Kazak ASSR, which due to the famine resulted in many more deaths. Some works estimate that 70% of these repatriated Kazakhs died.

While most Kazakhs were herders, the Kazak ASSR did have a substantial agricultural sector that mostly grew grain. Most farmers were Russians and Ukrainians, descendants of the people who had settled the Kazakh Steppe in Tsarist times. They, too, experienced famine due to collective agriculture, and hundreds of thousands died.

All told, famine in the Kazak ASSR killed perhaps 1.5 million to 3 million people. The Kazakhs were the most affected by far, and they became a minority within their own homeland. The depopulation of the region in turn led to further inhumanity on the part of the Soviets, who then used Kazakhstan as a dumping ground for GULag prisoners and for members of persecuted ethnic groups. For example, members of the following groups were all sent to Kazakhstan: Koreans from the Soviet Far East in the 1930s, Poles from areas annexed from Poland in 1939, Germans from the Volga ASSR in 1941, Chechens and Ingushes from the Caucasus in 1944, Greeks from Ukraine and southern Russian in 1942 and

400 Perhaps the most meaningful aspect of being an autonomous entity was that the local majority/plurality language became one of the administrative languages of the entity for government and legal purposes. For example, the Russian SFSR used Russian as an administrative language, while the Kazak ASSR used Russian and Kazakh, and Kyrgyz ASSR used Russian and Kyrgyz.

401 Supposedly per the 1926 census, 25% of Kazakhs were settled, 6% were fully nomadic (herding animals year round), and "more than" 65% were semi-nomadic (herding animals during warm weather). See https://ru.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%93%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%BE%D0%B4_%D0%B2_%D0%9A%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%B0%D1%85%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B5_%281932%E2%80%941933%29 (in Russian).

1944, and so on. Kazakhs did not become the majority population in Kazakhstan again until the 1990s.

The rest of Central Asia also suffered from the effects of forced collectivization. Although the southern part of Central Asia had great tracts of desert, dry shrublands, and mountains, agriculture flourished along the region's rivers and in irrigated areas. Animal herding was also common in the region. As in Kazakhstan, farmers and herders resisted collectivization, sometimes passively and sometime actively, including violence and revolt. The Basmachi movement, which had been almost extinguished in Soviet Central Asia, flared up again in 1929 as Stalin's policies were implemented. The Basmachi staged raids from Afghanistan into Central Asia, prompting counter-insurgency operations by Soviet military and security forces. The Soviets responded by reinforcing their military and security forces in Central Asia. They also sent Red Army expeditions into Afghanistan in 1929 and 1930 to attack the Basmachi. The 1929 operations had limited impact, as Afghan support helped the Basmachi evade the Soviet forces. However, a new king of Afghanistan took power in late 1929, and he had tired of the Basmachi. Afghan authorities accordingly failed to help the Basmachi during the Red Army's 1930 operations. The Basmachi suffered losses but were not destroyed and continued to try to raid Central Asia. Basmachi fortunes turned for the worse in 1931: Soviet forces thwarted a large raid from Afghanistan, and the Afghans expelled Ibrahim Bek, the Basmachi leader, from the country. Bek infiltrated into Tajikistan but locals captured him and turn him over to the Soviet authorities, who executed him.

***Sidetrip:* The End of the Basmachi**

The Basmachi movement went into eclipse with the death of Ibrahim Bek in 1931. With so many Muslims fleeing Central Asia for Afghanistan in the early 1930s due to collectivization and famine, however, the Soviets feared the Basmachi would be able to recruit many new fighters and would rise again as a major threat. Soviet intelligence concentrated on penetrating and neutralizing foreign Basmachi groups.

The Basmachi resurgence failed to happen, but the Basmachi in Afghanistan remained a minor potential nuisance up through 1943. They even received some German and Japanese support during World War II, but they never regained effectiveness. Their last hurrah was their plan to stage a massive raid in 1943. Alim Khan, the former Emir of Bukhara, was in exile in Afghanistan and was working with the Basmachi in hopes of regaining his throne. Soviet intelligence and Afghan authorities discovered the plot. The Afghans ordered Alim Khan "in

no uncertain terms”⁴⁰² to cease his efforts, which ended the planned raid. Alim Khan then suffered a natural death at age 64 the following year. This marked the final end of the Basmachi movement.



The final major reorganization of Soviet Central Asia occurred in 1936. The Russian SFSR lost three of its ASSRs, two of which became union republics:

- The Kazak ASSR became a union republic, the Kazakh SSR. (Note the “Kazakh” spelling replacing “Kazak”.) Its border with the Turkmen SSR was adjusted, with Turkmenistan gaining territory along the Caspian Sea⁴⁰³.
- The Kyrgyz ASSR was also promoted to become a union republic, the Kyrgyz SSR.
- The Kara-Kalpak ASSR was transferred from the Russian SFSR to the Uzbek SSR⁴⁰⁴. The Kara-Kalpak ASSR was now the only ASSR in Soviet Central Asia. (Smaller autonomous entities like the Autonomous Gorno-Badakhshan Oblast continued to exist.)

After 1936, the borders of the Central Asian union republics would remain unchanged for the remainder of the USSR’s existence. The ethnic delineation of Central Asia was never seriously meant to have serious political consequences. It was a way for the Soviets to pretend to accommodate the self-determination of ethnic minorities, and for Stalin, who had authored *Marxism and the National Question*, to burnish his reputation as a Marxist theorist. In

402 <https://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/journal/docs-temp/690-kogan.pdf>.

403 I have not done the research to find out why the Turkmen SSR gained this territory. The population in this area did contain both Turkmens and Kazakhs, so perhaps it was related to ethnic composition in some way. However, I suspect the reason was to place the Garabogazköl, a highly-saline lagoon of the Caspian Sea, entirely under Turkmen authority. The Turkmen SSR had an industry extracting salt from the southern part of the lagoon. In the 1930s, the industry was modernized and headquartered next to the lagoon in what had been territory of the Kazak ASSR. In support of this suspicion, I note that only a thin strip of territory bordering the lagoon was transferred to Uzbekistan.

404 This made the Khiva enclave of the Uzbek SSR contiguous with the rest of the SSR, but I do not know if this consideration played any role in the decision to transfer the Kara-Kalpak ASSR to Uzbekistan.

reality, the Soviets had no intention of allowing any Central Asian SSR, ASSR, AO, or other autonomous entity to practice any real political autonomy. Similarly, as long as the Communists remained firmly in control of the Soviet Union, no Central Asian union republic would be able to exercise its constitutional right to secede. Communist control weakened in the late 1980s, the USSR broke up in 1991, and the Central Asian union republics became independent countries.



16.C Estonia in the Russian Civil War

The Bolshevik revolution and subsequent Russian Civil War were complex events. Estonia, a small territory (about the same size as Denmark) that was part of Russia in 1917, illustrates some of these complexities in the following simplified account.



Maps Notes

In 1914 soon after the outbreak of World War I, Sankt-Peterburg (“St. Petersburg”) was renamed Petrograd, and the Sankt-Peterburg Governorate became the Petrograd Governorate.

What is now the city of Tallinn was officially named Revel⁴⁰⁵ in Russian until the Estonians changed it to the local Estonian name, Tallinn, in 1918. For simplicity, in the following text I just use Tallinn. Kihyumaa was the Russian name of Hiiumaa Island, which assumed its Estonian name in 1918.

In April 1917, the Russian Provisional Government transferred the ethnic Estonian areas of the Livonian Governorate to the Estonian Governorate. The Germans rescinded this transfer after the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk allowed them to occupy and administer the Baltic region.

The western area of the Vitebsk Governorate consisted of Latgale (aka Latgalia), which had a majority population that spoke Latgalian (either a dialect of Latvian or a separate language closely related to Latvian, depending upon whom you ask). The Latgales advocated in 1917 for their region to be transferred to the Livonian Governorate, but the Russian Provisional Government refused. In December 1917, soon after the Soviets came to power, they agreed that Latgale should be part of Latvia and allocated it to Iskolat, the Latvian soviet that controlled most of the area of Latvia that was not occupied by the Germans. (Subsequently, the February 1918 German offensive captured the rest of Latvia including Latgale, and the Iskolat soviet was soon disbanded. The Germans did not rescind the Latgale transfer after the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.)

The Petrograd region and nearby regions was the Northwestern Theater of the Russian Civil War. Anti-Soviet White forces here went through a number of names for themselves before settling on the Northwestern Army. For simplicity, I call them the “Northwestern Whites”.

German naval superiority in the Baltic Sea kept the Russian Navy bottled up in the Petrograd area, particularly at the heavily fortified base at Kronshtadt. Similarly, German naval control of the western entrance to the Baltic Sea prevented the superior Royal Navy of Britain from operating in this sea.

The Russian Empire conquered what would become Estonia and most of Latvia from Sweden by 1710. By 1897, Estonia’s population was about 90% Estonian, 4% Russian, and 3.5% Baltic German. Estonia had seen growing industrial development, so by World War I the area was more industrialized and urbanized than most other regions of the empire. Its level of industrialization did not, however, remotely approach the levels of the leading industrial countries like Britain and Germany, so Estonia still had a large agricultural sector.

⁴⁰⁵ Revel was the Russian spelling. The site of the city was a port in Medieval times and was conquered by Denmark in the 13th Century, whereupon it became widely known as Reval, its Germanic name. This version of the name became popular in English. The city ended up in Russia in the 18th Century, and acquired its Russian version of its name, Revel. However, the local Estonian population called the site Tallinn (also as Tallinna), widely believed to have derived from “*Taani-linna*”, Estonian for “Danish castle”.

Like most places under Russian administration and law, Estonia had a number of social problems. Factory workers had low pay coupled with poor working and living conditions, which led to radicalization of the workers. As we will see during the Russian Civil War, the Soviets hoped to spark a workers' uprising in Tallinn, the capital. Considerable amounts of agricultural land was held in vast estates owned by the local Baltic German aristocracy. This meant that many peasants (the farmers), most of whom were ethnic Estonians, had at best small farms or at worse were poorly-paid landless laborers working on the large estates. The landless peasants resented this situation, as evidenced by a popular song during unrest in 1905: "Manors burn, Germans die, manor land becomes ours!"⁴⁰⁶.

Like in Russian-owned Finland, Poland, and many other non-Russian territories, Russia subjected Estonia to russification, with the consequence of alienating many ethnic Estonians and increasing Estonian nationalism. Russification included the use of Russian in education, resulting in firing teachers who could not teach in Russian. This had the pernicious effect of decreasing Estonia's previously high level of education attainment: only 80% of Estonian recruits to the Imperial Russian Army were able to read in 1901, as compared to 98% in 1886⁴⁰⁷.

Ethnic Estonians politically ran the gauntlet from revolutionary socialists, social democrats, nationalists seeking independence, liberals seeking autonomy within a Russian republic, and pro-empire conservatives. Overall, political moderates were the largest block. There were also many socialists but only a few conservatives.

The Baltic Germans mostly consisted of middle-class people and nobles, whose German ancestors migrated to the Baltic region centuries ago. The Baltic German population was small but had great political and economic power in the region, as the Baltic German aristocracy had immense land holdings. The Baltic Germans tended to be well educated and, once in the Russian Empire, came to provide many officials for the Russian government, including heads of important ministries. However, the rise of Germany from 1871 caused the Russians not only to start questioning the ultimate loyalty of the Baltic Germans but also to worry that the ethnic Estonians might become germanized and look to Germany rather than Russia⁴⁰⁸. Russification in Estonia, besides affecting ethnic Estonians, also targeted the Baltic

406 M. Karelson; "Theodor Pool – Maaseadus ja Maareform" ("Theodor Pool - Land Law and Land Reform"); 2021; https://agrt.emu.ee/pdf/proceedings/toim_2000_13_karelson1.pdf (in Estonian).

407 http://www.estonica.org/en/History/1850-1914_National_awakening/Russification_period/. The Russian Army is a proxy for the measure of literacy. The Russian Empire was not good at collecting demographic information and did not conduct an empire-wide census after 1897. The Russian Army in the late 19th Century started to determine if its recruits could read, an increasingly useful skill for even common soldiers.

408 http://www.estonica.org/en/History/1850-1914_National_awakening/Russification_period/.

Germans and initially was intended to reduce their political, economic, and cultural power. In this, it almost completely failed.

Another side of russification was to encourage Slavic, Russian Orthodox peasants to settle in Estonia. This was meant to create an innately pro-Russia population in the territory, but it came to little, with relatively few peasants moving to Estonia. Yet another facet of russification was to encourage the local population to convert from Lutheranism to Russian Orthodoxy. Unsurprisingly, given that it involved changing deeply-held religious beliefs, this was a failure.

Even during the height of russification, the Baltic Germans continued to serve in the Russian government and military, often in highly important positions. World War I transformed this relationship, since Russia was now fighting and losing to the Germanic duo of Germany and Austria-Hungary. The Russians from the start of the war in 1914 suffered consistently heavy losses and, from 1915, loss considerable amounts of territory. The caused the Russians to suspect the Baltic Germans might prefer German rule to Russian rule, and led to speculation that Baltic Germans in the Imperial Russian Army were secretly working against Russia. One Baltic German general was suspected of deliberately misleading his troops to causes losses, although his actual performance was no better or worse that ethnic Russian generals in similar situations.

The Russian government began treating many Baltic Germans as potential traitors and attempted to forcibly deport them from areas near the battle zone like in Courland and parts of Livonia. Mistreatment of the Baltic Germans must have turned many against Russia, as would become evident in 1918. During the Russian Civil War, many Baltic Germans in Estonia would work with the Estonian nationalists for independence. (In Latvia, in contrast, many would end up working with the Germans against not only the Soviets but also the Latvian and Estonian nationalists.)



This map shows existing borders and the political goals of Germany in the northeastern areas of the Eastern Front. For 1918, it does not show the territories occupied by the White Movement, separatists, or Allied intervention forces.

During the German offensive against the Soviets in February 1918, an Estonian group declared Estonian independence and organized a provisional government in the interval between the withdrawal of Soviet forces arrival of German troops. The Germans did not recognize this government, as they had other plans for the region. In March, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk between Germany and Soviet Russia required the Soviets to cede their Polish and Lithuanian territories, which the Germans intended to make into German-ruled vassal kingdoms. The Courland Governorate was also ceded. The Baltic German elite declared Courland to be the Duchy of Courland⁴⁰⁹ and offered Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany the throne. The Kaiser in turn recognized the duchy as a “free and independent state”. He neither accepted nor declined the throne but opened negotiations that left the possibility the duchy would be annexed into Germany. Courland remained for the meantime administered as Germany-occupied territory.

Brest-Litovsk left sovereignty of the Estonian and Livonian Governorates with the Soviets but allowed Germany to occupy and administer these areas until a “general peace” was concluded⁴¹⁰. In April, encouraged by the creation of the Duchy of Courland, the Baltic German elite next proclaimed the creation of the United Baltic Duchy (*Vereinigtes Baltisches*

409 Fully, the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia, its 18th Century name before its incorporation into Russia

410 Although the Estonian mainland was not ceded to Germany, the Estonian and Livonian islands to the west of the mainland were ceded to Germany. “General peace” was not defined in the treaty but was understood to mean the end of World War I.

Herzogtum) over the territory of Courland, Livonia, and Estonia. The Kaiser once again was offered the throne. However, since Estonia and Livonia had not been ceded by the Soviets, this matter progressed little until September.

The Allied Powers had intervened in the Russian far north in 1918. Allied ground forces seized the main ports of Arkhangelsk and Murmansk and then spread out across the northern theater. The growing presence of these troops alarmed both the Soviets and Germans. The Soviets feared the Allies might march on Petrograd or try to overthrow their state. The Germans were concerned the Allies might take Finland or reopen the Eastern Front as a major theater of World War I. These threats led meant the two countries came to a new arrangement in late August. Both agreed to dispatch military forces to fight the Allies in the north⁴¹¹, and part of the deal included the Soviets ceding the rest of the Baltic region.

The Kaiser in September now recognized the United Baltic Duchy as a sovereign state but did not accept the throne. Who would rule the duchy had become a political issue among Germany's aristocracy, with several noble families advancing their own dynastic ambitions. (Some Germans mocked this situation in 1918 as "the export of princes", since the German aristocracy was squabbling over who would rule the growing crop of German vassal states.) In the end, the Duke of the Grand Duchy of Mecklenburg-Schwerin in northern Germany was selected to become the duke of the United Baltic Duchy. Significantly, he was not to take power as a sovereign duke but as a subordinate of the Kaiser, the same arrangement he held as Duke of Mecklenburg-Schwerin. This implied the Baltic duchy would be treated as part of Germany, even if it were not outright annexed into Germany.

The Baltic German elite were behind these political maneuverings for the Duchy of Courland and the United Baltic Duchy out of their own narrow self interest. If Germany were in charge of the Baltic region, they expected to retain their considerable land holdings and political power, something they might lose under states dominated by ethnic Estonians and Latvians and would certainly lose if the Soviets took over. Many (not all) other Baltic Germans, particularly in Latvia, seem to have had supported the creation of the United Baltic Duchy. The duchy had almost no support from ethnic Estonians or Latvians. Most of them wanted to have their own independence, although many Estonian and Latvian socialists preferred federation with the Soviet state. And, this is not just the end of complications in this region!

In northeastern Estonia, the Germans halted along the line of the Narva River, leaving a small strip of Estonian land under Soviet control. A number of maps in English-language works mistakenly show all of Estonia under German occupation.

411 The Germans were to sent a 50,000-soldier expeditionary force to the far north, but Germany's increasing poor situation on the Western Front in September 1918 meant no troops could be spared for this adventure.

Germany's ambitions for the Baltic region went far beyond creating pro-German puppet states between Germany and Russia or even annexing the region into Germany. The Germans also intended to colonize the Baltic region with settlers from Germany, with a company for colonization being set up in April 1919. Some popular works called for the germanization of the Estonians and Latvians, and a form of this likely would have become German policy. (The Poles and other non-German groups in Germany, for example, were subjected to germanization under German law.) During World War II, the Nazi plan to germanize the Baltic region was thus not something new but instead was a more brutal vision of a recurring German goal.

Most ethnic Russians in Estonia may have been loyal to Russia in the abstract but had no desire to be part of a Soviet state; many volunteered to serve in the Estonian army. They were organized into small ethnic Russian units or in mixed Russian-Estonian units. These units would later grow through recruitment of Red Army soldiers who had surrendered or deserted to the Estonians.

The White Movement, the Soviet's main foes in the Russian Civil War, rarely favored independence movements. They wanted an intact Russian state. This is one of the few things they had in common with the Soviet regime⁴¹². Events forced the Northwestern Whites to be an exception. These White forces began forming during the summer of 1918 in the Pskov area of northwestern Russia, next to Estonia. The Germans assisted them, seeing them as a useful force that could threaten the nearby Soviet city of Petrograd⁴¹³. Fairly substantial military aid was promised, but little arrived before Germany lost WW1 in November. That month, facing annihilation at the hands of the Soviets, the Northwestern Whites retreated into Estonia and agreed to recognize Estonian independence. This began military cooperation against the Soviets between the Northwestern Whites and Estonians.

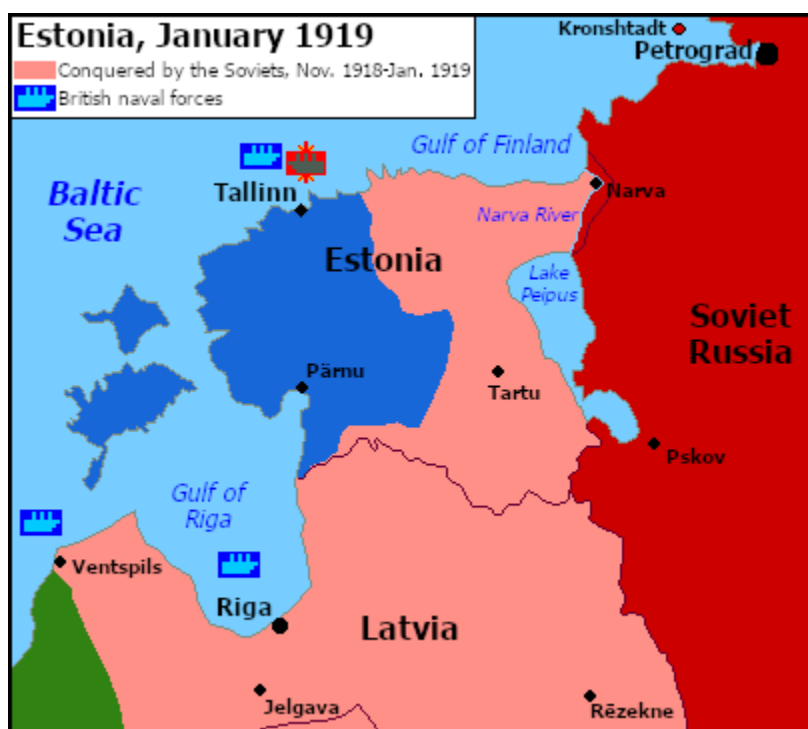
Germany's defeat in WW1 ruined German plans for the Baltic region and indeed for the entire Eastern Front. The terms of the armistice between the Allies and Germany nullified the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and the Germanic vassal states. In Estonia, the immediate beneficiary of the armistice was the Estonian Provisional Government, which had managed to survive the German occupation. In November, the Germans handed over control of Estonia to this government. The armistice did allow the Germans to keep troops in the Baltic region as long as the Allies allowed, to help prevent the Soviets from taking over Estonia (and Latvia). Some German troops went home at this time, but others remained in the

412 Both sides claimed they would allow some degree of autonomy for minority groups on ethnic, religious, or cultural lines.

413 The leadership of the German Army became quite interested in seizing Petrograd in summer of 1918. Ostensibly they wanted to occupy the city for German use of the railroads leading to the Finland and Murmansk.

region. The Soviet threat quickly became real and acute, with Red Army forces invading Estonia before the end of November (and Latvia in December). With the German Navy inactivated by the armistice, the Soviets' Baltic Fleet began operations in the Baltic and supported the Red Army advance, including shelling coastal positions and making amphibious landings. While this Soviet fleet had many ships idled for lack of maintenance, supplies, and command staff, its active component completely outmatched the Estonian navy, which had a few small ships but nothing the size of a destroyer or larger.

The Estonians began raising volunteer military and militia forces as soon as the provisional government came to power. Besides ethnic Estonians and ethnic Russians, many Baltic Germans would volunteer to fight for Estonia. (In contrast, many Baltic Germans in Latvia would fight for a German-dominated state.) Estonia at first could only field quite small, poorly-equipped forces. These with some of the remaining German troops and the Northwestern Whites attempted to resist the Soviet advance⁴¹⁴ but were steadily pushed back towards Tallinn, the capital, by early January 1919. At some point, the Germans withdrew their forces from Estonia, likely in December 1918 or January 1919⁴¹⁵.



414 Several works claim Estonia refused help from German forces remaining in the region. Whether or not this actually was Estonia's stance, on the ground Estonian and German troops did cooperate together in late 1918. For example, both groups had troops defending the Narva region against the Soviet advance. At some point in early 1919 the Estonians and Germans became estranged, as Germany revived its plans to dominate the Baltic region.

415 I have found no mention of German troops operating with the Estonians after the winter of 1918/19, although I have not researched this topic in depth.

The Estonians were receiving foreign assistance, with weapons, supplies, and volunteers arriving from Denmark, Finland⁴¹⁶, and Sweden. Allied intervention also helped the Estonians withstand the Soviet assault. The surrender of Germany opened up the Baltic Sea, and Britain sent a naval force that began delivering supplies to Estonia (and Latvia) in December 1918. Although the initial orders for the force limited it only to “coastal reconnaissance”⁴¹⁷ and not combat operations, the British commander so broadly interpreted these instructions that they became meaningless. Significantly, in the Gulf of Finland near Narva, the British warships bombarded the Soviet lines of communications and destroyed a crucial bridge that disrupted the Soviet advance on Tallinn. The warships would go on to shell Red Army troops in the Estonian coast, causing them further problems.

Also in December, the Soviets hoped to spark a workers’ uprising in Tallinn as the forces defending Estonia fell back towards the city. Warships of the Baltic Fleet sortied with the intention of shelling Tallinn. The Soviets believed this show of force would convince radical workers in the city to revolt. However, the British warships thwarted this plan and captured two Soviet destroyers. They were turned over to the Estonian navy and despite their damages and lack of maintenance were quickly put into service. The Soviet Baltic Fleet soon abandoned offensive operations and returned to base⁴¹⁸.

Latvia, which had also declared its independence, was subjected to a Red Army invasion starting in December 1918. The Soviets quickly overran much of the country. Many of the Red Latvian Rifles, some of the best Red Army troops at this time, were sent from the Eastern and Southern Theaters to help the invasion. Once the Soviets captured Riga, the capital, in early January they proclaimed the creation of the Latvian Socialist Soviet Republic⁴¹⁹. This supposedly was an independent nation but was really a Soviet puppet state dependent upon the Red Army for its existence. The Red Army offensive in Latvia ended in exhaustion by the end of January, with Latvian and German forces managing to hold out in

416 The Finns sent a relatively good amount of supplies and volunteers, given the small size of the Finnish population, their limited resources, and the fact that they themselves had just achieved independence. This was part of Finland’s policy of *Heimosodat* (*Frändefolkskrigen* in Swedish) or “Kinship Wars” to help neighboring Finnic-language peoples like the Estonians, the Ingrian Finns, and the Karelians in their struggles with the Soviets.

417 Clifford Kinvig; *Churchill’s Crusade: The British Invasion of Russia 1918–1920*; 2006.

418 Various Soviet-based accounts claim the Soviet Baltic Fleet commanders refused to undertake operations due to the growing amount of sea ice in the Gulf of Finland. The implication here is that the fleet’s reverses at the hands of the British did not influence the decision to return to base. I think this is likely a propaganda ploy, perhaps to minimize the importance of the British naval force. I find likely that the British forces greatly influenced the timing of the Soviet return to base. As we will see, the Estonians would undertake winter naval operations in the Gulf of Finland after the Baltic Fleet became inactive. This suggests the problems with sea ice was not as severe as Soviet-based accounts would lead you to believe.

419 “Latvian Socialist Soviet Republic” was the word order for this 1918 state. “Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic” was used when the Soviets annexed Latvia in 1940.

western Latvia. The Red Army had driven a wide wedge between the Estonian and Latvian forces, but this would soon change.

In Estonia, problems caused by British naval shelling⁴²⁰ plus the growing strength of the Estonian army halted the Red Army's advance and saved Tallinn from capture⁴²¹. On 7 January 1919, the Estonians went over to the offensive, using essentially every military asset at their disposal: Estonian and foreign volunteer forces, armored trains, the Estonian navy, and the Estonian air force, which at this time consisted of a single biplane captured from the Red Army. The navy made amphibious landings along the northern coast, including one near Narva that quickly captured the city. By the end of January, the Estonians were in control of northern Estonia up to the Narva River. The Northwestern Whites took up defensive positions along the river, in the hopes of soon being able to advance on Petrograd. Estonian forces pushed the Red Army out of southern Estonia in February. The Estonian and Latvian governments were friendly to one another, and Latvia allowed the Estonian army to raise and control an ethnic Latvian brigade in southern Estonia for operations there and in northern Latvia. The Latvians and Germans went on the offensive in western Latvia and began pushing the Red Army back towards Riga. The Estonian and Latvian front lines would meet up later in the spring, with consequences unforeseen at this time.

By late February, the Red Army facing Estonia was reinforced with newly-trained conscripts and went back over to the offensive. The Northwestern Whites withstood the Red assault on Narva in the north, but the Soviets made some advances in southern Estonia. The Estonian army, which still continued to grow in strength, counter-attacked, with battles between the two sides see-sawing across southern Estonia into the spring.

Besides the Northwestern Whites on the Narva River being just 135 km (85 miles) from Petrograd, spring 1919 saw growing White Army threats to the Soviets in the eastern, northern, and southern theaters. In April, the Soviets attempted to reduce the number of threats by offering to make peace with the Estonians, which would also remove that country as a base for the Whites. The Northwestern Whites would have to operate out of Latvia, which would at a minimum more than double their distance from Petrograd. The British, however, wanted the Soviets to lose Petrograd; they dissuaded Estonia from negotiating with the Soviets by threatening to cease supplying and supporting the Estonian army.

420 The help British shelling gave in stopping the Soviet advance is from Clifford Kinvig; *Churchill's Crusade: The British Invasion of Russia 1918–1920*; 2006.

421 The Soviets in 1919 did not set up a Socialist Soviet Republic for Estonia like they did for Latvia. They had earlier created the Commune of the Working People of Estonia in late 1918, which then acted as an unofficial government for Estonian territory being conquered by the Red Army. Perhaps they intended to turn this commune in an Estonian SSR after capturing Tallinn.

While all this was happening in April, the Estonians elected representatives to a constituent assembly that began working on a constitution and on land reform. In May, the Estonian Provisional Government was soon replaced by an elected government⁴²².

A very different situation occurred in Latvia about the same time. The Germans were allowed to keep troops in the Baltic region in hopes of blocking a Soviet take-over of the area. After the Germans left Estonia, their forces were concentrated in Latvia. Germanic forces consisted of German Army troops who had remained in the region, together with German volunteer forces (the *Freikorps*) from Germany and forces of Baltic Germans from Courland and Livonia (the Baltic *Landwehr*). As the shock of losing World War I wore off, Germany revived its hopes of creating a pro-German Baltic state⁴²³. In the spring of 1919 the Germans staged a coup against the Estonian-friendly Latvian Provisional Government, which fled to the protection of the British Baltic naval forces. The Germans created a pro-German Latvian puppet state (which I call “Germanic Latvia”⁴²⁴) headed by a Baltic German. This was now the third government claiming control of Latvia, after the Latvian Provisional Government and the Latvian Socialist Soviet Republic.

422 The government was elected by the constituent assembly from among its members rather than being directly elected by the Estonian citizenry. It was thus a form of indirect democracy a bit similar to how the Soviet government was elected. However, all members of the assembly were selected in free and fair elections, whereas the Communist running the Soviet state increasingly manipulated their elections to ensure Communist control.

423 German volunteer forces were also in Lithuania, to help the Lithuanians fight the Red Army and to try to turn the country into a German satellite state. Lithuania is outside the scope of the piece on Estonia and is not covered here.

424 The Germanic Latvian government also called itself a provisional government, the Provisional Government of Latvia. To avoid confusion, I just call it the Germanic Latvian government or Germanic Latvia, to distinguish it from the Latvian Provisional Government.



Estonian troops preparing to capture Pskov, May 1919 (pastel by E. Brinkmann)

The picture shows a wide variety of uniforms and helmets for the Estonian troops: Russian Army uniforms likely from Estonian veterans of World War I, Red Army uniforms likely from Soviet soldiers who surrendered or deserted to the Estonians, German Army uniforms possibly left over from the 1918 German occupation, and British Army uniforms from British aid. Possibly present are gray Swedish Army uniforms and brown Danish Army uniforms.

In May 1919, the Estonians went on the offensive across the entire front. In the center, south of Lake Peipus⁴²⁵, the Estonians advanced towards Pskov. Red Army troops holding the outskirts of this city included a small, wavering division of “Red Estonians”. The division commander and about a thousand troops deserted to the Estonians, with hundreds of more soon surrendering. This unhinged the Pskov defenses and let the Estonians quickly capture the city⁴²⁶. Afterwards, the Estonians pushed east for a bit before halting.

425 In Estonian, this lake is Lake Peipsi, and Lake Chudskoye in Russian. When considered as a lake complex of two lakes (Peipus in the north, Pskov in south) connected by a small channel or narrow third lake, it is also known as Lake Peipsi-Pihkva in Estonian (Pihkva being Estonian for Pskov) and Lake Chudsko-Pskovskoe in Russian.

426 Pekka Ereht; ““Pihkva pole enam kaugel!” (“Pskov is not far!”); 2003; <https://ekspress.delfi.ee/artikkel/69073543/pihkva-pole-enam-kaugel> (in Estonian).



In the north, the Estonians and Northwestern Whites crossed the Narva River and advanced east, almost reaching Petrograd before being halted. Operations along the Gulf of Finland once again saw the Estonian navy assisting the ground forces, including landing troops along the coast. This was possible because British naval forces kept the Soviet Baltic Fleet confined to their bases. The Soviets probed the British force blocking Kronshtadt, resulting in several small-scale actions that saw each side take damage. The Finns dispatched naval forces to assist the British, and the British reinforced their Baltic force with an aircraft carrier, *Vindictive*, that carried 12 biplanes. In July, *Vindictive* began making air raids on the Kronshtadt naval base.

In the south during May, the Estonians attacked the Red Army in northern Latvia and advanced south. The Germanic Latvian forces in western Latvia also attacked; they captured Riga and advanced east and north. The Red Army could not hold its ground in Latvia without reinforcements, but none were being sent there. The Soviets had decided their reinforcements were better used to defend Petrograd and to fight White forces in the southern and eastern theaters⁴²⁷.

The front lines of the Estonian army and the Germanic Latvian forces soon met up in Latvia, whereupon the Germanic forces including the Baltic *Landwehr* attacked the Estonians. The Germanic Latvia government demanded the Estonians withdraw back to Estonia. The Germans' ultimate goal seems to have been to occupy Estonia itself, placing almost all of the

⁴²⁷ https://lv.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latvijas_br%C4%ABv%C4%ABbas_c%C4%AB%C5%86as (in Latvian).

Baltic region under German control again. The Germanic forces and Estonians battled throughout June 1919 until the Estonians prevailed and advanced to the outskirts of Riga by early July.

Both sides by this time had mostly or completely ceased operations against the Soviets, who used the respite to rest and rebuild. The British viewed the Germanic-Estonian conflict as a disastrous diversion, with the Germans to blame. The Allied Powers accordingly demanded that the two sides agree to a ceasefire, the Latvia Provisional Government be restored as the government of Latvia, the Germanic Latvian government be dissolved, and Germany withdraw its forces from Latvia. Germany was far too weak to openly defy the Allies, so its plans to turn the Baltic region into a pro-German state were once again in ruins. Covertly, the Germans kept some of their forces in the region, including the *Freikorps*, by merging them into the pro-German Western White forces⁴²⁸.

Soon after the ceasefire in Latvia, Estonia's Latvian force secured Riga. The city and this force then passed over to control of the Latvian Provisional Government. Estonian forces withdrew from Latvian territory, with the Latvian Provisional Government taking control of this area. The Baltic *Landwehr* came back under the control of the Latvian Provisional Government but its loyalties were mistrusted, even after the unit was purged of German citizens. They were mostly kept on security duties in the west of the country, away from the Estonians in the north and the Soviets still holding eastern Latvia (Latgale) in the east.

The Soviets persisted in trying to make peace with Estonia over the course of the spring and summer, while engaging in combat against them at the front. An August Red Army offensive in the northwest recaptured Pskov and pushed back the Estonians and Northwestern Whites in many places in front of Petrograd, undoing much of their gains there. The Estonians entered into negotiations with the Soviets in September. The talks quickly ended after Estonia demanded that the talks include the Finns, Latvians, and Lithuanians. Later in September, the Estonians assisted the Northwestern White's offensive against Petrograd. However, the Red Army now had quite superior forces. They defeated the Northwestern Whites and pushed the Whites and Estonians back to the Narva River during the autumn.

The attack of the Germanic Latvian forces on the Estonian army in the spring had made the Baltic German aristocracy quite unpopular in Estonia. This perhaps made the October 1919

428 The Western Whites were a separate force from the Northwestern Whites and were essentially under control of the Germans. They professed that they were going to help overthrow the Soviets but actually concentrated on fighting the Latvians and Lithuanians.

Estonian land reform harsher than what it would otherwise have been. The large estates, which contained 58% of the agricultural land in the country, were nationalized from their owners without compensation for distribution to small farmers, mostly ethnic Estonians. Since the vast majority of the affected estates were owned by the Baltic German aristocracy, the land reform law was seen by some as punitive to these people, even though the law treated all estate owners the same regardless of ethnicity. (In 1925, a revision gave minimal compensation to the affected landowners, each got 50 hectares (about 124 acres) of land from their former estates.)

The Soviet defeat of the Northwestern Whites meant they had to retreat to Estonian territory. The Estonians, however, now worried that the Northwestern Whites might turn on them and tried to occupy Estonia. The Estonians accordingly disarmed the Whites, ending the Northwestern Whites as an effective military force. The Estonians also no longer needed the White forces to help defend Estonia. Their army was now large enough to defend their borders against the Red Army unless the Soviets sent an unrealistically large force, given all their other military commitments.



Border clashes and occasional intense battles between the Red Army and the Estonian army occurred for the rest of 1919, even after Estonia resumed peace negotiations with the Soviets in November. A preliminary agreement was reached on 31 December 1919, with a ceasefire between the two sides going into effect on 3 January 1920. On 2 February 1920, Estonia and

the Soviets signed the Treaty of Tartu, in which the Soviets renounced “forever” all rights to the territory of Estonia:

Russia unreservedly recognizes the independence and sovereignty of the State of Estonia, and renounces voluntarily and forever all sovereign rights possessed by Russia over the Estonian people and territory whether these rights be based on the juridical position that formerly existed in public law, or in the international treaties which, in the sense here indicated, lose their validity in future.

—From Article II of the Treaty of Tartu, 2 February 1920

One provision of the treaty required each side to expel foreign organizations hostile to the other side. This meant the formal end of the Northwestern Whites in Estonia. Estonia had secured its independence... for the meantime. About 20 years later Stalin and Hitler would agree to split eastern Europe between them, putting in motion events that saw the Soviet Union annex Estonian into the USSR in 1940 as the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic.

16.D Overview: Germany, 1918–1936



Cartoon depicting French Marshal Ferdinand Foch, Supreme Allied Commander of the Allied Armies, presenting terms to Germany, Nov. 1918⁴²⁹

The Allied and Associated Governments affirm and Germany accepts the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing all the loss and damage to which the Allied and Associated Governments and their nationals have been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her allies.

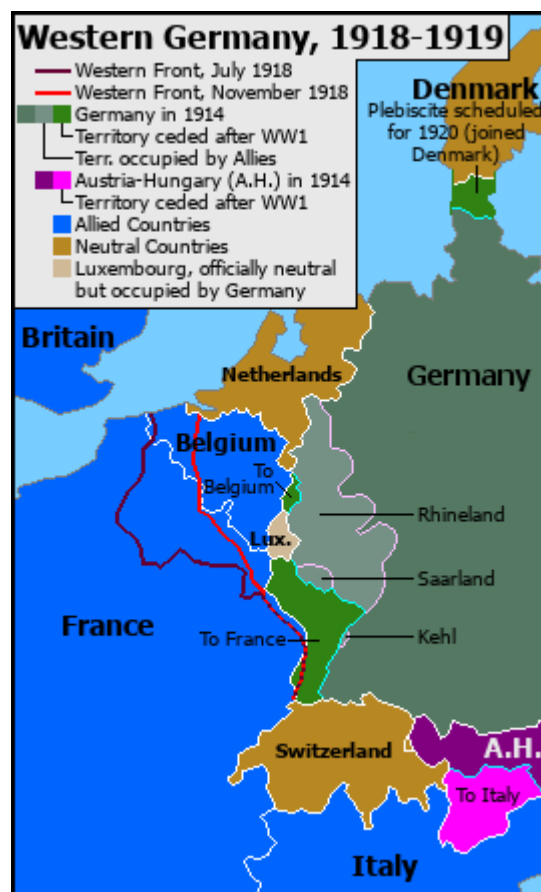
— Article 231 of the Treaty of Versailles, which became known as the infamous “War Guilt” clause. Unfortunately, Article 231 was poorly translated into German:

Die All. und Ass. Regierungen erklären und Deutschland erkennt an, dass Deutschland und seine Verbündeten als Urheber für alle Verluste und Schäden verantwortlich sind, die All. und Ass. Regierungen und ihre Staatsangehörigen infolge des Krieges, der ihnen durch den Angriff Deutschlands und seiner Verbündeten aufgezwungen wurde, erlitten haben.

⁴²⁹ “And This is No Scrap of Paper”; cartoon by W.A. Rogers; printed in the *New York Herald*, 7 November 1918. The “scrap of paper” is a reference to German Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg’s comment in 1914 that Britain was willing to go to war with Germany over a “scrap of paper”, the 1839 Treaty of London that guaranteed Belgium’s independence and neutrality.

The phrase “*als Urheber*” meant “as authors” or “as instigators” [of the war], in the sense of having deliberately caused the war⁴³⁰. This was not the correct sense of what Article 231 meant, but it caused outrage in Germany as unfairly placing the entire blame for WW1 on Germany and her allies.

The Central Powers had been defeated in late 1918, ending the fighting in World War I. Germany, as the strongest country of that coalition, was the last to give in, agreeing to an armistice that went into effect on 11 November 1918. Germany had to withdraw its forces from foreign soil⁴³¹, allow the Allies to occupy parts of western Germany, surrender weapons, aircraft, and warships, and meet other terms that meant it would not be able to resume fighting later. The Allied blockade of Germany, which was significantly contributing to a growing famine there, was to continue until a peace treaty between the Allies and the Germans was signed. This would be the **Treaty of Versailles**, which was signed in 1919 and went in to effect in 1920.



Losing the war had extreme effects on Germany. The German people had made huge sacrifices to the war effort, enduring heavy military casualties, economic hardships, growing

430 Robert C. Binkley and A.C. Mahr; “A New Interpretation of the ‘Responsibility’ Clause in the Versailles Treaty”; *Current History* Vol. 24, No. 3; 1926; 398–400. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45335625>.

431 German withdrawal from the Eastern Front was partially delayed, [as covered in the main text](#).

shortages, and even starvation. Further, the German government had censored and falsified the news of the war. As late as September 1918 Germans were being told they were winning the war. In truth, German forces from the summer of 1918 had been in retreat across northern France and Belgium, unable to hold against Allied offensives. The German military high command became convinced that the war was lost and told the German government in late September to negotiate an armistice as soon as possible. It was thus a shock when the German public learned in October that the government was seeking terms armistice. This meant Germany was conceding defeat, even though no part of Germany had been lost to the enemy. Sailors' mutinies broke out in late October when German admirals tried to sortie the Navy in hopes of engaging the British Royal Navy in a final battle. These mutinies quickly led to unrest and revolts spreading across Germany.

Sidetrip: The November Criminals and the Stab in the Back

The German military high command under Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff had demanded in September 1918 that the German government negotiate an armistice from the Allies. Although it was customary for the military leadership to arrange armistices, Ludendorff insisted that the government negotiate the armistice. He wanted civilians to take the blame for ending the war, so that he could preserve his reputation as well as that of the German military.

When the armistice took effect in November, German armies were still on foreign soil on all fronts. Many civilians and soldiers accordingly found it hard to believe that the German Army had been defeated. A lie began to circulate that **November criminals** had betrayed the German military and people. This grew into a right-wing conspiracy theory that claimed traitorous groups on the home front had acted to lose the war: Communists, socialists, liberal pro-republic politicians, and German Jews. The myth evolved into the German military being **stabbed in the back**. These lies were widely believed in some quarters and became rallying cries for German monarchists, nationalists, and extreme-right groups.

By early November, events in Germany were spiralling out of control. Kaiser Wilhelm II, the German emperor, soon abdicated, followed later that month by all the hereditary rulers of the various regions of Germany⁴³². Revolts turned into revolution in some places, led by

⁴³² The German Empire had been formed as a federation of states under the King of Prussia, who became the Kaiser. All told, there were 22 rulers: one emperor and king, three other kings, six grand dukes, five dukes, and seven sovereign princes.

extremist socialists with support from radical workers, soldiers, and sailors. They wanted to turn Germany into a socialist dictatorship like Soviet Russia under the Communists. The German moderate left proclaimed Germany a republic with a social-democratic system. German liberals supported the idea of a republic, while monarchists sought ways to restore hereditary rule.



Was will Spartakus? What does Spartacus want?
1919 poster of the Spartacus League

The Spartacus League (*Spartakusbund*), named for Spartacus, the leader of slave revolt against the Romans) was also the Communist Party of Germany. The poster is seemingly a call to fight the right-wing German hydra of the New Militarism, Capitalism, and Junkerism (extreme conservatism of the landed nobility). In actuality, the Communists were attempting establish a revolutionary Soviet state and to overthrow the German republic, which was led by the moderate-left Social Democratic Party of Germany.

In 1919, the new center-left government and the monarchist German military high command came to an uneasy accommodation in order to suppress the left-wing revolutionaries. Order was restored, and a constitution for Germany created in the small city of Weimar. This made Germany a mixed presidential-parliamentary democracy, what eventually became called the **Weimar Republic**. Key parts of the system were:

- The German **president** was directly elected by the public and was the **head of state**. Unlike some parliamentary systems in which the presidency is mostly a ceremonial

post, the German president had important powers and governmental functions. The constitution granted the president considerably more power in times of emergencies.

- The **Reichstag** was the primary legislative body with the ability to pass laws and oversee the chancellor and cabinet. Reichstag members were elected by universal adult suffrage on a proportional representation basis.
- The **chancellor** was the **head of government** and chaired the cabinet. The president appointed the chancellor. The constitution placed few limits on whom the president could make chancellor⁴³³, but in practice it was a member of the Reichstag. In normal times, the leader of coalition of political parties that commanded the most seats in the Reichstag became chancellor.
- The executive branch consisted of several ministries, such as the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Defense. The ministries were headed by Reich **ministers**. The chancellor nominated people to be ministers, which the president would then confirm or turn down. The constitution placed few limits on who could be a minister. In normal times, ministers were members of the Reichstag selected from the governing coalition of parties.

In actual practice, citizens could be appointed to be **ministers without portfolios**. Such people did not head a ministry but were still ministers with the right to attend and vote in meetings of the cabinet. This allowed people important in some manner to the government to be part of the cabinet. For example, Eduard David, an important politician of the Social Democratic Party of Germany, was often a minister without portfolio.

- The supreme executive body was the national ministry, better known as the **cabinet**. This consisted of the chancellor and the ministers, and they handled executive matters by majority vote.

Sidetrip: More on the Weimar Constitution

Besides the key institutions covered above, the Weimar constitution also created bodies like the *Reichsrat* and the Supreme Judicial Court (*Reichsgericht*, “Reich Court”). The *Reichsrat* was a secondary legislative body that represented the interests of the various German states (*Länder*). Its members were directly appointed by the state governments. The *Reichsrat* was able to propose

⁴³³ The articles on the chancellorship had no specific restrictions. Article 128 stated “All citizens without discrimination shall be eligible for public office in accordance with the laws and their capacities and merits”.

legislation for the Reichstag and to veto laws passed by the Reichstag. A two-thirds majority of the Reichstag, however, could override a Reichsrat veto.

The Supreme Judicial Court handled disputes between central government and the states, impeachment proceedings brought against the president, chancellor, or ministers by the Reichstag, and other matters as specified in national laws.

In practice, the executive branch also had a vice chancellor post in addition to the chancellorship. The constitution did not establish such a post, so the vice chancellor had no constitutional authority. Instead, one of the ministers was typically also tapped to be vice chancellor, since ministers did have constitutional authority and the right to attend and vote in cabinet meetings.

Imperial Germany had been a constitutional monarchy. Although it has some democratic institutions including an elected Reichstag, it was an authoritarian state as very considerable powers were the prerogative of the kaisers. The Weimar constitution, by contrast, did create a democratic state. One of its weaknesses was beyond its scope: the presence of important political parties that wished to overturn the constitution and impose a different type of government.

The constitution built in numerous checks and balances on governmental power. The Reichstag could pass a **vote of no confidence** on the cabinet, which required the chancellor and ministers to resign. This did not trigger new elections but instead started negotiations to select a new chancellor and cabinet. The president could dissolve the Reichstag, which did trigger new elections. The president could also require a law passed by the Reichstag to be subjected to a national referendum. The Reichstag by majority vote could cancel emergency decrees issued by the president. The cabinet could withhold approval of a law passed by the Reichstag, which required the Reichstag to reconsider the legislation. The electorate had the right to propose and pass laws by referendum⁴³⁴.

In normal times, several political parties that had won seats in the Reichstag would cooperate to form a **coalition government**. The president would appoint the coalition leader as chancellor and the coalition's choices for ministers but at times did reject some ministerial choices. Sometimes, the coalition commanded a majority of seats in the Reichstag and formed a **majority government**, enabling the cabinet and Reichstag to work together. More often, the fractured nature of German politics meant the coalition did not have a majority in the Reichstag, making it a **minority government**. It could govern as long as it gained enough

434 A referendum had to be called if one tenth of eligible voters petitioned for a proposed law.

support from other parties to survive a vote of no confidence⁴³⁵. Minorities governments were fragile and often survived for only a few months.

The constitution's emergency powers provisions allowed the president to **govern by decree** and to **directly appoint chancellor and ministers**. These powers were meant to be used in crises, but political instability during the Great Depression meant the president would often use them.

What's in a Name: "Weimar Republic"

The national assembly met in Weimar in 1919 to create the German constitution, because Berlin, the capital, was too dangerous at this time due to ongoing violence. The resulting document was the Constitution of the German Reich (*Die Verfassung des Deutschen Reichs*) but became informally known as the **Weimar Constitution**.

Through lack of agreement on alternatives, Germany retained its old official name, *Deutsches Reich* (German Empire or German Realm⁴³⁶). However, during the time of the German republic, the name *Deutsches Reich* was not popular and was mainly used just for official purposes. Instead, a variety of informal names were used. By far the most popular was *Deutschland* (Germany). "German Republic" (*Deutsche Republik*) was often used, especially on the German left. Monarchists and traditionalists on the right disliked using "republic", since they did not want Germany to be a republic. Many of them also disliked using *Deutsches Reich* since Germany was no longer an empire. They often used *Deutschland*. "German People's State" (*Deutscher Volksstaat*) became a popular alternative among moderate German Catholics.

The example of "Weimar Constitution" eventually gave rise to the term **Weimar Republic** (*Weimarer Republik*, also *Republik von Weimar*). This term seems not to have been used much if at all before 1929, when both the Nazis and Communists began using it. Several works claim the first recorded mention of "Weimar

435 In practice, if it was clear the Reichstag would pass a vote of no confidence, the chancellor and cabinet would usually resign before the vote was taken.

436 *Reich* technically meant "realm", with *Deutsches Reich* conveying the sense of the realm of the German people. *Königreich* meant the realm of a king (a kingdom, such as the Kingdom of Prussia), and *Kaiserreich* meant the realm of an emperor (an empire). In 1871–1918, Germany was an empire, so *Deutsches Reich* became conflated with *Kaiserreich*, the "German Empire". After 1918, *Deutsches Reich* continued to convey a sense of a unified realm of the German people, which the Nazis tapped with their slogan "*Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer*" – "One People, One Realm, One Leader".

Republic” was in a February 1929 speech by Adolf Hitler. “Weimar Republic” was a term of contempt to the Nazis, as they despised the idea of a republic and held that the Weimar Constitution resulted a decadent state run by the November criminals. The term became popular throughout Germany in the 1930s. After World War II, historians throughout the world came to use Weimar Republic to mean the German state from the fall of the German Empire in 1918 to the Nazi takeover in 1933.

The German economy was in poor shape at the end of the war. German gross domestic Product (GDP) in 1919 was only 73% that of 1913, the last full year of peace before WW1. It would take until 1927 for GDP to exceed 1913’s level. Industrial production had fallen during the war, and production of civilian goods was especially hit hard as factories were converted to military production. Millions of men had been drafted in the armed forces from industry and agriculture, replaced mostly by women as well as some children and hundreds of thousands of foreign laborers, many of them coerced into working for Germany⁴³⁷. The end of the war entailed converting the economy to peacetime functioning and to reintegrate millions of demobilized soldiers and sailors into the work force.

*German Inflation, 1914–1919*⁴³⁸

<i>Year</i>	<i>Consumer Price Index (1950 = 100)</i>	<i>Annual Inflation</i>	<i>Cumulative Inflation since 1913</i>	<i>Note</i>
1913	53.9	-	-	Last full year of peace
1914	55.6	3.15%	3.15%	WW1 begins 28 July 1914
1915	69.6	25.18%	29.13%	
1916	90.7	30.32%	68.27%	
1917	135.2	49.06%	150.83%	
1918	162.1	19.90%	200.74%	WW1 ends 11 Nov. 1918
1919	222.2	37.08%	312.24%	

Like most European countries in the war, Germany had left the gold standard in order to finance the war. The gold standard had kept the German currency, the gold mark (*Goldmark*),

⁴³⁷ Foreign laborers came from lands occupied by Germany. At first, Germany mostly tried to recruit voluntary foreign workers. (Temporary farm workers from Russian Poland who were in Germany at the start of the war were not allowed to return home or to change jobs.) However, the Germans could not get enough foreign volunteers and by 1916 resorted to forced labor. Most of these laborers actually remained in the occupied territories on military construction projects, but thousands were sent to work in Germany itself. I have not seen firm figures on how many forced laborers WW1 Germany used, but it must have been at least several hundreds of thousands. Nazi Germany would reuse and expand on this example during WW2, ending up with millions of slave laborers in Germany by 1944–1945.

⁴³⁸ Derived from a table of price indices in Germany, 1870–2011; <http://www.gabriel-zucman.eu/files/capitalisback/T271>.

quite stable both domestically, since the value of a mark was fixed in gold, and internationally, since it traded on a fixed exchange rate with other currencies (4.20 gold marks exchanged for 1.00 US dollars, for example). Abandoning the gold standard allowed Germany to finance the war through deficit spending and printing paper money (informally called the *Papiermark*, the paper mark) not back by gold, resulting in what was, for Germany at this time, considerable inflation.

By 1918, the German national debt stood at 156 billion marks. The Germans had planned to pay off this debt by winning the war and forcing the defeated enemy to pay reparations. Losing the war meant a defeated Germany was saddled with this debt. It was a considerable burden that even exceeded what the Allies would soon demand in reparations. The debt and reparations were the first of many financial problems that would periodically hurt the German economy throughout the 1920s and early 1930s.

The weakness of the German economy at the end of the war meant the government did not return to the gold standard. It could continue printing money as it wished. This would soon result in hyperinflation, a severe economic shock.



The Allied Big Four of the Paris Peace Conference forcing Germany to take its medicine⁴³⁹

The victorious Allied powers met in Paris in 1919 to decide what to do with Germany, resulting in the **Treaty of Versailles**. This formally ended the war with Germany and placed that country under many restrictions. The treaty was the result of intensive negotiations among the major Allied powers, plus consultation with minor Allied powers and some new

⁴³⁹ The Big Four were Lloyd George (Prime Minister of Britain), Vittorio Emanuele Orlando (Prime Minister of Italy), Georges Clemenceau (Prime Minister of France), and Woodrow Wilson (President of the USA). This cartoon was published in the (London) *Daily Express*; 7 May 1919.

countries like Poland. Other countries, some would-be countries, and various groups also lobbied for their diverse interests. For example, neutral Denmark obtained plebiscites for two northern German areas on whether they would remain in Germany or join Denmark. For another example, the Ukrainian People's Republic, which had declared its independence from the Soviet state and was fighting for its existence, unsuccessfully tried to get the Allies to recognize it as a sovereign state. The treaty was ready to sign by June 1919.

Germany had been excluded from the negotiations and was told in June that refusal to sign the treaty would result in Allied occupation of Germany. Allied armies per the terms of the 1918 armistice were already occupying western Germany up to the Rhine River together with large bridgeheads across the river. Allies troops were thus poised to march into the heart of Germany, and the German Army was in no shape to oppose them had Germany refused to sign the treaty. The Army had turned over many thousands of its machineguns and artillery pieces to the Allies as part of the armistice terms, and millions of German soldiers had been demobilized in late 1918 and early 1919. The German government signed the treaty. The Germans were aghast at the harsh terms of the treaty, even though they had imposed even harsher terms on the Soviets in the March 1918 Treat of Brest-Litovsk.

Some terms of the Versailles Treaty were:

- Germany lost territory to Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, France, and Poland⁴⁴⁰. Germany relinquished the Memelland (called the Klaipėda region by the Lithuanians) in East Prussia to Allied control and French occupation. The Allies were at a later date supposed to determine the disposition of this region, but the region was unilaterally annexed by Lithuania in 1923⁴⁴¹.

440 Most of this territory was ceded outright. Versailles mandated four regional plebiscites to allow local inhabitants to choose between remaining in Germany or joining another country. Two were in northern Germany; they were conducted in 1920 with northern Schleswig voting to join Denmark and central Schleswig voting to stay in Germany. One was conducted in 1920 in the southern part of East Prussia, which voted to remain part of Germany rather than join Poland. The final one was in 1921 in Upper Silesia, with about 60% voting to remain in Germany and 40% to join Poland. This plebiscite included votes (about 16% of the total) from people who lived elsewhere in Germany but could claim Upper Silesian origins, which bolstered the pro-German vote. The Polish inhabitants of Upper Silesia accordingly did not accept the results of the plebiscite, and fighting broke out between Polish forces and German militias. This resulted in Poland gaining the eastern third of the region and Germany retaining the rest, with the League of Nations recognizing the resulting border.

Versailles gave Eupen-Malmedy to Belgium but also required Belgium to open "registers" in which the inhabitants of the territory "will be entitled to record in writing a desire to see the whole or part of it remain under German sovereignty". This is sometimes called a plebiscite, but Versailles called it a "public expression of opinion" and studiously avoided calling it voting, never mind a plebiscite. Belgium was only required to communicate the results to the League of Nations and accept any decision the League might make on this issue. Only a very few inhabitants of the territory were will to publicly identify themselves in writing as being in favor of remaining in Germany.

441 The region had a mixed population people speaking a variety of languages, German, "Memeländisch" (which seems to have been a local Germanic dialect with some Polish and Lithuanian influence), and Lithuanian being the most common. Lithuania

- Danzig was detached from Germany made into a “Free City” under the League of Nations. Its position at the mouth of the Vistula River made it a crucial port for goods traveling to and from Poland and this a key element for a viable Polish economy.
- The Saarland, a German industrial region with plentiful coal deposits, was put under League of Nations administration (and occupied by the British and French) for 15 years⁴⁴². At the end of the 15 years, the inhabitants of the region would vote in a referendum whether to remain under League of Nations administration, rejoin Germany, or join France. (They overwhelmingly voted to rejoin Germany.)
- Germany lost all of its overseas colonies (all were in Africa and the Pacific). Officially, they became League of Nations mandates. Germany also lost its leased territory in China, its other overseas possession⁴⁴³.
- Germany was prohibited from keeping troops in or fortifying the Rhineland, a German region west of the Rhine River that bordered France and Belgium, plus a 50-km (31-mile) strip of territory east of the Rhine River.
- Allied forces were allowed to occupy the Rhineland, the Rhine bridgeheads⁴⁴⁴, and Kehl across from Strasbourg⁴⁴⁵ for varying amounts of time from 5–15 years⁴⁴⁶.
- The German Army was enfeebled, with Germany allowed only a tiny volunteer force of 100,000, of which no more than 4,000 could be officers. The army could have only seven infantry and three cavalry divisions. (In contrast, the German Western Front had

came to fear that the Allies would make the region a free state, along the lines of the Free City of Danzig. This was something the Memelland German minority actually wanted, as the best way to eventually rejoin Germany. To prevent this, Lithuania occupied and annexed the region.

442 The Saarland coal mines were actually given to France as compensation for damage to French coal mines during Germany’s occupation of northeastern France in the war. Saar coal was sent to France. When the Saarland rejoined Germany, the Nazis paid 900 million francs to regain control of the coal mines.

443 This was Tsingtao (Kiautschou in German; now better known by its pinyin spelling, Qingdao). It is often called a colony but was technically leased to Germany from China for 99 years under somewhat less than voluntary terms. It became a German naval base and was administered by the German Navy, not the German Imperial Colonial Office. Japan took over the territory in 1914, relinquished it to China in 1922, and occupied it again in 1937–1945.

444 The Köln (“Cologne”) bridgehead in the north for 5 years, the Koblenz (“Coblenz”) bridgehead in the center for 10 years, and the Mainz bridgehead in the south for 15 years.

445 Kehl was on the Rhine River Germany immediately across from Strasbourg, which had become part of France. The river ports of Strasbourg and Kehl were economically integrated, with Kehl being the more important. The occupation allowed France seven years to develop the Strasbourg port (plus an additional three years if needed) so that Kehl would no longer be needed.

446 The Rhineland and the bridgeheads were divided into three zones, with the occupation there to be progressively reduced: the northern zone in 5 years (1925), the central zone in 10 years (1930), and the southern zone in 15 years (1935). Occupation times could be extended if Germany was not in compliance with the terms of the treaty. This occurred for the northern zone, which was occupied for an extra year, into 1926. Thereafter, normalization of relations with Germany cause the rest of the occupation to end early: the center in 1929 and the south in 1930.

192 divisions for its spring 1918 offensives, and Germany at the time had many more divisions in the Balkans, Italy, and Russia.) Conscription and civilian universal military training were prohibited. Germany was also forbidden from having a general staff, as the German General Staff had been a highly-capable body responsible for many of Germany's military successes.

Germany had no trouble finding enough volunteers for its army, so only the best were allowed to join. Versailles mandated that standard term of service for the army was 12 years (25 years for officers), which had the effect that common soldiers became highly experienced. All this made the army a highly-motivated, elite force capable of rapid expansion once the Nazis took over.

- Germany was only allowed a tiny navy of 15,000 volunteers, with just six small, obsolete battleships, six light cruisers, twelve destroyers, and twelve torpedo boats. Submarines were completely prohibited. When the old battleships wore out, they could be replaced with armored ships limited to a maximum displacement of 10,000 long tons each (10,160 metric tons⁴⁴⁷). 10,000 tons was the equivalent of other countries' heavy cruisers, which were far less powerful than modern (for the times) battleships.
- Germany was prohibited from having many kinds of modern weapons including tanks, military aircraft, and submarines. Other types of weapons were strictly limited in number. For example the treaty limited German artillery to a total of 204 light (7.7-cm) guns and 84 medium (10.5-cm) howitzers, which meant no heavy artillery at all⁴⁴⁸.
- Germany had to pay substantial **reparations** (in gold-backed money and in goods like coal and timber) over the course of 30 years. German reparations went to a large number of Allied countries, within a system overseen by a **Reparation Commission**. Reparations even went to Italy and Romania, both of which had joined the Allies during the war in hopes of gaining territory from Austria-Hungary⁴⁴⁹.

447 Long tons (British Imperial tons) were used in the Treaty of Versailles since they were in common use to measure ship displacements at that time. A long ton is 1.01605 metric tons.

448 For a text of the treaty, see https://www.census.gov/history/pdf/treaty_of_versailles-112018.pdf. Table No. III specifies the maximum number of weapons.

449 Reparations were for damage to civilians due to the war, so Italy and Romania qualified because fighting occurred on parts of their territories. Italy was to receive 10% of German reparation payments, and Romania 1.1%. Some of the other shares were 52% for France, 22% for Britain, and 5% for Yugoslavia (formed from the Allied countries of Serbia and Montenegro plus other territory). See the United States World War Foreign Debt Commission; *Minutes of the World War Foreign Debt Commission, 1922-1926; 1927*; https://www.google.com/books/edition/Minutes_of_the_World_War_Foreign_Debt_Co/8K3aJSKcBAAC?hl=en&gbpv=0.

It should be noted that had Germany won WW1, the Germans fully intended to make the losers pay reparations to Germany.

Total reparations were set at 132 billion gold marks, although this figure was chosen to satisfy Allied public opinion, which wanted Germany to pay for all war damages its warmaking had inflicted on civilians. This sum was obviously unrealistic⁴⁵⁰, and reparations were structured so that Germany was actually required to pay only 50 billion gold marks (although with compound interest). The remaining 82 billion gold marks of reparations were interest-free and would be contingent on Germany's ability to pay.



Most Germans detested the terms of the treaty and especially the “war guilt” clause, Article 231. The German government was not allowed to try to negotiate any changes to the treaty, so Germany had to either sign it or be occupied. Since Germany was now far too weak to try to halt an Allied occupation by military means, the German government signed the treaty on 28 June 1919. The Allies in turn lifted their naval blockade in July⁴⁵¹.

450 The Versailles Treaty had been unable to set the total amount of reparations, as the Allied negotiators simply could not come to agreement. The British in 1919, for example, wanted an immense level of reparations. Versailles got around this by charging the Reparation Commission with determining the amount of reparations. This provoked considerable concern in Germany that they were signing a “blank check” by agreeing to the treaty, but they had no choice. It perhaps worked to their favor, since as desires for revenge cooled a more realistic amount was chosen in 1921. By now, for example, the British had realized their economy would be best served by returning to the conditions that prevailed before WW1, and they now advocated for much lower reparations than the Commission finally decided upon.

451 While the Allied blockade remained in place until July, the Allies did allow German ships to carry some food to Germany, under tight supervision, from April 1919.

Sidetrip: Unfair and Harsh Treaties

The Germans viewed the terms of the Versailles Treaty as unfair and harsh, and many terms certainly were such. However, if Germany had won the war, it would have almost certainly imposed its own unfair and harsh peace settlement on its European enemies. For example, what came to be called the “September Program” was drafted in September 1914 while Germany was still expecting to achieve a rapid victory in the war. Its goals were:

- Belgium would become a German vassal state, ceding some territory to German administration and allowing German bases in the rest of its territory. Germany would also take over the Belgian Congo in Africa.
- France would cede territory in northern France to either Germany or Belgium, pay a large war indemnity to Germany, and be prohibited from having fortifications in northern France. Germany would also take over French colonies in central Africa, although not other French colonies.
- Luxembourg would be annexed into Germany.
- Russia would cede parts of its western territories, particularly the Russian part of Poland, to become buffer states between Russia and Germany. By early 1918, German success against Russia transformed this goal: Germany planned to create German-ruled vassal states from Russian territory: the Baltic region, Finland, Lithuania, and Poland. Further, Ukraine was to become independent from Russia and provide food to the Central Powers in return for military protection.
- Germany would create and dominate an economic region consisting of central Europe, much of western Europe, and perhaps other parts of Europe.

Germany did not get to impose any version of the September Program, but it did force Soviet Russia to sign the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918. Some of Brest-Litovsk’s terms were even harsher than Versailles’, such as requiring the Soviets to disband all of their land forces⁴⁵².

⁴⁵² This disbanding did not actually happen. The Soviets needed troops to fight the Russian Civil War, and the Germans did not want the anti-German White Movement to prevail over the Soviets.

The Versailles Treaty was just one of several treaties ending WW1. Others dealt with Austria-Hungary (the empire was dismembered), Bulgaria (which lost territory and was placed under restrictions like Germany), and the Ottoman Empire (dismembered). Despite the American president being one of the key Allied leaders involved in negotiating the Versailles Treaty, the US Senate refused to ratify this treaty. Instead, the US in 1921 would negotiate and ratify separate peace treaties with Austria, Germany, and Hungary⁴⁵³.

“Any war or threat of war, ..., is hereby declared a matter of concern to the whole League, and the League shall take any action that may be deemed wise and effectual to safeguard the peace of nations”.

—A portion of **Article 11 of the Covenant of the League of Nations**

Versailles also created **League of Nations**, which was founded in 1920. The League was the first worldwide organization of countries dedicated to trying to prevent war, promote disarmament, and resolve international disputes through negotiation and other non-violent means. Conferences and treaties on limiting war and weapons followed in the 1920s.

Spotlight: The League of Nations



First meeting of the Assembly of the League of Nations, at the *Salle de la Réformation*, Geneva, Switzerland, 15 November 1920⁴⁵⁴

The League of Nations consisted of the **Assembly**, the **Council**, and the **Secretariat**⁴⁵⁵. All member countries had a seat in the Assembly. The Assembly normally met once per year for several days, although it convene additional sessions each year if desired. The Assembly voted on League policies, on

453 The US had not been at war with Bulgaria or the Ottoman Empire, so peace treaties were unnecessary in these cases.

454 Photograph source: *Nasjonalbiblioteket* (National Library); Norway. The *Salle de la Réformation* was the Hall of the (Protestant) Reformation.

455 For the Covenant (constitution) of the League of Nations, see https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp.

whether to admit new members or expel existing ones, on whether to amend the League's Covenant, and on "any matter within the sphere of action of the League affecting the peace of the world". For most issues, the Assembly required a unanimous vote to pass a resolution: all members actually present had to vote in favor of the resolution. Certain issues as specified in the Covenant could be passed by simple majority vote or by a two-thirds majority vote. For example, admission of a country to the League required a two-thirds vote. This prevented a League member from being able veto the admission of a bitter rival.

The Council, like the Assembly, could vote on issues affecting world peace or on matters related to the League. The Covenant allocated disarmament issues and oversight of the mandated territories specifically to the Council, although in practice a committee handled many mandate issues. Some international treaties also required the Council to handle various issues rather than the Assembly. For example, the Versailles Treaty allocated the supervision of the Free City of Danzig to the Council.

A major function of the Council was to settle international disputes. It regularly met four times per year and could meet as many times as needed during emergencies and crises. The Council was divided into permanent members, representing major League countries, and elected members, from other countries. Every three years, the General Assembly voted for a new set of elected members. Also, a League country not on the Council gained a temporary seat there when the Council considered an issue "specially affecting the interests" of that country.

At first, the Council had four permanent members and four elected members. The original permanent members were the major Allied countries of WW1 that had joined the League: Britain, France, Italy, and Japan. The USA would have been a permanent member had it joined the League. The elected part of Council was expanded over time to six, nine, ten, and finally eleven elected members. The permanent members had no special abilities in the Council, and each member of the Council, permanent, elected, or temporary, had one vote. The Council required a unanimous vote to pass a resolution, so in effect every member of the Council had a veto⁴⁵⁶.

The permanent members of the Council changed over time, since it was based on the importance of the country. When Germany was allowed to join the League in

⁴⁵⁶ In the subsequent United Nations, only the permanent members of the Security Council have vetoes.

1926, it thus became a permanent member. When both Japan and Germany left the League in 1933, the Council was reduced to just three permanent members, Britain, France, and Italy. This rose to four when the USSR joined the League in 1934. Italy left the League in 1937, and the USSR was expelled from the League in 1939 following its invasion of Finland. The League then had just two permanent members, Britain and France, for the rest of its existence.

The Secretariat⁴⁵⁷ handled the day-to-day administrative matters of the League. It prepared agendas for the League's bodies and published reports of their meetings. International treaties negotiated among countries could be registered with the League, with the Secretariat publishing their terms. (Secret agreements between countries were, of course, not sent to the League.) The Secretariat was led by a General Secretary.

In addition to the League's main bodies, the League had many commissions and committees that met frequently, with some committees being permanent (such as the Permanent Mandates Commission). The League also organized numerous conferences on various topics, often related to peace or disarmament.

The victors of World War I took over all German overseas colonies and much of the territory of the Ottoman Empire. The Allies decided that most these territories were not ready to become independent states and were placed under League of Nations as **mandated territories**. They were assigned to the supervision of individual countries in the League, often Britain or France but also including Australia, Belgium, Japan, New Zealand, and South Africa. Officially, a mandate consisted of a region of people considered "not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world", so they were placed under the "tutelage" of "advanced nations" on behalf of the League. Some of these territories were slated to become independent states when they were judged ready. However, the country in charge of a mandate had substantial power to administer the territory as it wished, and many mandates were in effect little more than colonies. Only one of the 16 mandates actually became an independent state before World War II: in 1932, the Mandate for Mesopotamia became the Kingdom of Iraq and joined the League.

⁴⁵⁷ The Secretariat was sometimes called the Permanent Secretariat, the Council the Executive Council, and the Assembly the General Assembly, but these latter terms were not official.

The USA did not join the League of Nations. The US Senate of the 1920s refused to ratify the Treaty of Versailles. This was in part out of a desire not to join any international organization whose decisions might infringe on the sovereignty of the US or override the power of the US Congress to make American laws. Tied up with this was growing trend in the US towards isolationism. Many people in the US had come to view US participation in WW1 as a mistake that only benefited arms dealers and belligerent European countries. Isolationists in the Senate claimed League membership might even involuntarily require the US to go to war to defend another League member, such as through Article 11 of the League's Covenant⁴⁵⁸. Finally, American partisan politics and even personal rivalry all played parts in the Senate's refusal to ratify the treaty⁴⁵⁹.

While many thought the absence of the US weakened the League, I cannot see how US membership would have made much difference. In practice, the League would not use Article 11 to take any forceful action. Instead, it worked through moral authority and relied on its members to abide by its decisions. It had no effective way to influence countries outside the League and lacked the will to restrain member countries from resorting to war. All this was vividly evident when Italy invaded fellow League member Ethiopia in 1934.

458 All this was somewhat overblown, as the League was for the promotion of peace. Further, any invocation of Article 11 required the Council to meet. The US would have been a permanent member of the Council and thus could have vetoed any resolution involving Article 11. However, the president, not the Senate, would have determined how the US votes in the Council. This left open the remote possibility that a president could have supported an Article 11 resolution authorizing war, usurping the Congress's authority to declare war.

459 President Woodrow Wilson was from the Democratic Party, but the Republican Party controlled the Senate in 1919. Wilson disdained many Republican senators and refused to include any senators at all in the American delegation to the Paris Peace Conference. This was an unwise action given the need to have the Senate ratify the treaty.



Cartoon of Mussolini deriding the League of Nations over Ethiopia⁴⁶⁰

The League voted to impose economic sanctions on Italy: no armaments trade with Italy, no provision of loans or credit to Italy, and various other measures. The sanctions did not ban trade with Italy over oil, coal, pig iron, and steel, all vital materials Italy needed, and an attempt to add them to the sanctions failed⁴⁶¹. Most League countries followed the sanctions, but countries outside the League ignored them. The US appealed to Italy to peacefully settle with Ethiopia but refused to associate itself with the League's sanctions or to do much other than advise an American oil to end its concession in Ethiopia⁴⁶². Various American companies actually increased their trade with Italy once the sanctions were imposed.

The League in theory could have voted to impose a naval blockade on Italy to enforce the sanctions. In practice, this was not even officially considered and had no chance of passing had it been brought to a vote⁴⁶³. Italy ignored the sanctions and began preparing its economy in case stronger sanctions were imposed. The sanctions also contributed to Italy turning towards Nazi Germany. Italy, despite

⁴⁶⁰ David Low; cartoon in *The Evening Standard*; 15 February 1935.

⁴⁶¹ For an overview of the sanctions, see Cristiano Andrea Ristuccia; "1935 Sanctions Against Italy: Would Coal And Crude Oil Have Made a Difference?"; 1997; <https://www.nuffield.ox.ac.uk/economics/history/paper14/14paper.pdf>.

⁴⁶² See the Ethiopian-Italian Conflict section of *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1934, Europe, Near East and Africa, Volume II*; <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1935v01/ch26subch1>.

⁴⁶³ Similarly, Britain refused to close the Suez Canal to Italian ships, despite this being the main route for Italy to send troops, weapons, and supplies to Ethiopia.

its fascist dictatorship, had been against German attempts to overturn the Versailles Treaty and had been strongly opposed to Germany taking over Austria. In 1936, Italy started to cooperate Germany, and the two countries would become allies. Italy left the League in 1937.



Signing of the Kellogg-Briand Pact⁴⁶⁴

Although the US was not a member of the League, the US often worked with League members for peace and disarmament issues, including the 1922 Washington Naval Treaty (regulating warships), the 1928 Kellogg-Briand Pact (for the renunciation of war as an instrument of national policy), the 1929 Geneva Convention on Prisoners of War, and the 1930 London Naval Treaty (regulating warships and submarine warfare). The US Senate ratified all these treaties.

Countries frequently joined or voluntarily quit the League. One country (Yugoslavia) managed to be a founding member, left the League, and then rejoined. Countries often left the League when they intended to undertake actions against the League's principles or when, in disputes with other countries, the League found in favor of the other country.



The Permanent Court of International Justice in session

⁴⁶⁴ Photograph of the 27 August 1928 edition of *The Day* (New London, Connecticut).

The League of Nations created the **Permanent Court of International Justice**. This was an autonomous body not directly run by the League but nevertheless closely associated with it. The court, informally known as the World Court, handled various international disputes.

Another autonomous body associated with the League of Nations was the **International Labor Organization** (ILO), created as part of the Versailles Treaty⁴⁶⁵. The ILO came into effect in 1920 as a tripartite body representing governments, employers, and workers. Its remit was to help establish “universal and lasting peace... based upon social justice” by improving the “conditions of labour”. More prosaically, the ILO helped guide international labor laws and relations. It had no legislative authority but instead submitted recommendations to the League. Various works suggest the Allies’ interest in founding the ILO was to lessen the appeal of Marxist socialism and communism.

The League of Nations failed to deter Nazi Germany from embarking on wars of aggression in Europe. In 1946 after World War II, the League of Nations dissolved itself in favor of the new United Nations, and the Permanent Court of International Justice dissolved itself in favor of the new International Court of Justice (also informally called the World Court). The ILO survived and in 1946 became the first specialized agency of the UN.

⁴⁶⁵ Part XIII of the treaty was the ILO’s constitution.



THE GAP IN THE BRIDGE.

1919 cartoon about the absence of the USA from the League of Nations⁴⁶⁶

Versailles, the other peace treaties, and the League of Nations seemed to herald a new world order in 1920. There were, however, major problems to this system. Not only did the League lack the USA, the world's largest economic power by far, two other major countries were outside the system: the USSR and Germany. The Soviet Union, with its Marxist ideology and support for violent revolutionary movements, was an international pariah in the 1920s. There was no chance in the 1920s that two thirds of the League members would vote to admit the Soviet Union into the League⁴⁶⁷. Germany as the principal Allied foe in WW1 was another international pariah in the early 1920s and was excluded from the League.

This is not Peace. It is an Armistice for twenty years.

—French Marshal Ferdinand Foch in 1919, reacting to the Treaty of Versailles.

Foch believed Versailles' terms were too lenient on Germany. He wanted permanent French occupation of the Rhineland as the way to secure France against future German militarization and aggression. Many among the war's victors agreed with him. Others believed the terms were too harsh and that German resentment of them would lead to a new war as Germany sought to overturn them.

The terms were both too harsh and too lenient. The victors of WW1 would tire of enforcing them while refusing to release Germany from them. When German ultra-nationalists took

⁴⁶⁶ *Punch* magazine; 10 December 1919.

⁴⁶⁷ The USSR only joined in 1934, after the Nazis had taken over Germany in 1933. No doubt fear of Nazi intentions helped smooth the ascension of the Soviet Union into the League.

power, no effective international action was taken as they rearmed and overturned the Versailles restrictions one by one, resulting in World War II.



Despite its problems and weakness in the early 1920s, Germany with its large population and industrial prowess retained the potential to be one of the strongest countries in Europe, both economically and militarily. France, which had suffered huge human and economic losses in the war, was determined to keep Germany weak. Its foreign policy worked to block all German attempts to weaken or revise Versailles. France also ringed Germany with a **cordon sanitaire** (sanitary cordon⁴⁶⁸), a system of anti-German alliances and treaties with other European countries. France and Belgium entered a defense pact. France and Poland also entered a defense alliance together. France signed separate treaties of friendship with Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia. These latter three countries formed their own alliance, informally called the **Little Entente**, to defend against possible aggression from Austria or Hungary.

Germany was never in full compliance of the terms of the Versailles Treaty. The Germans did substantially disarm as required by the treaty, but they also hid weapons in violation of

⁴⁶⁸ *Cordon sanitaire* originally was a term denoting the cordoning off of an area afflicted with an epidemic or infectious disease, to prevent it from spreading. It acquired a metaphorical, political sense of fencing off anything deemed dangerous.

the limits. (One widespread belief immediately after the war was that Germany had concealed heavy artillery barrels inside unused chimneys.) Germany evaded the 100,000-soldier limit for the German Army in various ways, such as by beefing up some of its police forces into what were in effect forbidden military reserves. The German government also came to tolerate the existence of some right-wing militia groups, with an intention of using them as military reserves.

Sidetrip: German Militias and the Security Police

Militias



A gathering of the League of Front-Line Soldiers, aka *Der Stahl*, in 1933

German militias were mostly formed by right- and left-wing groups, such as the Ruhr Red Army of communists and socialists, the monarchist-fascist *Der Stahlhelm* (The Steel Helmet), various right-wing *Freikorps* (Free Corps) movements, and the Nazi *Sturmabteilung* (Storm Detachment, aka the SA).

Some militia groups were little more than street gangs while others were large, uniformed forces. Many of their arms were WW1 weapons that demobilizing German soldiers had kept rather than turn in. The militias were not under government control and would fight one another or government forces. Indeed, early government attempts to control the militias led to serious political problems. The *Freikorps* disdained the republican government but had good ties with the German military, which was controlled by monarchist officers. In 1920, the government tried to dissolve two major *Freikorps* units. This precipitated a right coup (the Kapp Putsch) by some military officers, *Freikorps* groups, and

other right-wing groups. The coup collapsed due to lack of support from the German public.

Communists and socialists in the Ruhr used the coup as a pretext to stage their own uprising in an attempt to win “political power by the dictatorship of the proletariat”. The Ruhr Red Army of at least 50,000 militiamen seized the Ruhr region in March 1920. The German government responded by sending in Germany Army and Freikorps forces to suppress the revolt, including Freikorps troops that had just participated in the coup. The government regained control of the Ruhr in April, with over 1,600 soldiers and militiamen from both sides being killed⁴⁶⁹.

Security Police



German Security Police, 1919

The riots, revolts, and attempted revolutions that plagued Germany in 1919 resulted in the creation of militarized, well-armed police forces to protect the government and quell insurgents. At the national level, in late 1919 Germany began creating units of Security Police (**Sicherheitspolizei**, *Sipo*) in many parts of the country. They were also known as the Green Police (*grüne Polizei*), since they wore distinctive green uniforms, in contrast to other German police forces which mostly used blue uniforms.

⁴⁶⁹ Almost all of the Ruhr was in the demilitarized zone created by the Versailles Treaty. The French objected that Germany was violating the treaty when it sent in armed forces to put down the uprising. France in retaliation occupied Frankfurt-am-Main and Darmstadt, two cities just to the east of the Mainz bridgehead. French troops withdrew later in 1920 after German troops left the Ruhr.

The military potential of the Sipo was obvious to the French, who in 1920 confronted Germany over this violation of Versailles. The Security Police were disbanded at national level and were placed under the administration of the individual German states like Prussia and Bavaria. Each state designated them as they wished, with some continuing to use Security Police while others used Security Police (*Schutzpolizei, Schupo*), State Police (*Landespolizei, Lapo*), and Order Police (*Ordnungspolizei, Orpo*). To satisfy French demands, they were not allowed to have artillery or to form rapid-reaction airborne units as had originally been planned. The French even required the green uniforms to be replaced, which they maintained were intended for military camouflage. However, these uniforms remained in use for years until they wore out, so their “Green Police” name remained popular.

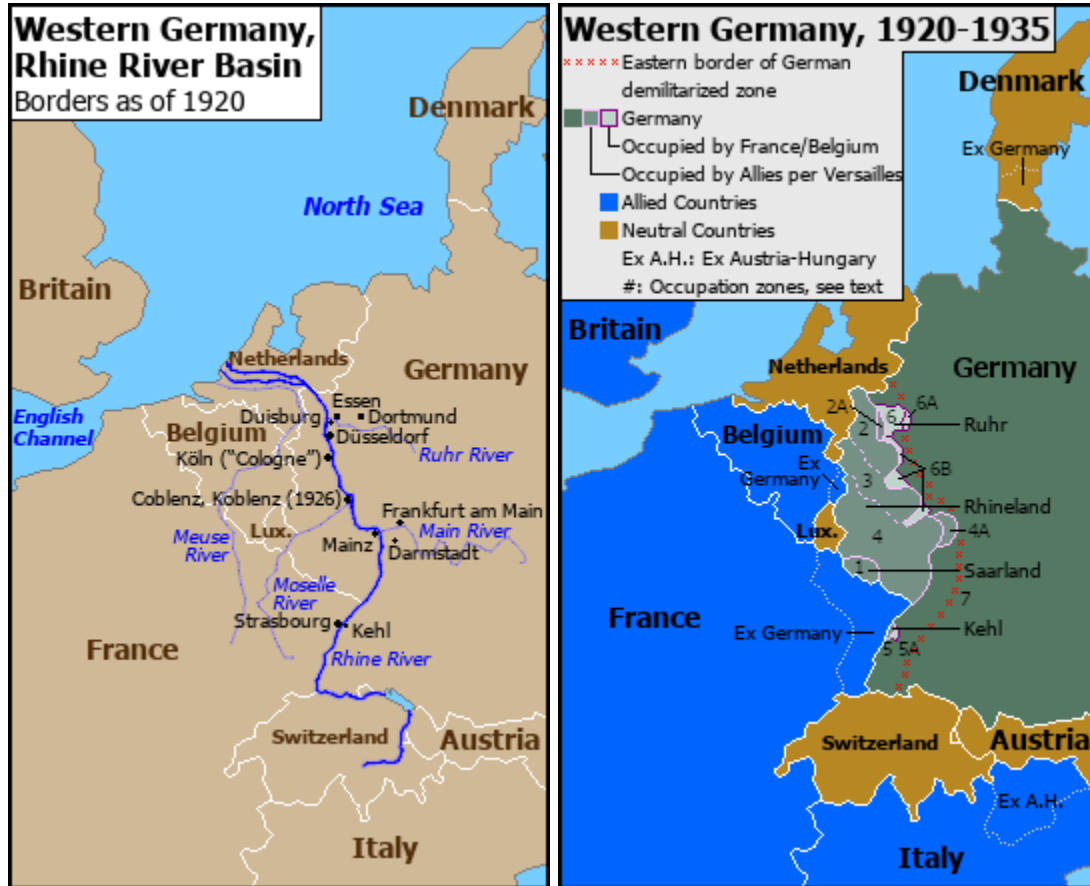
These state police forces remained highly militarized and resided in military-style barracks. They were equipped with some military-grade equipment: “specialty cars” (armored cars with machineguns) and infantry weapons such as grenades, military carbines, and machineguns. Members of these forces served 12-year terms of enlistment, just like the Army. Initially, their NCOs and officers were former NCOs and officers of the WW1 Germany Army, and their lower ranks were often recruited from Freikorps members. Britain and France consider the military nature of these forces to be a violation of Versailles. However, the overall size of these forces was not huge (about 90,000 in 1929⁴⁷⁰), and Britain would come to view this as a relatively minor issue.

Once the Nazis came into power in the 1930s, they began reorganizing these state-level police forces and absorbing some into the Germany Army. In 1936, they created a new, national-level Security Police (*Sicherheitspolizei, SiPo* or *Sipo*) organization, but this was not militarized and consisted of the Secret State Police (*Geheime Staatspolizei, Gestapo*) and the Criminal Police (*Kriminalpolizei, Kripo*). However, the Green Police would live on in another form. Almost all other German police forces together with firefighting, civil defense, and coast guard bodies, were reorganized into a national-level Order Police (*Ordnungspolizei, Orpo*) organization, reusing one of the names of the state-level militarized police. The Orpo included militarized police forces, again with green uniforms. Many

470 90,348 including 3,576 candidate members (*Anwärter*) if Wikipedia is correct:

[https://de-m-wikipedia-org.translate.google/wiki/Sicherheitspolizei_\(Weimarer_Republik\)](https://de-m-wikipedia-org.translate.google/wiki/Sicherheitspolizei_(Weimarer_Republik)) (in German). Per the page, the total size of all German police forces, including municipal police and gendarmerie, was 143,842.

Orpo units would be used in the field during World War II as police battalions and regiments. They mostly operated as security and rear-area forces but some occasionally were used in front-line combat.



Occupation of western Germany, 1920–1935, per the Versailles Treaty and related events:

1: The **Saarland** was under League of Nations administration and was occupied by Allied troops, 1920–1935. A plebiscite in 1935 resulted in an overwhelming vote to rejoin Germany.

2: The **northern part of the Rhineland** zone including the **Köln (“Cologne”) bridgehead** across the Rhine River was occupied by Allied troops, 1920–1926. The occupation originally was to end in 1925 but was extended per Versailles due to German non-compliance with the treaty.

2A: A small strip of land in the **western Ruhr** east of the Rhine River originally was not occupied. It was added to the northern Rhineland zone in 1921 due to German defaults on reparations.

3: The **central part of the Rhineland** zone including the **Coblenz bridgehead** across the Rhine River was occupied by Allied troops, 1920–1929. Coblenz was first occupied by American troops, with the French taking over when the Americans went home in 1923. In 1926, the city changed the spelling of its name to the more Germanic **Koblenz** as a sign of resistance to the French. The occupation originally was to end in 1930 but ended early due to normalization of relations with Germany.

4: The **southern part of the Rhineland** zone including most of the **Mainz bridgehead** was occupied by Allied troops, 1920–1930. The occupation originally was to end in 1935 but was ended early due to normalization of relations with Germany.

4A: The occupation of the eastern part of the **Mainz bridgehead** ended a year earlier (1929) than the rest of the bridgehead and the southern Rhineland.

5: The **Kehl river port** zone was occupied by Allied troops, 1920–1930.

5A: A **Kehl bridgehead** zone to the east of the Kehl river port zone was occupied by French troops 1923–1924 in conjunction with the French occupation of the Ruhr.

6: Most of the **Ruhr** was occupied by French and Belgian troops, 1923–1925.

6A: The **Dortmund region** of the eastern Ruhr was occupied by French troops, 1923–1924.

6B: In conjunction with the Ruhr occupation, the French expanded the **Rhine bridgeheads** and occupied them, 1923–1924.

7: Versailles required the Germans to **demilitarize** all German territory west of the Rhine River and a 50-km (31-mile) strip of territory east of the river. This meant Germany could not have any armed forces in this zone, had to dismantle existing fortifications there, and could not build new fortifications there. The treaty did not limit the duration of this demilitarized zone in any way, in effect making western Germany permanently demilitarized, even after the withdrawal of all Allied occupation forces. The Germans, however, did not completely dismantle all militarily-useful fortifications⁴⁷¹ in the demilitarized zone. Dismantling work at some sites proceeded very slow or not at all, prompting Allied, mainly French, complaints.

The victors of WW1 expected the Germans would try to evade the terms of the treaty. The Versailles Treaty created **Inter-Allied Commissions of Control**, in charge of “seeing to the **complete execution** of the delivery, destruction, demolition and rendering things useless to be carried out at the expense of the German Government in accordance with the present Treaty”⁴⁷². There were three control commissions, a military one for the land forces, a naval one, and an aeronautical one. While Germany paid for the commissions, they were staffed with Allied personnel. Once the commissions finished their duties per the treaty, they were to be disbanded, and the League of Nations was then to supervise German compliance to the disarmament provisions of the treaty.

The Military Inter-Allied Commission of Control (the **CMIC**, per its French initials from **Commission Militaire Interalliée de Contrôle**) was perhaps the most important commission and became the most contentious. It supervised the German process of handing in or destroying weapons. It caught a number of German “evasions and procrastinations”, such as attempts

471 Historic fortifications like medieval castles were spared, since these provided little protection from artillery.

472 https://www.census.gov/history/pdf/treaty_of_versailles-112018.pdf.

to hide weapons in excess of the treaty's limits and inaction on changing German law to conform to the treaty's military limitations.

The existence of the CMIC soon led to dissension among the Allied powers. The French insisted on being fully satisfied that the CMIC had achieved the "complete execution" of its duties before they would agree to disband the commission. This in effect meant the commission would never end, since it would never be fully possible to prove, for example, that Germany had not hidden weapons. The British were well aware the Germans were indeed evading and procrastinating, but they came to believe that the CMIC had succeeded in disarming Germany so much that the country no longer was a military threat. For example, even though Germany had not yet reduced its artillery to Versailles levels by June 1920, the Germans had turned over 24,000 artillery pieces to the Allies and had destroyed another 9,000, a substantial disarmament. Britain accordingly wanted to disband the CMIC and grew impatient over French intransigence. This would lead to the somewhat odd situation in which Britain secretly negotiated with Germany on how to end the CMIC⁴⁷³. This established a pattern of Britain being more lenient on Versailles and being willing to negotiate without France about its terms, which Hitler in the 1930s would exploit.

ARTICLE 8

The Members of the League recognise that the maintenance of peace requires the reduction of national armaments to the lowest point consistent with national safety and the enforcement by common action of international obligations.

The Council [of the League of Nations], taking account of the geographical situation and circumstances of each State, shall formulate plans for such reduction for the consideration and action of the several Governments.

Such plans shall be subject to reconsideration and revision at least every ten years.

After these plans shall have been adopted by the several Governments, the limits of armaments therein fixed shall not be exceeded without the concurrence of the Council.

The Members of the League agree that the manufacture by private enterprise of munitions and implements of war is open to grave objections. The Council shall advise how the evil effects attendant upon such manufacture can be prevented, due regard being had to the necessities of those Members of the League which are not able to manufacture the munitions and implements of war necessary for their safety.

473 John P. Fox; "Britain and the Inter-Allied Military Commission of Control, 1925-26"; *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 4, No. 2; 1969; <http://www.jstor.org/stable/259666>.

The Members of the League undertake to interchange full and frank information as to the scale of their armaments, their military, naval and air programmes and the condition of such of their industries as are adaptable to war-like purposes.

— Article 8 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, part of the Treaty of Versailles

The Versailles Treaty established the League of Nations and its covenant (its constitution). Article 8 of the Covenant required League members to disarm to minimum necessary. The horrors and costs of World War I also resulted in major peace and disarmament movements in many countries. There were numerous conferences on disarmament, and some treaties limiting navies, but many League members including Britain, France, and Italy manifestly did not disarm to the extent they should have⁴⁷⁴. This became a source of German resentment, as the major European powers were ignoring their international commitments to disarm while insisting on German disarmament.

France in particular could bring overwhelming military force against Germany should it chose to do so. It did not take long to happen. Germany frequently failed to deliver sufficient coal and timber to meet required reparations payments. In December 1922 and again in January 1923 the Reparation Commission declared that Germany was in default. The Commission in January on majority vote authorized the **occupation of the Ruhr**, an industrial region producing much of Germany's coal and steel, so that its coal, coke, and manufactured products could be taken for reparations. That month, France and Belgium (together with a small contingent from Italy) then occupied the Ruhr⁴⁷⁵. France also expanded the bridgeheads across the Rhine and expanded the Kehl occupation zone into a major bridgehead in southern Germany.

The occupation was very controversial and damaging to France's reputation. Britain, which has voted against the measure at the Reparation Commission, denounced the occupation, and the USA also condemned it. Italy soon changed its stance, withdrawing its contingent and coming out against the occupation.

474 The British, apparently sincerely, maintained that they had reduced their armed forces to the lowest practical levels. The fact that the Royal Navy was the world's large navy was due to the needs of the British Empire. The British Army was reduced to a quite small size, although possibly the reason for this might have more with to do with limiting government expenditures rather than out of a genuine commitment to Article 8.

475 The French and Belgians created an authority in charge of the Ruhr occupation, the Inter-Allied Mission of Control for Factories and Mines (MICUM, from the French **M**ission **I**nteralliée de **C**ontrôle des **U**sines et des **M**ines).



"4 Germans Killed in Ruhr"; *Chicago Daily Tribune* headline for 6 March 1923

Germany was far too weak try to oppose the occupation by military means, but it resisted with political and economic measures. The German government ceased making all reparations payments to France and Belgium, which in turn caused the occupiers to attempt to extract all these payments from the areas they were occupying. The occupation was met with growing passive resistance by the inhabitants of the Ruhr, which the German government encouraged and financially supported. One key tactic was for workers and officials to refuse to obey orders issued by the occupiers. In solidarity with the Ruhr, some Germans in the occupied Rhineland also began to ignore the orders of the occupation authorities. The French responded by trying to force obedience through military trials, heavy fines, detention, and expulsion from the Ruhr. Almost 150,000 Germans including workers, officials, police officers, and their families were deported⁴⁷⁶.

The occupiers were determined that the Ruhr pay for the costs of its occupation. French and Belgian troops were billeted at schools and private residences. The occupiers supplied their financial and material needs by requisitioning the funds of government bodies and the property of local government agencies, private businesses, and private citizens. When this was met with resistance, the occupiers forcibly seized what they wanted. Acts of passive resistance were sometimes met with violence by the occupiers. For example, when French troops tried to seize property from a Krupp factory on 31 March 1923, the workers staged a mass protest, a tactic that had often led to the troops withdrawing empty handed. On this occasion, the French open fired on the protesters, wounding many and killing 13⁴⁷⁷.

476 Wolfgang Sternstein; "The *Ruhrkampf* of 1923: Economic Problems of Civilian Defence"; Chapter 5 in Adam Roberts (editor); *The Strategy of Civilian Defence*; 1967; <https://www.bmartin.cc/pubs/19sd/refs/Sternstein1967.pdf>. Many general works on the Ruhr occupation claim the French expelled "150,000 non-essential workers", but they targeted protesters and resisters (particularly the leaders of the resistance) and their families. Sternstein claims 147,020 German civilians were expelled "from the Ruhr alone" in January through November 1923. This might imply the French expelled more civilians from their occupation zones outside the Ruhr and also that the French expelled more people after November 1923. Many German police were deported since they refused to salute foreign officers. Temporary forces replacing the police were organized and were joined by firefighters acting as police, but they were less effective in enforcing civil order. Street gangs and criminals began a crime wave, which the French tolerated in hopes that it would break the will of the Ruhr civilians to resist the occupation.

477 See Sternstein (previous footnote) for this and many other detail on the Ruhr occupation.

Ruhr railroad and waterway workers refused to transport goods to France or Belgium, and this spread to the Rhineland, shutting down almost all traffic on the Rhine River in Germany. To run the railroads, the occupiers at first had to use their own soldiers and then brought in French, Belgian, Czech, and Polish workers to run a skeleton system.

Strikes were the most effective form of resistance, since the occupiers depended upon the many hundreds of thousands of German workers to mine the reparations coal, create the reparations coke, and keep the economy functioning. Strikes often brought many parts of the Ruhr to a standstill. Workers could afford to go on prolonged strikes, since the German government paid the wages of workers on strike against the occupiers⁴⁷⁸. This measure was quite effective but extremely expensive.

To increase economic pressure on the Ruhr populace and on Germany in general, the French prohibited Ruhr products from being sent to the unoccupied parts of Germany, hurting the entire German economy. The Ruhr was not self-sufficient in food and depended upon the sale of Ruhr goods in the rest of Germany to finance food purchases, so this French action created a food crisis. There were many cases of hunger, including malnutrition among children. The German government responded by buying food and sending it to the Ruhr, another large expense. By September 1923, the German government simply could not afford the expenses of supporting the Ruhr. It announced the end of passive resistance and ended payments to strikers and food purchases. Nonetheless, while it lasted, the resistance had greatly reduced the economic benefit the occupiers had hoped to gain.

Acts of violent civil disobedience increasingly occurred in the Ruhr. Campaigns of sabotage were directed against Ruhr infrastructure of use to the occupiers, conducted usually by extremist German left-wing and right-wing groups. The German public mostly credited the extremist right for the sabotage. The right publicly claimed they were defending Germany⁴⁷⁹. In contrast, although German communists engaged in sabotage, their adherence to the ideal of international socialism meant they would not claim to be acting for nationalist or patriotic reasons.

478 In normal times, employers would not pay wages to striking workers, since they were not working. Many Ruhr employers were willing to do so during the occupation, but they soon ran out of money. (The strikes idled the factories, and with no products to sell the owners' revenues were greatly reduced.)

The occupiers attempted to prevent the German government from sending money to the Ruhr, which resulted in the Germans smuggling in money and the French trying to confiscate it.

479

Some sabotage resulted in the deaths of occupation troops and resulted in harsh reprisals against the inhabitants of the Ruhr, adding to the death toll inflicted by the occupiers. About 130–140 German civilians⁴⁸⁰ died at the hands of the French occupiers.

Sidetrip: The “First Soldier of the Third Reich”

Albert Leo Schlageter, a Freikorps veteran and newly-joined member of the Nazi Party, was a saboteur in the Ruhr. The French military arrested him for destroying railroad tracks and executed him after a military trial. The resulting publicity made him a martyr to the German right and a propaganda cause for the Nazis, who would portray him as the “first soldier of the Third Reich”.

Hitler would mention Schlageter in *Mein Kampf*. Once in power, the Nazis would celebrate his memory with ceremonies and a dramatic play (*Schlageter*) that promoted Nazi goals. Many places and some units were named in his honor, including the Luftwaffe’s Fighter Wing 26 “Schlageter”, the Kriegsmarine’s *Albert Leo Schlageter* training ship, and the Army’s Infantry Division Schlageter, one of the last divisions raised by the Germans in World War II.

The Ruhr occupation badly disrupted the economy of Germany, and its effects spilled over to nearby countries. Belgian, Dutch, and French companies that normally imported Ruhr coal saw their deliveries drop substantially. This did hurt French and Belgian heavy industries, but only temporarily. They were able to replace Ruhr coal with coal from Britain and from Upper Silesia in Poland⁴⁸¹. France, Belgium, and other European countries suffered worse economic damage for another reason: the growing economic decline in Germany resulting from the Ruhr occupation. Private German companies had trade or financial dealings throughout Europe. As the German economy collapsed, foreign trade and finance declined, affecting the many foreign companies that dealt with German companies.

The German government lacked funds to pay for striking workers or other costs of the Ruhr resistance, so it simply printed the money it need. Inflation had already been soaring in post-war Germany but now spun into **hyperinflation**⁴⁸². For example, a loaf of bread that had cost about 160 marks in Berlin in late 1922 cost 200,000,000,000 marks by autumn 1923. Many

480 A death toll of 130 is often quoted in English-language sources, while some German-language sources claim 137.

481 Upper Silesian coal had to be railed from Poland to western Europe, and it was not possible to send it through Germany, the shortest distance. Instead, it had to travel a more circuitous route through Czechoslovakia, Austria, and Italy. Austrian railroad workers, in sympathy for fellow Germans in the Ruhr, sometimes refused to transport the coal.

482 Historians still debate whether or not hyperinflation had already started before the Ruhr occupation, as it was already getting out of control. Regardless, inflation accelerated dramatically once the government began printing money to pay strikers.

Germans had their life savings wiped out. This particularly hurt members of the German middle class, which made some receptive to right wing extremism.

Hyperinflation did have one minor benefit for private German businesses that held a lot of debt. This debt was not indexed to inflation, and hyperinflation made it easy for many business to pay off their debts, at the expense of their lenders. This benefit was far outweighed by the damage hyperinflation did to lenders, the economy in general, and German citizens. Unemployment among union members rose from 4% in July 1923 to 23% in October. Extremist left- and right-wing groups staged uprisings or plotted coups. The experiences of hyperinflation would scar the German public for decades.



Left: Shopping for food with baskets of marks; Right: Children play with blocks made of marks

The mark had lost so much of its value that bundles of marks were used as toys. Since the mark was constantly losing value on an hourly basis, people rushed to spend them as quick as they received, buying vital necessities and items that would hold their value. One story from the time of hyperinflation is that a woman shopper placed her basket of marks down and got distracted. When she noticed, the basket had been stolen, but the marks had been left behind⁴⁸³.

Hyperinflation and other economic problems forced the German government in September 1923 to announce the end of passive resistance, to cease paying Ruhr strikers, and to resume

⁴⁸³ <https://www.econlib.org/hyperinflation-in-germany-1921-1923/>.

reparations payments to France and Belgium. All this plus the government's earlier inability to get the occupiers to withdraw from the Ruhr or to protect German citizens there discredited the moderate center-left governing coalition. This benefited the extremist groups on both the hard left, particularly the German Communists, and on the hard right. The small Nazi Party and its leader, Hitler, gained considerable national attention in late 1923 when the Nazis participated in a coup attempt against the government. Hitler served nine months in prison for the coup, where he wrote *Mein Kampf*, which gained his movement even more publicity.

The German government ended hyperinflation in the autumn of 1923 by introducing new, sound currencies, first the *Rentenmark*⁴⁸⁴ and then the **Reichsmark**. The value of the new currencies were backed by assets of value. The Reichsmark was linked to gold, returning Germany to the gold standard, pegged at the pre-war rate of 4.2 gold marks per dollar. This prevented the government from simply printing money to meet its budgetary needs, as it had to maintain sufficient gold reserves (or other assets linked to gold) for the amount of currency in circulation.

A Reichsmark was equal to one trillion paper marks. This meant almost all debts denominated in paper marks could easily be paid off. The entire 156 billion mark government debt of 1918, for example, was worth less than a single Reichsmark. While this was great for public and private debtors, it represented huge losses for lenders. Court cases and political pressure resulted in certain debts being revalued in 1925. The system was somewhat complicated⁴⁸⁵, but the core feature was that applicable debts were revalued at the rate of one Reichsmark per 40 paper marks.

The **Reichsbank**, the central bank, had abetted actions of the German government that resulted in hyperinflation. The bank was in charge of issuing currency and was supposed to protect the German economy, such as acting as a lender of last resort to help stabilize the banking system. However, it had been controlled by the German government, and by law it was required to obey orders from the chancellor. During the Ruhr occupation, the Reichsbank was ordered to expand the money supply, creating hyperinflation. A 1924 law

484 Due to lack of gold, a transition currency, the *Rentenmark* was introduced first, on 15 November 1923. It was issued by a state-owned bank, *Deutsche Rentenbank*, which backed the currency based on holdings of business and agricultural mortgages. The German public accepted the *Rentenmark* as sound, ending hyperinflation. The *Reichsmark* appeared in 30 August 1924. This was backed by gold and was equal in value to the *Rentenmark*. New *Rentenmarks* were issued through 1925, and the *Rentenmark* remained in circulation until 1948.

485 See <https://www.elibrary.imf.org/display/book/9781513511795/ch006.xml> for details.

made the Reichsbank independent of government control⁴⁸⁶. This was intended to reassure citizens, investors, and financial institutions that the bank would act in the interest of the economy rather than the whims of the government. However, the head of the bank was appointed by the government. Once Hitler was in power, he would appoint a bank head who would support Nazi goals.

Although the Ruhr occupation had finally forced the German government to cave in to French demands, the resistance while it lasted prevented France from gaining any economic benefit. The occupation also badly harmed France's international standing among many of its former allies. French actions, particularly the killing of civilians, created sympathy for the plight of the Germans in many countries. The economic turmoil caused by the occupation caused some of France's eastern European allies to oppose it, despite their fears of Germany, since many of their economies in part depended on trade with Germany.

The occupation led to more diplomatic friction between France and Britain. Finally, a new French government saw little value in continuing the occupation and agreed to the **Dawes Plan** in August 1924, which restructured reparations to make it easier for Germany to make its payments. The United States was a key player in setting up the plan, as German reparations were unofficially associated with another problem: the huge war debts many European Allied countries owed to the US⁴⁸⁷. If the European countries did not receive German reparations, they would not continue to pay on their American debts. The Dawes Plan was negotiated by a committee of American, Belgian, British, French, and Italian representatives at the Reparation Commission, with no German negotiators.

The Plan set up a system where private finance (mostly bonds raised by American financial institutions) loaned money to Germany, Germany paid reparations, and the European countries paid on the American debts. The German government would have preferred to have reparations canceled or substantially reduced, but it accepted the Dawes Plan as a good first step towards these goals. Despite agitation against the Plan by extremists, the Reichstag acceded to it.

486 In 1924–1930, the Reichsbank was governed by a council of seven Germans and seven foreign representatives from countries Germany owed reparations or debt repayment, as part of the Dawes Plan (covered later in the main text). This ended in 1930. The Reichsbank officially remained independent after this, but its government-appointed head could now set bank policies that favored government plans without any formal foreign opposition.

487 In the early war years, European countries had borrowed money from private US institutions, but once the US entered the war in 1917, the US government took over as the major lender to Allied countries. After the war, this situation became a major problem, as the European countries wanted their debts forgiven for their efforts in “saving civilization” but the US government and public naturally wanted the debts repaid.

Various German politicians saw another benefit of the plan: it partially aligned the US with Germany against its former allies. As long as Germany kept paying the full annual amounts for reparations and its international loans, the US would want its former allies to repay American war loans. Since the allies still wanted their American debts forgiven, this kept the war debts as a source of friction between the US and its former allies.

Dawes Plan lending worked in the short term. It allowed the German economy to recover, since in effect Germany was paying reparations with borrowed money rather than with German gold or goods. In the medium term, Germany would run up substantial international debts, a potential source of problems. A growing economy, however, held open the hope that Germany would be eventually able to pay reparations without the need for loans.

As part of the Dawes Plan, France and Belgium withdrew their forces from the eastern Ruhr and the expanded bridgeheads in 1924. They withdrew from the rest of the Ruhr by August 1925. Despite securing reparations payments, France's occupation mostly was failure: The reparations terms had been revised in favor of Germany, a precedent that would encourage the Germans to press for changes to the terms of Versailles Treaty. Why then did France agree to the Dawes Plan? Some histories state that France had tired of being at odds with its former allies and that French internal politics had shifted, which were indeed factors. However, the poor state of the French economy was perhaps the overriding factor. France had incurred huge debts in fighting WW1. It had also lent considerable money to Russia, a debt that became uncollectible when the Soviets took over Russia and refused to honor Russian international debts. The Western Front of WW1 had mostly been fought in northwestern France, damaging the region's agriculture, mines, and industry. France needed recurring, reliable German reparation payments for its economic recovery, and the Dawes Plan was the best available means to this end.

The Plan resulted in the growth of German heavy industry, and by 1926 the German steel industry was the largest steel industry on the continent. German manufacturing of all sorts of products increased, with German exports going to many countries throughout the world. Germany became a major, sometimes the largest, trading partner of many eastern European countries. Germany in turn imported raw materials for its factories and food for its population.

The German government was working to regain trust in Germany and end its status as an international pariah. This resulted in a set of **Locarno agreements** in late 1925. These treaties normalized the relations of Germany by addressing some of France's security concerns. In

the main treaty, Germany formally recognized its borders with Belgium and France as established by Versailles. These three countries agreed not to attack one another. Britain and Italy participated in the treaty as guarantors: In the event of unprovoked aggression by Germany against either Belgium or France, or vice versa, all other parties to the Locarno treaty were to assist the country under attack. Thus, Belgium, Britain, and Italy were obligated to come to France's aid if Germany attacked France. Each individual country did have to "satisfy itself" that the situation was indeed an "unprovoked act of aggression", and the treaty also required before action could be taken that the Council of the League of Nations formally recognize that aggression had occurred. These provisions seemed sensible at the time but would turn out to be a weakness of the treaty. By the mid-1930s, Italy was at odds with Britain and France and was becoming friendly with Germany. From then on, Italy was extremely unlikely to decide that unprovoked German aggression had occurred, which meant the security provisions of Locarno would not be triggered.

Following the Locarno agreements, **Germany joined the League of Nations** on 8 September 1926. Since it was clearly a major power, per the League's charter it immediately became a permanent member of the League Council. This led to the **ending of the Inter-Allied Commissions of Control**. They were increasingly seen as untenable after Germany's ascension into the League, and Britain was more determined than ever to end them. The British knew that Germany was still not in full compliance with the Versailles' military terms but believed that the Germans were effectively disarmed and "the time is past for haggling over these points of detail, however important they may seem to military eyes"⁴⁸⁸. France continued to insist on the resolution of all points, which would have continued the CMIC indefinitely, but Belgium came around to the British view. Isolated and worn down over this issue, the French government agreed to the end of the CMIC⁴⁸⁹. The Inter-Allied Commissions of Control accordingly withdrew on 31 January 1927. This did not end the presence of Allied occupation forces in part of the Rhineland, as the Versailles Treaty allowed their presence in the southern zone through 1935.

Locarno, Germany's entrance to the League, and the end of the commissions all improved the international situation but did not resolve all issues concerning Germany. The restrictive terms of Versailles remained in force and remained a festering issue that the German

488 Quote attributed to Orme Sargent of the British Foreign Office, 16 September 1926, per John P. Fox; "Britain and the Inter-Allied Military Commission of Control, 1925-26"; *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 4, No. 2; 1969; <http://www.jstor.org/stable/259666>.

489 France did gain the concession that the few remaining issues were to be handled through diplomacy, and, failing resolution, through majority vote by the Council of the League. This did not lead to the issues being resolved, however.

extreme right exploited. Locarno also caused problems with France's eastern European allies, since it only addressed Germany's western borders while ignoring Germany's eastern borders. To Poland, it seemed that Locarno implicitly left Poland vulnerable so that France and Belgium could have peace. This seriously weakened Polish trust in the Franco-Polish alliance.

The normalization of Germany's status together with its improving economy produced a boom time in the country, which came to be called the **Golden Age of Weimar**. The currency was stable. Industrial expansion provided many good-paying jobs and rising living conditions for the working classes. It was not truly a golden age. Even though the economy expanded, Germany ran a constant trade deficit, with the costs of its imports always exceeding the earnings of its exports. Rather than being able to pay reparations and international debt via a trade surplus, Germany was dependent upon constantly taking out new international loans, a situation that could not last long term.

The German middle class and farmers were both struggling and did not benefit from the so-called golden age. The middle class had seen their savings wiped out by hyperinflation, lowering their standard of living. Left-wing parties favored the working class over the somewhat conservative middle class and were not interested in championing middle class issues. Many in the middle class accordingly drifted towards the extreme right. The farmers in turn suffered from debt and low incomes, as a global grain surplus caused agricultural prices to fall. The farmers overall were quite conservative and accordingly ignored by the left parties. The farmers feared losing ownership of their land if the hard left came into power, as had happened in Soviet Russia under the Communists. Many farmers also drifted towards the extreme right, which responded by espousing protectionist agricultural measures. Since farmers comprised 25% of the German work force (in 1925), their turn further right hollowed out the political center. Both the middle class and the farmers would be badly affected once the Great Depression began in Germany in 1930, shifting more of them to the extreme right.

The return of Germany to the international fold meant German participation in many of the disarmament conferences. This was a problem, as Germany would press for "equality": either Versailles' military limitations on Germany should be lifted or the other major powers should have to follow similar limitations. France in its desire for "security" in turn blocked all German proposals along these lines, so that rancor rather than good relations between France and Germany typically remained the norm.

Germany also continued to break terms of the Versailles Treaty. Issues that had vexed the Inter-Allied Commissions of Control, such as Germany concealing weapons, militarizing some police forces, and failing to dismantle some fortifications, continued. Germany also had secret programs to acquire forbidden weapons like military aircraft and to procure legal weapons beyond the allowed limits. Some German companies engaged in secret armament research like submarine or aircraft design in Germany itself or in nearby countries like the Netherlands and Sweden.

Many violations of the Versailles Treaty were conducted by the Reichswehr, the post-WW1 organization that replaced the WW1 German Army and Imperial German Navy. The Reichswehr in the early 1920s often deliberately violated the treaty on its own initiative, often without informing the German government of its actions. In May 1923, the Germans had enough weapons to equip at least 18 infantry divisions, eight more than allowed by Versailles⁴⁹⁰. By 1925, the Army wanted to have the ability to mobilize 300,000 soldiers in 21 infantry divisions: 200,000 more soldiers and 11 more divisions than the treaty allowed. However, it did not have enough weapons. Instead, it could only raise an Emergency Army (*Notstandsheer*) of 16 divisions, two less than in 1923 as older weapons were wearing out. An Army of 16 infantry divisions would remain the plan for the rest of the 1920s, but in practice it was difficult to maintain sufficient weapons for even 16 divisions.

What's in a Name: Reichswehr and Wehrmacht

WW1 Imperial Germany's armed forces were the *Deutsches Heer* ("German Army", but often called the Imperial German Army in English) and the *Kaiserliche Marine* (Imperial Navy, often called the Imperial German Navy in English). In March 1919 Germany's armed forces were renamed the *Reichswehr*. Formed from "Reich" and "Wehr" ("defense"), this meant Reich Defense Force.

490 Berenice A. Carroll; "Germany Disarmed and Rearming, 1925-1935"; *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 3 No. 2; 1966;

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/422650>. The captured May 1923 documents discussed two mobilization possibilities: one for 18 infantry divisions and another for 35 infantry divisions. However, the Ordnance Office noted that it was not possible to equip the 35-division plan with existing stocks of weapons. Stocks were sufficient to equip at least 18 divisions, although there were not enough light machineguns. It also noted the 18-division Army would not be able to fight "a serious war" since it would have few aircraft, no AA guns, and inadequately-equipped support units.

The documents also noted that it was becoming increasingly difficult to procure weapons from outside Germany. It further noted that it currently was not trying to procure illegal weapons from German industry, due to the "pacifist position of the mass of the working class". This meant that the Army believed left-wing factory workers would reveal illegal weapon or ammunition production to the Allied authorities. Ammunition stocks were quite low and insufficient to fight a serious war. German factories were at best able to build 2,250 artillery shells per month (1928). In contrast, Germany in 1918 had been producing about 11 million shells per month (per <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/anecdotes-from-the-archive/war-of-the-manufacturing-machines-1916/>).

The Reichswehr had two components: the Reich Army (*Reichsheer*) and the Reich Navy (*Reichsmarine*). This did not mean the Reichswehr actually functioned as a unified armed service. Instead, the larger Army dominated the Reichswehr, while Navy actually operated as if it were independent.

After the Nazis came into power, in 1935 they redesignated the Reichswehr as the Wehrmacht. This literally meant “Defense Force”, from “Wehr” (“defense”) and “Macht” (“force” or “power”) but from at least the 19th Century its sense was “armed forces”. For example, *Britische Wehrmacht* was a common German term meaning the British armed forces.

Like the Reichswehr, the Wehrmacht was not a unified grouping of armed services. Each service was fiercely independent: the Army (*Heer*), the Navy (*Kriegsmarine*, literally “War Navy”), and the Air Force (*Luftwaffe*, literally “Air Weapon”). From 1938, there was a Wehrmacht headquarters (the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*) in theory over the HQs of the three services, but in practice this mostly was a rival HQ to the Army’s HQ (the *Oberkommando des Heeres*) rather than its superior.

The Wehrmacht was in charge of the armed forces of the German state. Nazi Party militarized organizations like the SA (the stormtrooper paramilitary), the Totenkopf-SS (the SS paramilitary in charge of the concentration camps⁴⁹¹), and the Waffen-SS (the SS conventional military forces) were not part of the Wehrmacht. The militarized units of the Order Police (*Orpo*) were also not part of the Wehrmacht but were under mixed control of the SS and civilian government. When SA, SS, and Orpo forces were in the field on military or security operations, the Germany Army did have operational control over them, but this still did not make them part of the Wehrmacht. After the war, many popular works used “Wehrmacht” as a convenient label that meant both the actual Wehrmacht as well as the Nazi Party and Orpo troops.

⁴⁹¹ The pre-war Totenkopf-SS grew in size and ended up sending several regiments to the field as security/second-rate combat troops. The SS-Totenkopf Division was formed from three of these regiments but was a Waffen-SS unit, since it was intended to be a first-rate combat division. The other Totenkopf-SS regiments were eventually absorbed into the Waffen-SS.



The Soviet Union, with its very limited access to foreign visitors and its vast state security apparatus, seemed like an ideal place to conduct secret military research and training. The Soviets were receptive, as they wanted access to modern military technology. This led to German-Soviet cooperative efforts involving the Reichswehr (the German armed forces headquarters), German companies, the Soviet government, and the Red Army. There were several joint German-Soviet facilities:

- **A chemical warfare factory, Bersol, at Trotsk (later renamed Chapaevsk⁴⁹²), near the central Volga city of Samara (later, Kuybyshev).** Almost all major belligerents in World War I used “poison gas”. After the war, many political and military leaders throughout the world expected new, more-powerful chemical weapons would be used in future major conflicts. The post-war Germans were thus very interested in chemical warfare, but Versailles prohibited Germany from using, making, or importing chemical weapons. The 1920s Soviets, too, wanted modern chemical weapons, particularly mustard gas⁴⁹³. This had been one of the most effective chemical agents of WW1, but it appeared in 1916, too late for the weakening Russian Empire to develop its own mustard gas factories. After the Soviets consolidated power in the early 1920s, their economy was in ruins and for a time they lacked the resources and funding to acquire mustard gas proficiency on their own. Germany had an advanced chemical industry

492 Trotsk had originally been named Ivashchenko but became Trotsk during the Russian Civil War in honor of Lev Trotskiy. When Stalin achieved dictatorial power, he had Trotskiy, now his bitter enemy, exiled from the USSR in 1929. Trotsk was renamed Chapaevsk, in honor of the fallen civil war hero, V.I. Chapaev.

493 Mustard gas technically was not a gas but a liquid that typically was dispersed as a fine mist of liquid droplets. It later became known as mustard agent and mustard sulfur. The Soviets usually called the agent “yperite”, a name deriving from its first WW1 use by the Germans near the Belgian city of Ypres.

and many chemical warfare experts but needed highly secret and secure sites for chemical weapon research and production. The Soviets could supply such sites, while the Germans could supply expertise and funding. This led to the German-Soviet Bersol venture plus two other chemical warfare facilities.

Bersol⁴⁹⁴ had been a Russian explosives factory in WW1. The Germans and Soviets formed a joint stock company named Bersol to redevelop the site. The new company officially was to manufacture chemicals for civilian and industrial use (bleach, caustic soda, liquid chlorine, sulfuric acid, superphosphate, plastic explosives). This was a cover for its true purpose: the production of seven types⁴⁹⁵ of chemical war agents. Some of the civilian chemicals, particularly chlorine, could be used to make chemical agents. Two of Bersol's compounds were solely for chemical warfare: phosgene and mustard gas.

Reconstruction of Bersol began in 1923, and full production was planned for 1924. Despite considerable German investment and staffing, the project schedule proved to be overly ambitious. By 1925, the plant was only making superphosphate and phosgene, to the great dissatisfaction of the Soviets. The plant began to make small batches of all seven agents in 1926, but extensive flooding of the Volga River that May submerged the entire Bersol site, disrupting production. Subsequent German-Soviet disputes over Bersol led the Germans to realize the factory would never live up to Soviet expectations without substantially more German investment, which was not forthcoming. In 1927, the two sides ended their arrangement over the facility, with the Soviets taking over the site for themselves⁴⁹⁶.

- A Junkers-run **aircraft factory** at Fili, outside Moskva. The facility used the site of an incomplete automotive factory the Russians had been building during World War I to supply their military with trucks. Junkers took over the site and brought in equipment and workers. The facility, however, was more of an assembly plant than a full aircraft factory, as it only made some of the components it needed. The rest were made in Germany and shipped to Fili. The factory built/assembled 218 Junkers aircraft in 1923–

494 "Bersol" was derived from an alternative Russian name for potassium chlorate, "Ber^{to}letova Sol" ("Berthollet's Salt"). The substance was first made by French chemist Claude Berthollet in 1786. Berthollet's name in Russian was rendered as *Bertolle*, with the compound thus being Bertoletova Sol.

495 Ian Johnson; dissertation, "The Faustian Pact: Soviet-German Military Cooperation in the Interwar Period"; 2016; https://etd.ohiolink.edu/apexprod/rws_etd/send_file/send?accession=osu1461255006&disposition=inline.

496 This actually suited the Soviets, as by 1927 the Soviet economy was recovering from the civil war. The Soviets were now funding their own chemical warfare program, which they kept secret from the Germans. The Bersol facility was accordingly integrated into the Soviet CW program.

1926, with most of the work force transitioning from German nationals to Soviet citizens working under German management.

The facility was not a success. It was supposed to build fighters for both the USSR and Germany, but the German government decided to purchase D.XIII fighters from the Dutch Fokker company instead. The Soviets in turn were dissatisfied with the abilities of the Junkers models. They also disliked the fact that the facility was mostly an assembly plant. The Soviets lost interest in purchasing the plant's aircraft, and Junkers then gave up the venture and withdrew from the Soviet Union. The facility became Soviet Aircraft Factory № 22 and went on to make recon aircraft (R-3, R-6), fighters (I-4), attack bombers (SB, Pe-2), and heavy bombers (TB-1, TB-3) for the Soviet air forces.

- An **aviation facility** for flight training, aviation research, aircraft testing, and aircraft equipment testing (including engines, weapons, bombs, bomb sights, radios, and cameras) at Lipetsk in west-central Russia⁴⁹⁷.

Lipetsk went into operation in 1924. Unlike the Fili and Bersol factories, this facility was a great success and was highly useful for the Germans. The D.XIII fighters Germany secretly acquired were shipped to Lipetsk⁴⁹⁸ and would be used there for research and training through 1933. Junkers K47 aircraft were tested at Lipetsk, as the USSR was interested in them (but only bought a few)⁴⁹⁹. The K47 was a dual-use military aircraft capable of being a fighter or tactical bomber. It was used in dive bombing experiments, tests that directly assisted the development of the Ju 87 Stuka dive bomber. The Dornier Do F two-engine bomber was tested at Lipetsk and became the Do 11 in the Luftwaffe once the Nazis came to power. A number of other German aircraft designs were tested at Lipetsk, some of which went on to have careers as Luftwaffe aircraft, mostly as trainers.

Lipetsk became very important for the development of German air power. Work there, created a foundation of trained military pilots, aerial tactics, and technical knowledge. The Soviets also benefited, receiving some training and considerable technical assistance. Soviet engineers had the ability to inspect all aircraft and equipment the

497 The facility was at first planned to be located by the Black Sea near Odessa, which would have allowed it to test both army and naval warplanes. However, the German Navy decided to withdraw from the venture, so an inland site was chosen.

498 Since Versailles prohibited Germany from acquiring military aircraft, the Fokker fighters were supposedly for Argentina, not Germany. The pretense was that Fokker was going to ship them by sea to South America, but they were actually sent to Leningrad in the USSR and then on to Lipetsk to train German pilots.

499 The Junkers K47 was not made at Fili, as the Junkers company had already withdrawn from that venture.

Germans brought in and could take German aircraft and equipment on test flights. The Soviets also conducted clandestine night operations to disassemble and reverse engineer German aircraft equipment, something that was outside the scope of the German-Soviet agreement⁵⁰⁰.

While technology covertly flowed from the Germans to the Soviets at Lipetsk, military intelligence flowed the other way. By 1930, the Soviets were building up their air forces and aircraft industry. Information about this leaked to the Germans at Lipetsk, including facts like the Soviets were vastly expanding their bomber forces and that the a new generation of Soviet fighters were under design with the goal of being better than existing German fighters.

The Germans at Lipetsk also learned was that Soviet intelligence was stealing the designs of some foreign military aircraft throughout the world. By 1932, they were certain the Soviets were stealing German aviation technology at Lipetsk itself. This soured German-Soviet cooperation to such an extent that the Soviet authorities ordered their Lipetsk operatives to stop technology theft: “German firms have patent rights; we must reject the copying or photographing of equipment as well as the disassembly of these devices”⁵⁰¹. This allowed Lipetsk to continue as a German-Soviet cooperative effort until the anti-Communist Nazis came into power in 1933. All German operations at Lipetsk ended later that year.

- A **tank research and training facility** at Kama⁵⁰² in the city of Kazan in the central Volga region. Kama was based on a former Imperial Russian Army site, with the Germans selecting the site in late 1926 and developing it in 1927. An associated *polygon* (the Russian word for a weapons testing ground) was developed for tank maneuvers and weapon firing about 10 km (6 miles) away. The polygon was quite close to industrial facilities, and machinegun fire by Soviet trainees once accidentally wounded two factory workers.

Kama would not be fully complete until 1929, but the Germans were using the facility from 1927. Germany companies used Kama to test their secret designs for light tanks

500 German aircraft companies had hoped to sell their aircraft and aviation equipment to the Soviets, so the agreement did not allow the Soviets to reverse engineer and steal the companies' technology.

501 Ian Johnson; dissertation, “The Faustian Pact: Soviet-German Military Cooperation in the Interwar Period”; 2016; https://etd.ohiolink.edu/apexprod/rws_etd/send_file/send?accession=osu1461255006&disposition=inline.

502 “Kama” was a code name coined from “Kazan” for the city it was located in and from “Malbrandt”, for the German major who selected the site. The Soviets at first used the term as KaMa. They realized this name was problematic. The USSR had a Kama River that flowed into the Volga River only about 70 km from Kazan. If foreign intelligence uncovered the KaMa name, it might suggest a Soviet connection. They renamed the site TEKO, but it remained “Kama” to the Germans.

(*Leichttraktoren*; literally, “light tractors” but “tractor” was a deception term for “tank”). What became the Panzer I and Panzer II were both developed with Kama’s assistance. Designs for medium tanks (*Grosstraktoren*; literally “heavy tractors”) were also tested there without resulting in a production model. However, Kama did test a major innovation for German medium tanks. Earlier medium tank designs had used a two-crew turret with a gunner and a commander/loader, a fairly standard arrangement throughout much of the world. A 1932 design created a three-crew turret with a commander, a gunner, and a dedicated loader. This allowed the commander to concentrate on directing the tank, resulting in more efficient operations. Three-crew turrets became the standard for German medium tanks. Despite the Soviets having access to Kama, they apparently missed the significance of this turret design. Their 76-mm gun T-34 medium tank, for example, use a less-efficient two-crew turret throughout the war, and only in 1943 did the Soviets finally adopt medium tanks with a 3-crew turret: their 85-mm gun T-34-85 medium tank.

Kama also trained German officers as tank commanders. Soviet military personnel served at Kama as observers and assistants. However, Kama apparently was not as useful to Soviet tank development as Lipetsk was to Soviet aircraft development. By the time Kama was fully operational in 1929, the Soviets already had their own substantial tank research, development, and production efforts going. They did use Kama for some research, particularly for testing British AFVs (Carden-Lloyd tankettes and Vickers tanks). The Soviets benefited from these British tanks, but the Germans did, too. The Germans examined the British tankettes at Kama and incorporated some of their findings into what became the Panzer I.

The rise of the Nazis in early 1933 brought considerable tensions with the Soviets, and the Germans departed later that year. The Soviets converted Kama into a Red Army armored warfare school.

- A **chemical warfare research facility and testing grounds** at Podosinki, near Moskva. The Podosinki facility was a joint effort to research and test offensive chemical agents for artillery and aircraft. Podosinki’s close location to the Moskva urban population made it problematic as a testing grounds for aviation chemical bombs. The Germans were also unhappy with the primitive conditions and small space available at Podosinki, which they found to be “completely unsuitable”⁵⁰³. The facility opened in

503 Ian Johnson; dissertation, “The Faustian Pact: Soviet-German Military Cooperation in the Interwar Period”; 2016; https://etd.ohiolink.edu/apexprod/rws_etd/send_file/send?accession=osu1461255006&disposition=inline.

1926, but, following a serious fire there, the Germans in 1927 abandoned the site. They would soon relocate to a new facility, at Tomka.

The Red Army took over the Podosinki site and continued to use it for their own chemical warfare testing. Podosinki's continuing value to the Soviets was due to the fact that they had several chemical warfare factories in Moskva itself, so nearby Podosinki was very convenient.

- From 1927, a **chemical warfare research facility** at Tomka, in the Central Volga region. Tomka researched offensive chemical agents for artillery and aircraft as well as means to decontaminate areas affected by persistent chemical agents. For the Soviets, Tomka was a very secret site, and even its Soviet name was a state secret: Volsk-18. Tomka was thus a precursor of what would in the Cold War become a huge Soviet complex of secret locations and "closed cities" using code names, such as Chelyabinsk-40, where plutonium was made for Soviet atomic bombs.

The rise of the Nazis in 1933 made Tomka untenable. Although the German Army wanted to continue using Tomka at least into 1934, the Soviets required the Germans to leave in 1933. They took over the facility as their own chemical warfare research center.

The Reichswehr was in deliberate violation of Versailles from the very start of the treaty. Versailles prohibited the German military from having a General Staff. Germany seemed to comply, but the Army created an administrative Troop Office (*Truppenamt*) that was actually the core of the General Staff in disguise. It created military doctrine, planned operations, and gathered intelligence. Versailles also restricted the Army to a maximum of 4,000 officers. This, too, was evaded by staffing the Troop Office with many so-called civilian experts who like General Staff officers. The French were well aware that these civilians were officers in disguise, which became one of many issues that convinced the French the Germans were evading the treaty's limits.

The upper ranks of the Reichswehr were filled with officers from the former Imperial German Army. Most were not happy with Germany being a republic and wanted to restore the monarchy or establish a right-wing authoritarian state. To counter left-wing extremism and rebellion in the early 1920s, they came to an accommodation with the German republican government: The Reichswehr would defend the government from coups and help suppress rebellious left-wing groups. In return, the government would let the generals run the Reichswehr as they wished. In essence, the government funded the Reichswehr's

budget without oversight of how the money was being spent. The Reichswehr spent some of these funds on covert, illegal rearmament efforts in 1919–1926. These were officially kept secret from the German government, although some leading politicians in the government were well aware that the Reichswehr was violating the Versailles Treaty without knowing exactly what was happening. The government itself was also violating Versailles, such as through organizing and funding militarized police forces.

In late 1926, the Reichswehr and the government came to a new accommodation: The Reichswehr accepted government control of its actions and informed the government about its secret programs. In return, the government would directly and secretly fund rearmament efforts, rather than this happening through the Reichswehr's government budget. Planning for this resulted in the multi-year **First Rearmament Program** (*Erstes Rüstungsprogramm*) of 1928. The goal was to acquire weapons, equipment, and ammunition for an Army of 16 infantry divisions. Note the plan did not increase the number of divisions from the earlier planning but instead aimed to be able to fully equip and support such a force.

In 1932, the secret **Second Rearmament Program** (*Zweites Rüstungsprogramm*) began for an Army of 21 infantry divisions. It also sought to acquire 150 aircraft for the creation of an air force. The Versailles Treaty limited Germany to 10 divisions, but it technically was not illegal for Germany to plan for more divisions as long as they were not actually raised. However, Versailles put very strict limits on the numbers and types of weapons Germany was allowed to possess, so both rearmament programs were in violation of Versailles.

In 1928, the government also funded a program to build three “armored ships,” later notorious as **pocket battleships**, as replacements for some of the Navy's obsolete battleships. These new ships were modern designs featuring extensive welded construction, all-diesel propulsion, and 283-mm (11.1-inch) guns, very heavy armament for ships of that size. This program was not secret, as Versailles allowed the Germans to replace their old battleships. It did limit the maximum displacement of an armored ship to 10,000 long tons. This was the size of a heavy cruiser; in contrast, the displacements of British *Nelson*-class battleships coming into service in the late 1920s were about 33,500 tons.



“Pocket Battleship” *Admiral Graf Spee*

Spotlight: The “Pocket Battleships”

“Pocket battleship” was not used by the Germans but via the British became a popular term for the ships in the English-speaking world. The term arose because ships main armament consisted of 28 cm naval guns (actually 283-mm or about 11.14 inches), quite large for ships of their size. Many countries suspected each of the ships exceeded Versailles’ 10,000-ton limit, but foreigners had no right to inspect the ships to find out the truth. The Germans deceptively maintained the ships did not exceed 10,000 tons, but they all exceeded the limit to varying degrees, with the largest at 12,340 tons. Still, they were equivalent of other countries’ heavy cruisers and were completely outclassed modern battleships.

The pocket battleships also caused international controversy for another reason. To prevent a future naval arms race among the victors of World War I, Britain, France, Italy, Japan, and the USA agreed to numerous limits on warships, in the Washington Naval Treaty of 1922. One provision was that cruisers could not have guns with calibers in excess of 8 inches (203.2 mm). Germany, a defeated country under far stricter naval limits, was not included in the treaty. Versailles, however, had placed no limits on the size of naval guns. The pocket battleships were thus heavily armed compared to the heavy cruisers of the major naval powers.

France in particular, objected to this. Germany in turn proposed to join the Washington Naval Treaty and reduce the size of the guns on the pocket battleships. However, their proposed terms would have allowed Germany to

build a fleet of battleships about 70% the size of France's fleet. Britain and the US were open to negotiations, but France was opposed and prevented an agreement.

Besides breaking the terms of the Versailles Treaty, Germany implemented policies and programs that were legal under Versailles but were of potential benefit to the German military. Perhaps the most consequential one was the founding of *Deutsche Luft Hansa*⁵⁰⁴ (DLH) as the nucleus of a future air force. This was a civil air transport company flying passengers and cargo with an organization of pilots, air crew, ground crew, and airport facilities. DLH was not profitable and depended upon subsidies from the government.

DLH's need for aircraft allowed German aircraft manufacturers to build advanced civilian aircraft⁵⁰⁵, with obvious spill-over effects for military aircraft. Various German air transports were essentially dual-use civil-military aircraft, as they could easily be converted to light or medium bombers. For example, the Junkers W 33 line of light transports resulted in Swedish-made Junkers K 43 light bombers, which were used by several air forces outside Germany. Even as air transports, DLH aircraft gave Germany a large civil air transport fleet with direct military potential, such as air transport (and parachuting) of personnel, weapons, and supplies, abilities the Wehrmacht exploited in the opening years of WW2.

Rockets were another dual-use technology. The Germans began developing rocket-propelled aerial vehicles in the 1920s, ostensibly for civilian uses like scientific research. This technology took a long time to develop but would result in WW2 weapons: solid-fuel rockets (the Nebelwerfer rocket artillery and other rocket weapons), liquid-fuel missiles (the A4 or "V2" ballistic missiles), and rocket-propelled aircraft (the Me 163 interceptor)⁵⁰⁶.

The Dawes Plan of 1924 had been a temporary fix to the issues of German reparations and the French occupation of the Ruhr. It left Germany with a constantly growing international debt, causing concern that debt would become unsustainable. It had only temporarily reduced reparation payments, with the full annual amount to resume after five years, and its prosperity index mechanism could even increase annual reparation payments based on the size of the German economy. It did not address what would happen if Germany had to choose between servicing its loans or paying reparations. Countries receiving reparations

504 *Deutsche Luft Hansa* is "German Air Hansa", Hansa being a reference to the medieval Hanseatic League. The German government created DHL by merging two German airline companies and giving the new company in effect a monopoly over commercial air travel and air transport within Germany. The modern German airline, *Lufthansa*, was formed in 1953 after World War II with no legal connection to *Deutsche Luft Hansa*, which had developed close links to the Nazi Party and was dissolved after WW2. However, Lufthansa did take over the logo and employed much of the staff of the former DLH.

505 Some of these aircraft broke world records, such as when the Junkers W 43 reached 12,739 meters (41,795 feet) on 26 May 1929.

506 While the Reichswehr funded rocket development, it did not have a jet engine project. The German jet engine was developed in the Nazi era.

feared that Germany would choose to pay its debts rather than reparations. It was further feared the US would support this decision, since the Germans owned so much to private American financial institutions.

The **Young Plan** of 1929 was a more comprehensive attempt to settle these issues. The annual amount of reparations Germany had to pay was reduced by 20%, far less than the 60% reduction the Germans had hoped for. The payment schedule meant reparations would continue for decades, only ending in 1988 after the equivalent of 112 billion gold marks being paid. The Plan called for the remaining Allied troops occupying the Rhineland to be withdrawn in a few months, five years earlier than the Versailles Treaty had stipulated. An international conference finalized the plan in early 1930, Germany ratified its acceptable in March 1930, and it went into effect in May 1930, retroactive to September 1929. The German right vehemently denounced its terms and demanded (vainly at the time) for all reparations to end. The Young Plan, however, was doomed: in October 1929 the New York Stock Exchange crashed. The **Great Depression** was soon underway in the US and would spread across much of the world in 1930. German soon would be unable to meet its Young Plan obligations.



Unemployed Germans waiting to enter an employment office in Hannover, 1930

The Great Depression devastated the German economy. Economic activity greatly decreased and unemployment rapidly rose, ending the Golden Age of Weimar. Germany's government budget was immediately and badly strained by the Depression. As the economy declined, so did tax revenues. However, government expenses increased. For example, Germany had introduced unemployment compensation in 1927, paid out by a special fund financed by

taxes. The mass of unemployed workers in the Depression exhausted the fund. Unemployment was just one of many factors straining the government budget. As the economy declined, so did general tax revenues, but government expenses increased. In the short term, the government took on considerable short-term debt to meet its obligations, but interest payments on this debt would increase the budget problems. Borrowing was not sustainable in the medium term as long as the budget was badly unbalanced between tax revenues and expenditures.

Spotlight: German Housing and the Depression

Germany had a housing shortage in 1920s and 1930s. Rent control was enacted during the period of runaway inflation following the end of World War I, as otherwise there would have been mass evictions and homelessness due to hyperinflation. Rent control remained in effect after hyperinflation, but low rents strongly discouraged private construction of rental housing.

The government chose to address the housing shortage through public-subsidized construction of rental housing. This was financed by a special tax on certain types of properties⁵⁰⁷. The program did not eliminate the housing problem but did result in the construction of substantial numbers of rental house... until the Great Depression hit. Revenues from the property tax collapsed by almost 90%. The government did not make up the shortfall, so construction of new housing also collapsed. Most private construction companies that had built the housing were devastated, and the ones that survived fired most of their workers. This situation contributed to the rising unemployment rate and the impoverishment of many German families. The collapse of the property tax revenues and subsidized housing construction also indirectly increased pressure on government budgets, due to unemployment benefits and other social welfare spending⁵⁰⁸.

When the Depression started, the moderate-left Social Democratic Party (SPD) was the largest party in the Reichstag and had formed a grand coalition of moderate-left, centrist,

507 Hyperinflation in 1923 had made it easy for mortgage holders to pay off their mortgages. Since the underlying value of their properties was unaffected, it made sense to tax these properties. The *Hauszinssteuer* tax, which was enacted in 1924, indirectly targeted these properties as it only applied to properties acquired before July 1918.

508 Social welfare spending was quite inadequate to relieve the distress of impoverished Germans. Much of this spending was the responsibility of state and city governments, rather than the national government, so the national government in effect was pushing some of its budgetary problems off onto lower-level government.

and moderate-right parties⁵⁰⁹. To counter the Depression, the SPD wanted to implement social programs funded by deficit spending. This might have been partially effective if implemented well and at scale, as government spending would have helped offset the decline in the private economy⁵¹⁰. Moderate right parties favored traditional economic policies and wanted to slash government spending to balance the budget, since tax revenues were declining rapidly. The governing coalition collapsed in late March 1930 over disagreements on how to handle the unemployment system.

“ ...

If public safety and order be seriously disturbed or threatened within the German Reich, the President of the Reich may take the necessary measures to restore public safety and order; if necessary, with the aid of armed force. For this purpose he may temporarily suspend in whole or in part the fundamental rights enumerated in Articles 114, 115, 117, 118, 123, 124 and 153.

...

The President of the Reich must immediately communicate to the Reichstag all measures taken... On demand of the Reichstag these measures must be abrogated.

...”

— Excerpt from Article 48 of the German constitution.

Articles 114, 115, 117, 118, 123, 124 and 153 established basic rights such as freedom from arbitrary arrest, freedom of speech, freedom of association, etc. “On demand of the Reichstag these measures must be abrogated” meant that the Reichstag could nullify an action of the president by majority vote. It would do so once in 1930, although with unfortunate consequences.

The Reichstag also had two powers to use against a president who abused power. Article 43 allowed the Reichstag to initiate a recall election on a sitting president. The president’s powers were then temporarily while the election was held, and the president could be removed from office by a two-thirds vote of the general electorate. Article 59 allowed the Reichstag to impeach the president for violating the constitution or German law, with the case then being tried at the Supreme Judicial Court. Both of these actions were politically fraught and never resorted to.

In place of Reichstag coalitions forming the government, from late March 1930 a series of **presidential cabinets** were created to run the government. Hindenburg, the German


509 The coalition included the Social Democratic Party, the German Democratic Party, the Center Party, the Bavarian People’s Party, and the German People’s Party.

510 To increase effectiveness, the Reichsbank would also have had to adopt pro-active policies like effective protection of the banking sector. Complicating all this was Germany’s high levels of international debt.



president, would use his constitutional power to appoint a chancellor of his choice without regard to Reichstag coalitions. The president and the chancellor would then select a set of ministers to form a cabinet. If the cabinet failed to get its programs passed into law by the Reichstag, Hindenburg would use his ability to enact most of these programs by emergency decree via Article 48 of the constitution. Governing by decree was controversial, as it could be questioned whether public safety and order was indeed “seriously disturbed or threatened”. However, a simple majority vote in the Reichstag was all it took to nullify a decree.

Hindenburg wanted to revise or remove the limits the Versailles Treaty placed on Germany. He was a monarchist but in the short term was opposed to the restoration of the Hohenzollerns, realizing that international reaction to a restoration would end chances of renegotiating Versailles. He was also a conservative and a WW1 field marshal, so he favored conservative or right-wing chancellors with military backgrounds. He would not, at first, appoint any Nazis to be chancellor or ministers, as he disliked Adolf Hitler personally and the vulgar Nazi Party in general.

Hindenburg’s Presidential Cabinets

<i>Dates</i>	<i>Chancellor</i>	<i>Notes</i>
<p><i>First Cabinet:</i> 30 Mar. 1930–10 Oct. 1931</p> <p><i>Second Cabinet:</i> 10 Oct. 1931–1 June 1932</p>	<p>Heinrich Brüning</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WW1 infantry lieutenant; awarded Iron Cross • Center Party; for corporatist⁵¹¹ “Christian democracy” • Pursued strong austerity policies as chancellor • Unable to obtain form a Reichstag governing coalition so had to rely on presidential emergency decrees • Banned the Nazi SA and SS for plotting a coup • Due to political maneuvering of Schleicher, Brüning lost support of Hindenburg in May 1932 and resigned

⁵¹¹ Corporatism is a political system where the government is under the control of large interest block, aka “corporate groups”. A corporate group can be any powerful association, not just businesses or corporations. Corporate groups could be businesses but also agricultural associations, military groups, labor associations, etc.

1 June 1932–3 Dec. 1932	Franz von Papen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aristocrat and WW1 German General Staff officer • Led a <i>Freikorps</i> unit against the 1920 Communist uprising in the Ruhr • Center Party; no party affiliation when chancellor • Sought Nazi Party support to form coalition government, lifting the ban against the SA and SS • Intended but failed to declare martial law, which would have allowed him dictatorial powers; • Hindenburg dismissed Papen due political maneuvering of Schleicher, now Minister of Defense
3 Dec. 1932–30 Jan. 1933	Kurt von Schleicher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aristocrat and WW1 German General Staff officer • Reichswehr general and Minister of Defense • Since Reichswehr was supposed to be apolitical, did not join a political party, but favored the Nazi Party • Set up a public works jobs program to try to reduce unemployment • Papen managed to get Hindenburg to remove Schleicher and appoint Hitler as chancellor⁵¹²

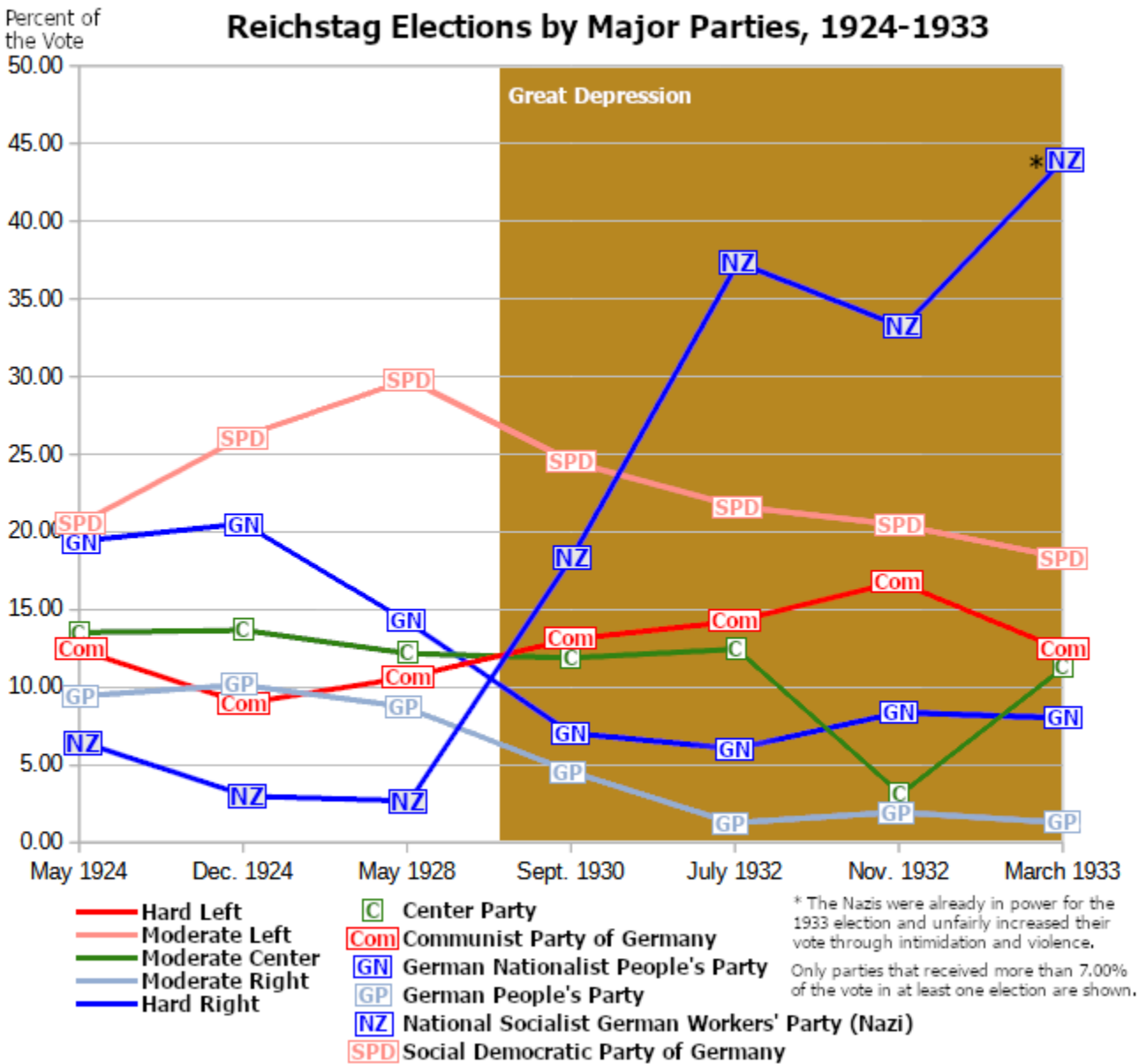
Heinrich Brüning was chancellor of Hindenburg's first presidential cabinet. He could not get a Reichstag majority to pass his austerity program and in the summer of 1930 Hindenburg used his emergency powers to proclaim the program by decree. This provoked the SPD to call a vote to nullify the decree in July 1930. The extreme left (the Communists) and the extreme right (the Nazis and the DNVP) joined with the SPD to vote down the decree. In response, Brüning had Hindenburg call new elections for the Reichstag. The election was held in September and saw the Nazis become the second largest party in the Reichstag.

The Great Depression revitalized the prospects of the Nazi Party. They had earlier gained some brief interest due to their participation in the attempted coup of 1923⁵¹³. Interest had quickly waned, and from December 1924 they had become a fringe party for the rest of the 1920s, gaining no more than 3% of the vote. In the 1930 elections, they received 18% of the vote, while the SPD, the largest party, saw its vote decline from about 30% to about 25%.

⁵¹² The appointment of Hitler as chancellor can be considered a temporary continuation of the presidential cabinet system.

Hitler's Nazis and the German National People's Party did form a coalition but lacked a majority in the Reichstag, so Hitler had to rely on Hindenburg's constitutional emergency powers. The unfair elections of March 1933 finally got the coalition a majority in the Reichstag, which Hitler used to establish his dictatorship.

⁵¹³ Other right-wing nationalist groups and individuals participated in the coup, including Erich Ludendorff, a foremost German WW1 general. The coup was called the Beer Hall Putsch because it began in the Bürgerbräukeller, a huge München beer hall. (German beer halls were popular spots for socializing and conducting politics.) *Putsch* is a German word for coup.



The chart shows only the larger parties. For more details, see the [Reichstag Elections appendix](#).

The hardships of the Great Depression fueled the rise of extremist as people looked for extreme solutions to their problems. On the right, the Nazis gained considerable support at the expense of both moderate and hard right parties⁵¹⁴. Hitler’s speeches throughout the 1920s had always blamed Jews and communists for Germany’s problems, claiming a Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy sought to destroy the economy and turn the country communist.

514 Some historians and economists have speculated that the Great Depression did not necessarily bring political success for the Nazis, as other factors could have been at work. However, recent statistical research shows that the German government’s austerity measures in response to the economic crisis increased suffering among the Germans (higher mortality rates), which were correlated with the rise in support for the Nazis. While “correlation is not causation”, the implication is clear that the Nazis benefited. See Gregori Galofré-Vilà, Christopher M. Meissner, Martin McKee, and David Stuckler; “Austerity and the Rise of the Nazi Party”; 2018; <http://www.nber.org/papers/w24106>.

Hitler's claims of pending economic collapse had been ridiculed during the 1928 Reichstag elections but made him look prescient once the Depression started. The Depression also allowed him to blame Jewish bankers for Germany's current plight. Antisemitism was common in Germany and widespread on the German right, but the Nazis' most extreme version of it now won them followers.

On the left, the German Communists gained popularity at the expense of the moderate-left SPD, although their rise in support was much more modest than that of the Nazis. The SPD viewed the 1930 election as a disaster and feared another one would see even more support for the extreme left and right parties. The SPD would now refuse to call a vote on presidential decrees, since this was likely to cause new elections, but extremist parties ensured the Reichstag had to vote on the decrees. To avoid new elections, the SPD voted in favor of the decrees and thus appeared to be supporting the austerity measures of the Brüning cabinet. This allowed the Communists to demonize the Social Democrats as "social fascists", causing the SPD to lose supporters⁵¹⁵.

Almost a third of the Reichstag was under Nazi or Communist control, which further weakened the German governing system. The Communists and the Nazis (at first) refused to cooperate with other parties, while various moderate parties in turn were not willing to join a coalition that included extremist parties. However, the moderate parties could not all agree with one another, so it was now very difficult to assemble a coalition that commanded a Reichstag majority. The rising strength of the Nazis and Communists, both of which hoped to overthrow the German republic, also scared foreign investors, and considerable foreign capital left the German economy immediately after the September 1930 election. However, the Brüning cabinet remained in power and continued to exclude the Nazis, so fears about German stability soon subsided.

Brüning was now also able to implement his austerity program by presidential decree. The results were strongly deflationary: slashing government spending while raising taxes. The government responded to the funding problems of the unemployment program by limiting who qualified for the program and reducing payments to those who did qualify. Austerity did allow the country to meet its international loan obligations, including those of the Dawes and Young Plans, but deflation inflicted more damage to the economy. Company revenues and worker wages decreased. Private debt, most of which was not indexed to deflation,

⁵¹⁵ The German Communists had occasionally called the SPD social fascists since 1923, but by the 1930s it had developed this into party policy. It now tarred the SPD as fascist and claimed all other parties in Germany except the Communists were fascist. It claimed it was the only anti-fascist party in Germany. Paradoxically, both the Communists and the Nazis often voted the same way in the Reichstag, with the goal of causing problems for Weimar republic and democracy in general.

became harder repay. Many companies shed employees or went bankrupt, increasing the already-high unemployment rate. Unemployed workers with reduced or no unemployment benefits were further radicalizing and joined extremist parties. With no work to occupy them, many joined the violent paramilitary arms of the extremist parties. Street violence increased between Communists paramilitaries like the League of Red Frontline Fighters⁵¹⁶ and right-wing paramilitaries like the *Stahlhelm* and the Nazi SA and SS⁵¹⁷. All this made German politics even less stable.

The Great Depression was not just a one-time economic crisis but an ongoing series of shocks. Across the world, government actions sometimes made the economic problems worse: As the economy declined, tax revenues fell and government budgets went badly out balance. A typical response was to cut government spending, but this further depressed the economy, leading to more unemployment and hardship. Many countries including the US attempted to save jobs by protecting their domestic companies from foreign competition, often through high tariffs and other barriers to imports. This was quite damaging to the system of international trade and particularly affected Germany, a major industrial exporter. Germany was also dependent upon imports, especially for food and raw materials. Germany in the 1920s had run a trade deficit, with its imports costing more than its exports earned. In the early 1930s with the Depression, this worsened as German exports declined faster than its imports. This helped to drain the foreign currency reserves of the Reichsbank, further complicating Germany's ability to trade.

One partial relief would have been for Germany to devalue its currency in relation to other currencies. This would have made German products cheaper in international markets and led to more exports. It would have made imports to Germany more expensive, eventually decreasing them. Both effects would have improved Germany's balance of trade.

Devaluation, however, was unacceptable for two reasons. More-expensive imports risked igniting inflation, which the German public feared given their earlier experiences with hyperinflation. The politicians might have eventually taken this risk but for the second reason. German public and private international debt had to be paid in gold or foreign

516 The League of Red Frontline Fighters (aka the Alliance of Red Front-Fighters, from *Roter Frontkämpferbund*) had been banned in 1929 due to its violence. Many of its members simply continued to operate illegally as the league or formed other pro-Communist paramilitaries like the Anti-Fascist Battle League (aka Fighting-Alliance Against Fascism, from *Kampfbund gegen den Faschismus*).

517 Brüning's cabinet would ban the SA and SS for their violence acts on 13 April 1932, leading to an immediate drop in political violence in Germany. Papen's more authoritarian cabinet would lift the ban on 15 June 1932 and tacitly encourage Nazi street violence, in hopes that unrest would result allow them to replace the republic with a military dictatorship.

currency. Devaluation would have had the effect of increasing the debts' Reichsmark burdens on both the government and private companies, an unappealing prospect.

Devaluation was attractive to other countries that exported more than they imported, as long as they weren't highly indebted like Germany. In September 1931, Britain devalued its currency, which led to an increase in British exports. A number of other countries soon followed. This further increased Germany's trade and economic problems, as other countries' devaluations made German products relatively more expensive, leading to a fall in German exports. Falling exports meant less industrial activity and more unemployment.

The presidential cabinet system added to Germany's fiscal problems. The constitution gave the Reichstag the right to authorize sovereign (foreign) borrowing, and the Reichstag's Debt Council blocked the cabinet from arranging foreign loans by emergency decree. It could not, however, stop the government from arranging domestic financing via decree⁵¹⁸. The government came to rely on selling interest-bearing German Treasury bills to German banks. As domestic government debt rose, German banks would become increasingly reluctant to buy Treasury bills. For example, in early May 1931, the government mostly failed to find buyers for a new set of government bonds⁵¹⁹. All this put further financial pressure on the German government.

*German International Debt, Excluding Reparations (millions Reichsmarks), May 1932*⁵²⁰

<i>Origin of Debt</i>	<i>Short Term Debt</i>		<i>Long Term Debt</i>		<i>Total Debt</i>	
<i>Country</i>	<i>Amount</i>		<i>Amount</i>		<i>Amount</i>	
USA	3,227	31.8%	5,165	49.3%	8,392	40.7%
Netherlands	1,661	16.4%	1,914	18.3%	3,575	17.3%
Switzerland	1,615	15.9%	1,146	10.9%	2,761	13.4%
Britain	1,286	12.7%	1,129	10.8%	2,415	11.7%
France	474	4.7%	482	4.6%	956	4.6%
Sweden	136	1.3%	167	1.6%	303	1.5%
Belgium	119	1.2%	80	0.8%	199	1.0%
Czechoslovakia	157	1.5%	18	0.2%	175	0.8%
Italy	73	0.7%	74	0.7%	147	0.7%

518 See <https://www.elibrary.imf.org/display/book/9781513511795/ch006.xml>.

519 Thomas Ferguson and Peter Temin; "Made in Germany: The German Currency Crisis of July 1931"; 2001;

https://economics.mit.edu/sites/default/files/2022-08/Made%20In%20Germany%20The%20German%20Currency%20Crisis%20of%20July_0.pdf. This failure occurred *before* Creditanstalt, a major Austrian bank, unexpectedly collapsed in May. The Creditanstalt problem thus did not cause the failure of the bond issuance, as is sometimes implied.

520 *Source*: Adam Klug; "The German Buybacks, 1932–1939: A Case for Overhang?"; 1993; <https://ies.princeton.edu/pdf/S75.pdf>.

Denmark	51	0.5%	9	0.1%	60	0.3%
Norway	14	0.1%	5	0.0%	19	0.1%
Other Countries	1,340	13.2%	281	2.7%	1,621	7.9%
TOTAL	10,153	100.0%	10,470	100.0%	20,623	100.0%

A US dollar exchanged for 4.2 Reichsmarks. German international debt was mainly issued by private financial institutions or investors. Almost all of the public debt and the great majority of the private debt was in the form of bonds issued in the currencies of the lenders and had to be repaid in those currencies (or in gold).

Roughly a third of German long term debt was borrowing by German state entities (the national government, the state governments, and other public bodies), and the rest was borrowing by private banks, companies, other organizations, and individuals.

The economic crisis in Germany continued to worsen in 1931. Many European banks including German ones were weakened by the Great Depression. In May 1931, Creditanstalt, the largest private bank in Austria, failed, a signal that even seemingly-strong European banks could be in trouble. German banks had little or no exposure to Creditanstalt, so this bank's collapse did not lead to a general banking crisis in Germany. Only a few German banks, those that were believed to be weak, did start to see a run on their deposits⁵²¹. It was the German government itself that, in June, inadvertently started a currency crisis and the collapse of the German banking system.

Brüning's cabinet planned to continue its policy of severe government austerity by presidential decree. The 1931/32 government budget, however, required even more tax increases and massive spending cuts than the 1930/31 budget did. This created considerable dissent in the Reichstag with the possibility that the president's decree might nullified. The ever-unpopular reparations payments contributed to the budget strain, and it was a common German view that the German people were unfairly suffering while Germany's creditors were being paid in full. Brüning himself wanted to eliminate reparations, and he believed that taking an aggressive stand on them could overcome Reichstag opposition to the budget. In early June 1931, he **announced that Germany was neither able nor willing to pay reparations**. This was a shock to the international order. European countries receiving reparations of course did not want them to end. The US also did not want reparations eliminated, as countries that stopped receiving reparations would almost certainly also stop repaying their American war loans. The US soon arranged an international agreement for a one year moratorium on the payment of all international debts. The German government

521 Harold James; "The Causes of the German Banking Crisis of 1931"; *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 37 No. 1; 1984; <https://doi.org/10.2307/2596832>.

had escaped paying its Young Plan obligations for a year and continued its austerity program, but it came at a huge cost: the country was plunged into a currency crisis and a banking collapse with the government then caught in a fiscal crisis.

The threat that Germany would not pay reparations created a panic that Germany might also default on its international loans, might impose controls to prevent capital from leaving the country, and might devalue its currency. Foreign investors, foreign companies, and other organizations began withdrawing their deposits from German banks and reducing their exposure to the German economy. Since currency controls would also hurt German exporters, some large domestic companies began moving some money out of the Reichsmark and Germany. As capital fled Germany, the foreign currency reserves at the Reichsbank were badly depleted, resulting in a **currency crisis**. This imperiled Germany's international trade, as these reserves were necessary to clear transactions between the Reichsmark and foreign currencies. The Reichsbank in late June imposed restrictions to try to deter German companies from transferring money out of the country. This further reduced confidence in the German economy.

Capital flight weakened German banks. Danat Bank was soon in serious trouble. It had already lost many foreign deposits, and a run on its remaining deposits began in July when rumors circulated that its large loans to Nordwolle, a German business, were at risk. The rumors were right, as Nordwolle went bankrupt later that month, and Danat's loan losses forced it into insolvency⁵²². This started a **general banking crisis across Germany** as depositors withdrew their money. The weakness of the banking sector in turn meant the government was unable to sell new issues of Treasury bills. This was a fiscal crisis for the government, as the money to be raised from sale of the bills was needed for the government budget. The prospect of the government being unable to pay its debts in turn decreased confidence in the soundness of the banks, intensifying the run on them. The bank sector collapsed, with various banks and credit cooperatives becoming insolvent.

Germany had to leave the gold standard and impose capital controls. The government, the Reichsbank, and solvent German financial institutions undertook emergency measures to rescue the banking sector, at a cost of about 1% of 1931 German GDP⁵²³. The German

522 The Reichsbank was supposed defend the banking system as "the lender of last resort", but due to the Great Depression and other factors it did not have the resources to act as such. For more details on this situation, see pages 38–39 of Thomas Ferguson and Peter Temin; "Made in Germany: The German Currency Crisis of July 1931"; 2001; https://economics.mit.edu/sites/default/files/2022-08/Made%20In%20Germany%20The%20German%20Currency%20Crisis%20of%20July_0.pdf.

523 The bailout was arranged to delay the full cost for years, and some banks taken over by the government were able to be sold later, recouping some of the expense. The overall cost to the state was still almost 1% of 1931 German GDP.

economy, which was already in a very bad state, grew worse. Brüning's self-inflicted economic crisis benefited the Nazis, and the July 1932 Reichstag elections saw them win the largest share of the vote. Electoral success still did not bring the Nazis into the government at this time. German right-wing parties could not form a majority government without the Nazis, and the Nazis refused to enter a coalition unless Hitler became chancellor.

Economic weakness, the currency crisis, and other financial distress caused the German government to decree a number of **economic controls over the German economy**. These allowed, for example, bureaucrats to set some wages and prices. They could also decide what sectors and companies had priority in receiving Reichsmarks when clearing international trade transactions. This meant the government favor imports like food and raw materials over imported industrial products that competed with German products. The Nazis would extensively use these controls once they came into power⁵²⁴.

The one year moratorium on debt payments was to end in the summer of 1932, but by the end of 1931 it was clear that Germany would not be able to resume reparation payments anytime soon. The major powers met in 1932 at the **Lausanne Conference** where they agreed to reduce German reparations by 90%. Germany was to issue bonds for the full amount, but these bonds could not be redeemed for three years, allowing time for the German economy to recover. Germany also was required to continue to pay its international loans and meet its other non-reparation obligations under the Dawes and Young Plans. Germany agreed and issued the bonds. The treaty for the Lausanne Conference, however, never officially went into effect. It was contingent on a separate agreement in which the US would greatly reduce or forgive its war loans, something the US refused to do. European countries with outstanding American war loans accordingly refused to ratify the Lausanne treaty. Nevertheless, Lausanne marked the end of reparations, as the Nazis would soon come into power and would not honor the bonds.

Lausanne made the German economy more attractive to foreigners, who began buying privately-issued German bonds. This helped German banks, as they were able to raise cash by selling bonds secured by their illiquid assets, and they then lent the cash to German businesses. The German economy began to improve in the second half of 1932. While unemployment was still high and economic problems abounded, things were at least getting better rather than worse.

⁵²⁴ The Nazis likely would have enacted similar controls if they had not already existed. Their existence, however, meant the Nazis could not have to spend the time in determining the controls and staffing the large bureaucracy needed to enforce them.

Unemployment in Germany was a worse problem in the early 1930s than even in the US. After Lausanne, Brüning's cabinet began implementing state-subsidized job creation programs. The government did not have the tax revenues to fund these programs, but it was neither financially nor politically feasible to openly fund these programs through deficit spending. The government found alternative means to fund the programs. One was a tax deferment scheme: Over the course of a year, the government issued tax remission certificates for payment of certain taxes and for companies that hired workers. Certificate holders earned interest and could later use the certificates to pay various taxes⁵²⁵. Crucially, the Reichsbank allowed the certificates to be used as collateral when taking out bank loans. The government hoped that companies would invest in their businesses through borrowing via the certificates, resulting in job creation⁵²⁶. However, companies were not restricted on how to use their loans and did not have to create jobs.

Another effort was a public works program, with the explicit goal of creating jobs. It was to be financed by hidden, off-budget deficit spending. A supposedly private company, the German Society for Public Works, known as *Öffa*, was set up, but it was actually an undercapitalized shell company effectively under government control. The government would issue public works contracts to German companies but did not fund the projects from the budget. Instead, *Öffa* paid the contractors with private **Öffa bills**⁵²⁷, which were interest-bearing promissory notes redeemable for Reichsmarks via the Reichsbank. They were comparable to medium-term Treasury bills but were discountable, allowing them to be sold for sums less than their face value while still being redeemable for the full amount. They could be sold by the contractor to commercial banks and to other companies. *Öffa* bills were backed by the Reichsbank, which also discounted the bills. The system in effect expanded the money supply outside the legal system of gold-back Reichsmarks. The Reichsbank was thus allowing the government to finance public works by deficit spending, without it showing up in the government budget.

525 The certificates were issued for payment of general sales tax, real estate tax, and business tax, as a rate of 40% of the amount paid, over the course of 1 Oct. 1932 through 30 Sept. 1933. They could be used in 1934–1938 to pay any taxes except income tax and corporation tax, at a rate of 1/5 the certificates per year. See

<https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/bullnattax41788284?journalCode=bullnattax>.

526 See <https://www.elibrary.imf.org/display/book/9781513511795/ch006.xml> and

<https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/bullnattax41788284?journalCode=bullnattax> for more details.

527 The German name of the company was *Deutsche Gesellschaft für öffentliche Arbeiten* AG, hence the name *Öffa*. The “bills” in “*Öffa* bills” came from the fact that they were commercial bills of exchange, legally-binding written orders that required one party to pay a fixed sum of money to another party under specified conditions. *Öffa* bills were only issued to finance public works.

The scheme was inherently inflationary, but this problem was pushed off into the future. Most *Öffa* bills were in theory redeemable after three months. However, the government had the right to repeatedly delay the redemption of the bills, for up to five years. (Since the bills paid a good rate of interest, most *Öffa* bill holders did not mind the delays in redeeming them.) The hope was that the system would return Germany to full employment within five years, and the expanded economy would then be generating sufficient tax revenues to pay off the *Öffa* scheme.

The *Öffa* scheme completely depended upon the cooperation of the supposedly-independent Reichsbank. Hans Luther, one of the leaders who ended hyperinflation in 1923, was now head of the bank. He was concerned about the inflationary nature of the system and allowed only a relatively limited number of *Öffa* bills to be issued.

The scheme also depended upon private companies and banks being willing to accept *Öffa* bills, so government legislation ensured that the bills were attractive. Banks liked them since they were discountable. This made them more liquid assets than the Treasury bills, which were not discountable. A law capped the amount of profits companies could issue as dividends to the shareholders and as bonuses to management⁵²⁸. Profits in excess of the cap had to be invested in government bonds or in *Öffa* bills, which earned an attractive rate of interest.

Political impasse coupled with intrigues by Kurt von Schleicher caused Brüning to lose support of Hindenburg and resign in the spring of 1932. Schleicher was an extremist right-wing Reichswehr general who wanted to replace the Weimar republic with a dictatorship, preferably with Schleicher himself as dictator. He was not a Nazi but sympathized with them and hoped to use their support to overthrow the Weimar republic. Schleicher had given the Nazi SA an unofficial role as a supplement to the Germany Army, and he intended to eventually merge the huge but ill-disciplined SA into the 100,000-man Army. The Nazis would have other ideas.

Schleicher was the Reichswehr's official liaison between the German military and the German government, so he had frequent contact with Hindenburg. Schleicher gained considerable influence over Hindenburg, who disliked the German left and, at a minimum, wanted a more right-wing government. Although the Nazi Party and Hitler would

⁵²⁸ The cap was equal to 6% of the par value of the company's stock. This was quite limiting, as par value was the value of a share of stock as set by the corporate charter, and the company could not issue stock below that value. Companies could issue stock above par value, so they usually set par value quite low to give them flexibility. Par value did not determine the price of the company's shares as sold in stock markets.

ultimately destroy Weimar in 1933, it was the influence of Schleicher and actions of Hindenburg that fatally wounded the republic in 1932.

When Brüning resigned, Schleicher wanted to remain the power behind the scenes, so he had Hindenburg appoint Franz von Papen as chancellor. Papen was a conservative aristocrat, had won an Iron Cross in WW1, and supported the German right. Schleicher himself became Minister of Defense in the Papen cabinet, while remaining a Reichswehr general. Papen favored a more authoritarian form of government and tried to form a coalition that included the Nazi Party. The Nazis would not join unless Hitler was made chancellor, which was unacceptable to Papen and Hindenburg. Schleicher was willing to make Hitler chancellor, which alienated Papen. Schleicher then maneuvered to get himself made chancellor in place of Papen in December 1932. Papen was bitter about this and now conspired with the Nazis to make Hitler chancellor.

The Nazis were actually in some disarray by this time. A Reichstag election in November 1932 saw the Nazis get just 33%, down from its 37% share in the previous election. This was the third Reichstag election in less than three years, and Nazi Party finances were now quite strained. All this caused considerable infighting in the party. Schleicher attempted to split up the Nazi Party, hoping that defecting Nazi factions would join with other right-wing parties to form a governing coalition under the general. Despite Nazi discord, the party's leaders refused to abandon Hitler.

Schleicher's significant accomplishment as chancellor was a major expansion of the jobs creation program begun under Brüning. Öffa bills could now be issued by other financial institutions, and the amount of bills that could be issued was greatly increased. Luther at the Reichsbank had agreed to the enlargement of the scheme as necessary but was still concerned with its inflationary aspects. The expanded jobs program began operating immediately, but it took time before it had significant effects on unemployment. When it did, the Nazis would be in power and would take credit for it.

Political maneuvering led Hindenburg to appoint Hitler as chancellor in January 1933. Papen became vice chancellor with the understanding he had the right to be present at every meeting between Hindenburg and Hitler. The Nazis also received only a minority of ministerial seats in the cabinet (three out of eight), and cabinet decisions were to be made by majority vote. All this was meant to "tame" the Nazis and help "box in" Hitler. Nevertheless, the Nazis were now in the government, and this was enough to destroy the Weimar Republic. The non-Nazi majority in the cabinet actually did little to tame the Nazis,

as most of these ministers were right-wing politicians who favored in varying degrees much of the Nazi program.

The Nazis abused their governmental powers to turn the state into a dictatorship. Hitler called for new Reichstag elections, which were scheduled for early March. Hitler's plan was to secure an outright majority for the extreme right (the Nazi Party and the German National People's Party, the DNVP), so that they could pass legislation, the **Enabling Act**⁵²⁹, that would give Hitler dictatorial power. The law was designed to give the German cabinet (and hence Hitler as chancellor) all legislative power without oversight from the Reichstag or the president. It would allow the government to suppress rights granted in the constitution.

Hitler was now in frequent contact with Hindenburg and in early February persuaded him to issue an emergency decree that limited freedom of the press and the right to assembly⁵³⁰. This allowed the Nazis to suppress support for rival political parties. They at first targeted the Communists, with Hitler claiming he was saving Germany from communism, but as the election approach all political parties other than the Nazis and the DNVP were harassed.



The Reichstag building on fire, 27 February 1933⁵³¹

On 27 February 1933, arson at the Reichstag burnt part of the building. Marinus van der Lubbe, a Dutch communist living in Germany, was arrested and confessed to setting the fire in hopes of rallying German workers against fascism. The Nazis blamed the Communists for the fire, while others claimed the Nazis set the fire as a false flag operation to take more power for themselves. Van der Lubbe did set the fire, but it is still uncertain if he was working alone, was part of a larger Communist conspiracy, or had been manipulated into

529 Officially, the Law to Remedy the Distress of People and Reich.

530 Officially, the Decree of the Reich President for the Protection of the German People.

531 <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-europe-43219509>.

setting the fire by the Nazis. Hitler got Hindenburg to issue the “Reichstag Fire Decree”⁵³² on 28 February. The government could now further restrict rights of assembly, freedom of speech, and freedom of the press. The government was also allowed to arrest and detain people without due process. The Nazis used this decree to hobble rival political parties, particularly the Communists.



1933 Nazi election poster

“In grösster Not wählte Hindenburg Adolf Hitler zum Reichskanzler...”
In greatest need, Hindenburg chose Adolf Hitler as Reich Chancellor...”

Hindenburg was a famous field marshal from World War I and a conservative. His choice of Hitler as chancellor conferred status on Hitler among those in the German right who had considered him vulgar and the Nazis extremist thugs. The Nazis played up the Hindenburg connection in the run up to the March elections while unleashing their SA stormtroopers to harass and intimidate voters.

The March elections were neither free nor fair. The Social Democrats and Communists both did poorly, and the Nazis received 43.91% of the vote, winning 288 Reichstag seats. The German National People’s Party, the Nazi’s partner, took 7.97% (52 seats). The coalition thus had a majority (52.6%) in the 640-seat Reichstag. This majority gave the Nazis ability to pass laws, but not without checks and balances on them. Per the constitution, laws passed without a two-thirds majority could be delayed and subjected to a referendum. It was certain

532 Officially, the Decree of the Reich President for the Protection of People and State.

political opposition would fight against the Enabling Act with all legal means, something Hitler wanted to avoid. In late March, the Nazis resorted to manipulation and persuasion to get the Center Party to vote for the Act, which accordingly passed with a two-thirds majority. There was still one last legal obstacle: President Hindenburg had to sign it before it could go into effect. Hindenburg still disliked Hitler but had now come to support the Nazi Party. As a monarchist, Hindenburg was also persuaded in favor of the Act when Hitler promised to restore the German monarchy once Germany had nullified the Versailles Treaty and regained its full sovereignty. Hindenburg signed the Enabling Act, and Hitler quickly used its provisions to turn Germany into a dictatorship.

This was the end of the Weimar Republic. The Nazis would soon outlaw all other political parties, take control of all levels of government in Germany, and imprison opponents in concentration camps.

*German International Debt (excluded Reparations), billions Reichsmarks*⁵³³

<i>Date</i>	<i>Long-Term Debt</i>	<i>Short-Term Debt</i>	<i>Total Debt</i>	<i>Note</i>
30 June 1930	10.8	16.0	26.8	Weimar Republic
31 July 1931	10.7	13.1	23.8	Weimar Republic
30 Nov. 1931	10.7	10.6	21.3	Weimar Republic
29 Feb. 1932	10.5	10.1	20.6	Weimar Republic
30 Sept. 1932	10.2	9.3	19.5	Weimar Republic
28 Feb. 1933	10.3	8.7	19.0	Nazi Germany (to power January 1933)
30 Sept. 1933	7.4	7.4	14.8	Nazi Germany; partial debt moratorium/default in effect
30 Sept. 1934	7.2	6.7	13.9	Nazi Germany
30 Sept. 1935	6.4	6.7	13.1	Nazi Germany
30 Sept. 1936	6.1	6.3	12.4	Nazi Germany
30 Sept. 1937	5.4	5.4	10.8	Nazi Germany
30 Sept. 1938	5.0	5.0	10.0	Nazi Germany
30 Sept. 1939	4.6	4.9	9.5	Nazi Germany

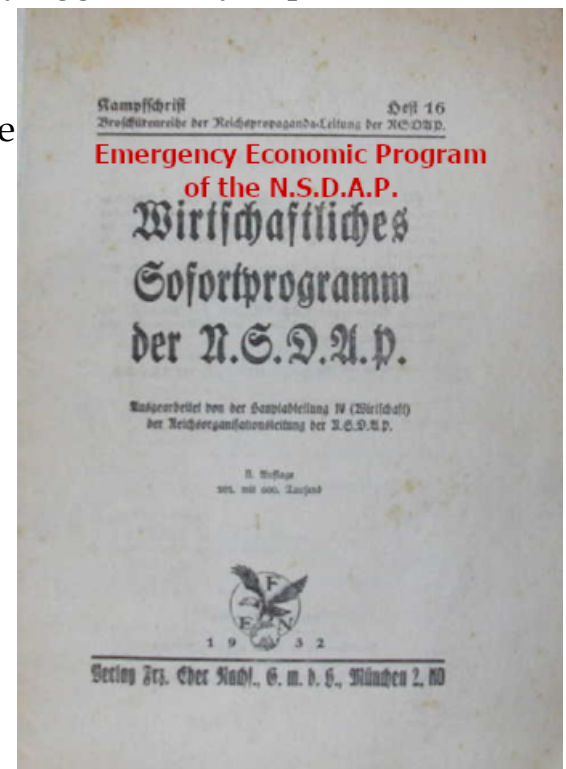
The Nazis detested reparations, the entire Versailles Treaty system, and the international debt Weimar Germany had taken on. They had no intention of redeeming the Lausanne bonds, so reparations effectively ended without Germany making the final payment. They defaulted on some German international debt by announcing partial moratoriums on payments in 1933 and 1934. This succeeded in pitting Germany's foreign lenders against one

⁵³³ Source: Adam Klug; "The German Buybacks, 1932–1939: A Case for Overhang?"; 1993; <https://ies.princeton.edu/pdf/S75.pdf>.

another to secure the best deal they could get from Germany over repayment of debts. The US deliberately got the worse deal, since about 40% of German debt (as of May 1932) was owed to American financial institutions. Britain (12%), the Netherlands (17%), and Switzerland (13%), Germany's other large creditors, all received more favorable treatment. The Germans in particular wanted to retain good relations with the British, to keep the British Empire open to German exports and as a source of natural resources imports.

There was little effective action the US could take in response. Germany was already effectively cut off from further loans from American finance due to the Great Depression and concerns over the size of German debt. International trade between the US and Germany greatly diminished (by about 85–90%), but this actually helped Germany. Germany had imported far more from the US than it had exported to the US and thus had a constant balance of payments problem. The dwindling of trade greatly eased the balance of payments. To make up for lost exports to the US, Germany aggressively expanded trade in places like Latin America and eastern Europe. The disappearance of cheap American imports from German markets also meant German industry now could sell more in Germany itself, at greater profits.

Unemployment was a major problem in Germany due to the Great Depression, and the Nazis had promised to eliminate it when they ran for July 1932 Reichstag elections, issuing a detailed "Emergency Economic Program of the N.S.D.A.P."⁵³⁴. Once in power in 1933, the Nazis publicly acted on these promises, pursuing job creation policies including state-funded public construction projects. They were fortunate in their efforts because the previous German governments in 1932 had begun state-subsidized jobs programs, which were starting to yield results in 1933⁵³⁵, and because the poor German economy had begun recovering in late 1932. The Nazis further expanded the Öffa system and of course took credit for it. Nevertheless, it took time to implement the expanded jobs program and more time still for it have a large effect.



534 See <https://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/sofortprogramm.htm>.

535 Leo Grebler; "Work Creation Policy in Germany, 1932–1935, I"; *International Labor Review*, March 1937; [https://www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/P/09602/09602\(1937-35-3\)329-350.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/P/09602/09602(1937-35-3)329-350.pdf).

Although German unemployment began declining, it remained high throughout 1933 and for much of 1934.

*Unemployment Rates, Selected Countries (%)*⁵³⁶

Year	Germany *	USA (total)	USA (non-ag.)	Britain	France	Notes
1921	2.8	11.9	16.9	17.0	5.0	Recession in US & Britain
1922	1.5	7.6	10.9	14.3	2.0	Recession in Britain
1923	10.2	3.2	4.6	11.7	2.0	Recession in US; France occupies Ruhr; German hyperinflation
1924	13.1	5.5	8.0	10.3	3.0	Recession in US; France occupies the Ruhr
1925	6.8	4.0	5.9	11.3	3.0	French occupation of the Ruhr ends
1926	18.0	1.9	2.8	12.5	3.0	Recession in Germany
1927	8.8	4.1	5.9	9.7	11.0	Recession in US & France
1928	8.6	4.4	6.4	10.8	4.0	
1929	13.3	3.2	4.7	10.4	1.0	Great Depression starts in US, late 1929
1930	22.7	8.9	13.0	16.1	2.9	Great Depression starts in Europe
1931	34.3	15.9	23.3	21.3	6.5	German currency and banking crises
1932	43.8	23.6	34.0	22.1	15.4	
1933	36.2	24.9	35.3	19.9	14.1	Nazis take power
1934	20.5	21.7	30.6	16.7	13.8	
1935	16.2	20.1	28.4	15.5	14.5	
1936	12.0	17.0	23.9	13.1	10.4	
1937	6.9	14.3	20.0	10.8	7.4	Recession in US
1938	3.2	19.0	26.4	12.9	7.8	Renewed recession in US

	Country is not in recession
	Country is in a recession
	Country is in the Great Depression (some recover sooner than others)

* Until 1932, German unemployment data only counted unemployed union workers.

⁵³⁶ German and British unemployment data from Walter Galenson and Arnold Zellner; *International Comparison of Unemployment Rates*; 1957; <https://www.nber.org/system/files/chapters/c2649/c2649.pdf>.

US unemployment data from Stanley Lebergott; "Annual Estimates of Unemployment in the United States, 1900–1954"; as published in Universities-National Bureau Committee for Economic Research; *The Measurement and Behavior of Unemployment*; 1957. Lebergott's chapter is available online at <https://www.nber.org/system/files/chapters/c2644/c2644.pdf>.

French unemployment data from Dietmar Petzina; "Arbeitslosigkeit in der Weimarer Republik" ("Unemployment in the Weimar Republic"); as published in W. Abelshäuser; *Die Weimarer Republik als Wohlfahrtsstaat (The Weimar Republic as a Welfare State)*; 1987. Abelshäuser's book and Petzina's data are available online at https://search.gesis.org/research_data/ZA8441.

USA (total): US total unemployment. US (non-ag.): US non-agricultural unemployment.

Unemployment rates are not fully comparable across countries as they are measured differently. British unemployment is based on data from unemployment insurance. French unemployment is for workers in industry, construction, and mining.

After the Nazis took power, they manipulated the unemployment statistics in their favor, although some changes may have been statistically justified⁵³⁷. However, unemployment did actually decline.

The complement to the jobs program was the Nazis' attempt to improve the condition of German farmers. Despite Germany's reputation as an industrial nation, agriculture was a major component of the economy. For example, the value of just the German grain harvest was about the same size of the value of the output of German heavy industry. Also, farmers were not only a key Nazi constituency, they were also important to Nazi racist ideology of Blood and Soil (*Blut und Boden*): pure Aryans farming German lands, including those to be conquered in the east for *Lebensraum*. Settling the eastern lands would also solve the problem that the farms of most German farmers were too small to provide more than a precarious existence even before the Great Depression. Falling agricultural prices during the Depression then made their plights worse.

Another option would have been to consolidate farms into viable units and release the excess farm population to work in the cities. This was unacceptable to the Nazis for ideological reasons: the German "race" was connected to the land. Excessive urbanization was a Jewish plot to destroy the Germans, as the country's birth rate fell as people moved to cities. The Nazis were not against cities and industry but wanted a balance between urban and rural that involved a large farming population.

Once in control of the government, the Nazis in 1933–1934 implemented major agricultural programs and decreed agricultural laws that gave them unprecedented peacetime control over the agricultural economy. They set food prices to benefit the farmers, who had been buffeted by. Higher prices came at the expense of German civilians in the towns and cities. In 1934, rising urban discontent over the rising price of food caused the Nazis to mostly hold food prices steady for the rest of the 1930s. Instead, the Nazis worked to improve German farming productivity.

The jobs and agricultural programs were the Nazi's public face in 1933–1934, but their secret priorities at this time were Hitler's goals to rearm Germany, overthrow the Versailles Treaty,

537 Dan P. Silverman; "Fantasy and Reality in Nazi Work-Creation Programs, 1933-1936"; *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 65 No. 1; 1993; <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2124816>.

and reverse the outcome of WW1. The Nazi regime inherited the Reichswehr's secret Second Rearmament Program of 1932 and soon dramatically increased its scope.

Plans for the Size of the German Army

<i>Year</i>	<i>Versailles Limit</i>	<i>German Plans</i>	<i>Notes</i>
1920	10	10(+)	Germans intended to supplement Army with militarized police and militias.
1923	10	18	Germans had secret weapon stockpiled sufficient for 18 divisions.
1925	10	16	Army wanted 21 divisions but secret stockpiles now sufficient only for 16 as older weapons wore out.
1928	10	16	1st Rearmament Plan; weapons were to be modernized and stockpiled to fully equip 16 divisions.
1932	10	21	2nd Rearmament Plan; divisions count increased to 21.
1933	10	21	Nazis come to power in early 1933 and soon accelerate secret production of weapons.
1934	10	36	Nazis/Army now plan to have 36 divisions.
1935	effectively ended	36	On 16 March 1935, Hitler publicly renounces the military limits of the Versailles Treaty, reintroduces conscription, and announces plans for an army of at least 36 divisions. France and Britain take no effective action to enforce the Versailles limits.
1936, short term	n/a	43	Nazis/Army plan to achieve 43 divisions in the near term: 36 inf, 4 mot, 3 panzer (although only with light tanks)
1936, long term	n/a	102	Nazis/Army plan to have 102 divisions by October 1940. 102 divisions achieved earlier, although panzer divisions would still be reequipping from light tanks to mediums into 1940 ⁵³⁸ . Composition of Germany Army on 1 Sept. 1939 (start of the war): 86 infantry divisions 3 mountain divisions 4 motorized infantry divisions 4 light divisions (motorized elements with some tanks) 5 panzer divisions

⁵³⁸ In actuality, it took even longer to retire all light tanks as battle tanks in the panzer divisions, but this was mainly due to substantially increasing the number of panzer divisions in 1940.



The German Army's buildup at first was mostly defensive, since the Army would remain very weak while weapon production ramped up. France and Poland were two of the countries with the most to fear from a rearmed Germany, and their militaries could easily crush the German Army had they acted in the early years of rearmament. Starting in 1934, the Germans began fortifying their eastern border with Poland, to help resist a potential Polish invasion. The gap between the Oder and Warthe Rivers was fortified, helping to protect Berlin, with defensive works extending north and south along the western banks of the Oder and Warthe. This was informally known as the "Ostwall" ("East Wall" or "East Rampart")⁵³⁹. Additional fortifications in Upper Silesia were to defend the industrial area there. Fortifications took up a greater share of the military budget in 1934–1935 than did tank development. Tanks were offensive weapons and per German plans would not be needed in quantity until the late 1930s.

France was a bigger threat than Poland, but the Versailles Treaty imposed a demilitarized zone on the greater Rhineland area in western Germany. The Germans could neither maintain military forces there nor fortify the region, making it easy for the French to rapidly

⁵³⁹ Officially, it was the Oder-Warthe-Bogen, the "Oder-Warthe Arc". Warthe is now best known as the Warta River, its Polish name since the river is now entirely in Poland.

advance into Germany should they choose to do so. Securing their western frontier was a crucial goal for the Nazis, and Hitler ordered troops into the Rhineland in March 1936. When the Allies took no effective action to oppose this move, the Germans then started a massive fortification effort to build the “*Westwall*” (“West Wall” or “West Rampart”; western countries called the fortifications the Siegfried Line⁵⁴⁰). By 1939, the Germans focused fortification priorities on the Westwall, including expanding its coverage. Work was halted on the Ostwall, which perhaps was just 40–50% complete⁵⁴¹.

Rearmament was very expensive: the Nazis planned to build a large army with modern weapons, build a large air force with advanced aircraft, and even create a major navy. They needed to implement measures to finance this expansion. One aspect of this was to partially default on German international debt, as covered above. Other efforts were aimed to boost German exports and to limit imports of goods, like consumer products and animal feed⁵⁴², that did not advance Hitler’s goals. This was accomplished through extensive bureaucratic regulation of trade, coupled with a domestic business taxation scheme that subsidized exports. The result all this was that Germany at first ran a strong trade surplus, earning foreign currency that helped to pay for necessary imports: food for the German populace and raw materials for German industry.

Domestically, a key measure was to pay for rearmament through hidden, off-budget deficit spending. The *Öffa* bill system provided the template, and rearmament would work using Mefo bills in the same fashion but on a much larger scale. Luther, head of the Reichsbank, was opposed to the plan because its huge volumes of spending would sooner or later result in inflation. However, in March 1933 Hitler demanded that Luther resign, and he was replaced by the strongly nationalist Hjalmar Schacht, who at this time supported Hitler’s

540 Westwall was an informal German name that became increasingly popular in Germany in 1938, with Hitler using it in speeches from 1939. The line originally seems to have had no official name in the 1930s but parts of it were known by their various construction programs, such as the Pioneer Program (pioneer in the sense of military engineering), the Limes Program (limes being a reference to the Roman Empire’s defenses facing the German tribes), and the Aachen-Saar Program. Perhaps if the line was called the “Westwall” from its start, the Allies would have used that name. Instead, they called it the Siegfried Line after the German WW1 defensive line, the *Siegfriedstellung*, in northwestern France in 1917–1918.

541 Only about 60 out of 160 (38%) major fortifications were complete. However, there were incomplete fortifications bunkers of some defensive value as well as various defensive works along the west banks of the Oder and Warthe Rivers.

542 German farmers imported considerable amounts of animal feed like corn (maize), soy beans and peanuts for their dairy and pig herds. The Nazis strongly regulated and reduced these imports, while promoting the use of German-grown feeds like potatoes and the agricultural waste from the beet crop.

plan⁵⁴³. An under-capitalized shell company, the Metallurgical Research Corporation⁵⁴⁴, was created ostensibly as a private limited-liability firm but actually under Nazi control. Beginning in May 1933, it began issuing “Mefo bills”. Like Öffa bills, the Mefo bills in effect expanded the paper money supply without gold reserves backing them. The system was inherently inflationary, but postponements in redeeming the bills, price controls, and other measures kept inflation suppressed throughout the 1930s⁵⁴⁵. Eventually the system would have become unsustainable, but the war started before the reckoning came due, ushering in a stricter system of economic controls coupled with high taxes and severe rationing of goods.

Like with Öffa bills, Mefo bills benefited from the law that capped the amount of profits a company could pay out as dividends to shareholders and as bonuses to management. “Excess” profits had to be invested in government bonds, Öffa bills, or Mefo bills. The Nazis were able to use this system to direct investment into areas they favored, like armaments, heavy industry, and electricity generation. German companies soon had plenty of profits to invest. Parts of the economy were already dominated by price-fixing cartels; Nazi regulations expanded this system and made it mandatory. Employee wage growth was also suppressed, as the Nazis replaced independent labor unions with a Nazi-run German Labor Front (*Deutsche Arbeitsfront*) that managed labor relations for the benefit of the German state and private companies. All this meant that German workers were not paid as well as they should have been, while German consumers had to pay higher prices. Coupled with the exclusion of most cheap American imports, German companies earned excellent profits, which helped finance rearmament.

Very many German companies supported the Nazi’s rearmament efforts. Companies that had been major arms manufacturers naturally supported rearmament. So did numerous companies that were controlled by nationalist Germans who wanted to restore Germany as a great power. However, support extended far beyond these companies, due to the Great Depression. Companies with no armaments or nationalist interests saw their participation in rearmament as a way to rebuild both the German economy and their own fortunes.

Rearmament affected Germany’s ability to conduct international trade. In the last years of the Weimar Republic, the presidential cabinets followed policies to run a trade surplus.

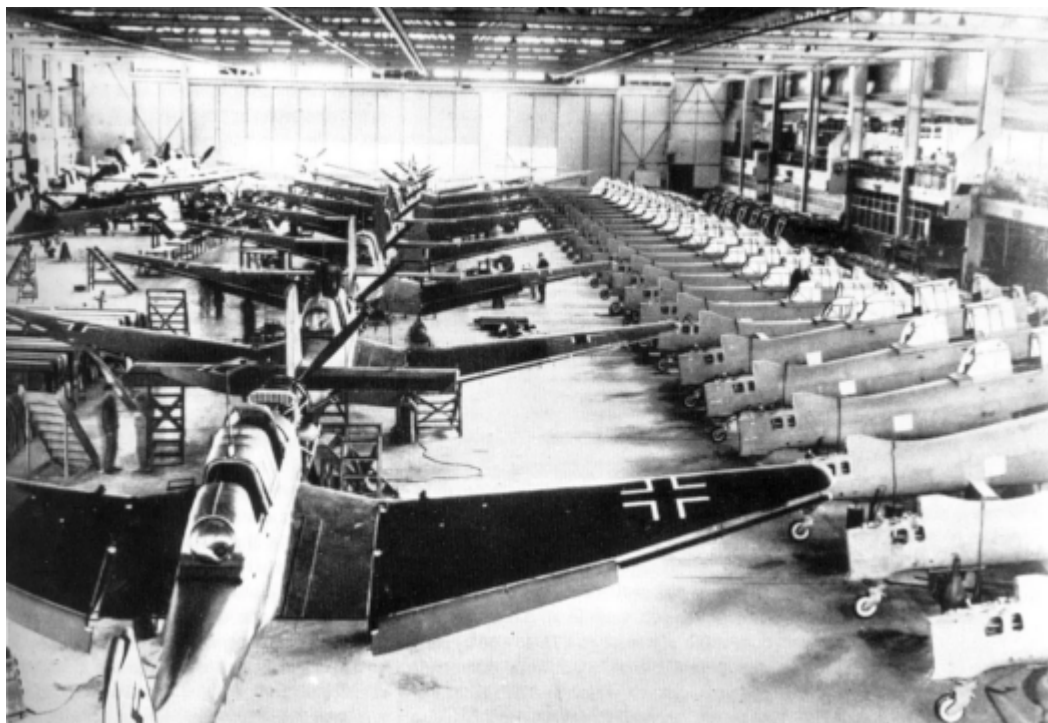
543 Schacht by 1935–1936 was greatly concerned about the inflationary nature of the great debt rearmament spending was building up and would unsuccessfully try to get Hitler to scale back rearmament. Schacht was also opposed to the growing Nazi violence against the German Jews (although he supported non-violent means to have Jews emigrate from Germany). Hitler dismissed him as head of the Reichsbank in 1939.

544 The *Metallurgische Forschungsgesellschaft*, hence the name “Mefo”.

545 German inflation remained in the low single digits after deflation ended in 1933; see <http://www.gabriel-zucman.eu/files/capitalisback/T271>.

Rearmament changed this dynamic. German industry had to import considerable amounts of raw materials to make weapons. Since these weapons went to the German military and were not exported to any significant degree, Germany now was often in danger of running a trade deficit. This threatened to deplete Germany's reserves of gold and foreign current, making difficult to continue importing raw materials and making weapons. The German balance of payments turned negative in 1934, prompting the Nazis to take measures (such as further restricting imports of civilian goods) to return it to positive in 1935. This was just temporary, and the balance of payments turned persistently negative again in 1936, whereupon the Nazis made their balance of payments situation a state secret.

German gold and foreign currency reserves were depleted paying for imports for rearmament, as Hitler refused to slow the pace of rearmament. By the late 1930s, the Nazis increasingly had trouble securing enough gold or foreign currency to pay for imports. The desire to seize Czecho-Slovakia's gold reserves was a major part of Hitler's decision to break up that country in early 1939.



Ju 87B dive bombers being built at the Weser Flugzeugbau

Case Study: The Nazi Aircraft Industry

The Nazis used their control of the economy to create a vast military aircraft industry. The Versailles Treaty had prohibited Germany from having military aircraft, but the Germans before the Nazis evaded the limits by building a civilian air transport industry. This created trained pilots who could quickly

transition to military aircraft and built had modern transport aircraft, some of which were capable of being converted into bombers. Secret Reichswehr programs also outright violated the treaty, such as by acquiring limited numbers of Fokker fighters from the Netherlands.

Nonetheless, the German domestic aircraft industry was quite small, able to build only about 100 civilian aircraft per year by 1932, just before the Nazis came to power. The Junkers aircraft factory dominated the industry, and the Nazis decided they must control the factory as the foundation for their military aircraft industry. They arrested Hugo Junkers on false charges of treason and coerced him into transferring a controlling interest of the factory's stock to the Nazi government. Without compensation. Yes, the fiercely anti-Communist Nazis were seizing private property without compensation, like the Communists did in Soviet Russia in 1918–1920.

Their next step was to use Junkers technology and expertise to seed the creation of other aircraft companies. The Nazis had expected that German companies would invest in creating aircraft factories, so that they could profit from military aircraft orders. A very few did to a very limited extent, but no company was willing to invest large amounts of money in what was obviously a risky business with almost no civilian applications. Orders from the German government would dominate their business, so the government could set the terms it wanted. Further, orders were not guaranteed. The companies would have to compete among themselves to get their designs accepted as Luftwaffe aircraft. The Nazi government itself had to finance the construction of the military aircraft industry: factories to make aircraft equipment, aircraft engines, and the aircraft themselves. This came at a great expense, although use of Mefo bills meant the reckoning was pushed off into the future.

The Nazis succeeded in their military aircraft plans. German aircraft factories went from building about 100 aircraft per year in 1932 to making almost 8,300 in 1939, almost all of them military aircraft or trainers for the Luftwaffe. On 1 September 1939 at the start of the war, the Luftwaffe was the second largest air force in the world, behind only the Soviet air forces. Some of its fighters, bombers, and aircraft engines were among the best in the world in 1939. Even the civilian air transports were a military asset, as the Germans used them to drop paratroopers during invasions and to fly supplies to the troops.

German Aircraft Production, 1933–1939⁵⁴⁶

Category	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939
Trainers, Air Transports, Civilian Aircraft	368	1128	1,360	3,582	2,955	1,885	3,562
Military Aircraft	0	840	1,823	1,530	2,651	3,350	4,733
Total	368	1,968	3,183	5,112	5,606	5,235	8,295

The Nazi Party in the early 1930s had a number of factions, some of which were not aligned with Hitler's interests. The SA in particular was a force unto itself, and its leader, Ernst Röhm, clashed with Hitler over social, economic, and military issues. Röhm also wanted to his SA to replace or absorb the German Army, which alarmed the Reichswehr generals. Hitler and the generals came to understanding: The German military would be loyal to Hitler and in return Hitler would rein in the SA and Röhm. Over a few days in the early summer of 1934, Hitler unleashed the SS and Gestapo to eliminate the SA leadership and other targets, in what became called the Night of the Long Knives. Röhm and perhaps as many as 1,000 other Germans were murdered. Victims ranged far beyond the SA and included various opponents to the Nazis, dissident former Nazis, and potential rivals to Hitler such as Kurt von Schleicher.

Hitler had dictatorial power once the Enabling Act went into force, but there still remained a legal means to remove the Nazis from government. If President Hindenburg lost faith in Hitler, he could use his constitutional powers to dismiss Hitler as chancellor, replace Nazi and pro-Nazi government ministers with politicians from other parties, and call new elections for the Reichstag. If the Nazis tried remain in power by force in these circumstances, a civil war was likely, one that the Nazis might not win. Hindenburg's status as a conservative and WW1 field marshal meant most of the Army, large parts of the non-Nazi right, and some Nazis would join the German center and left against the Nazis. Preemptively getting rid of Hindenburg by illegal means would also risk civil war. Hitler was very careful to show respect to Hindenburg in private and especially in public.

“Die von der Reichsregierung beschlossenen Reichsgesetze können von der Reichsverfassung abweichen, soweit sie nicht die Einrichtung des Reichstags und des Reichsrats als solche zum Gegenstand haben. **Die Rechte des Reichspräsidenten bleiben unberührt.**”

“Laws enacted by the Reich government may deviate from the constitution as long as they do not affect the institutions of the Reichstag and the Reichsrat. **The rights of the Reich President remain unaffected.**”

546 Derived from R.J. Overy; “German Air Strength 1933 to 1939: A Note”; *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 27 No. 2; 1984; <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2639187>.

— Article 2 of the Enabling Act (officially, the Law to Remedy the Distress of the People and the Reich)

In 1934, Hindenburg 86 years old and severely ill. If Hindenburg died in office, the constitution stipulated that the head of the German Supreme Court became interim president until new presidential elections were held. The head of court, Erwin Bumke, was from the German right, but Hitler did not want to take the chance that Bumke might disagree with Hitler and use the powers of the presidency to dismiss Hitler as the chancellor. When Hindenburg was on his deathbed on 1 August 1934, the Nazis used the powers granted by the Enabling Act to decree that if a president died in office, the posts of president and chancellor would be merged. The legality of this was dubious, since the Act did not allow actions that affected the rights of the president, but the decree would not face a legal challenge. Hindenburg died the next day, and Hitler was now both chancellor and president. To give their action the appearance of legitimacy, the Nazis held a manipulated referendum on the merger of the offices. Through extensive electoral fraud, the Nazis claimed 89.93% German people had voted in favor of the merger.



Photo of the 1936 Nazi Party rally at Nürnberg

The Führer now had no checks on him at all. Nazi Germany now rushed to rearm, overturn Versailles, persecute the Jews, and invade countries across Europe.

16.E Reichstag Elections, 1919–1933

The Reichstag was the core of the German parliamentary system, which governed Germany from the abdication of the Kaiser in November 1918. Executive governments (“cabinets”) were formed from shifting coalitions of Reichstag parties through early 1930, when President Hindenburg began appointing cabinets of his own choosing regardless of the Reichstag coalitions. The system collapsed in early 1933 when Hitler became chancellor and ended after the fraudulent March 1933 elections which allowed the Nazis to establish their dictatorship. While the Reichstag did remain in existence, it was a Nazi-controlled rubber stamp body and echo chamber for Hitler.

<i>Political Party</i>	<i>Jan. 1919</i>	<i>June 1920</i>	<i>May 1924</i>	<i>Dec. 1924</i>	<i>May 1928</i>	<i>Sept. 1930</i>	<i>July 1932</i>	<i>Nov. 1932</i>	<i>Mar. 1933</i>
Social Democratic Party of Germany	37.86	21.92	20.52	26.02	29.76	24.53	21.58	20.43	18.25
Nazi Party (National Socialist German Workers’ Party)	n/a	n/a	6.55	3.00	2.63	18.25	37.27	33.09	†43.91
Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany	7.62	17.63	0.79	0.32	0.06	0.03	n/a	n/a	n/a
German People’s Party	4.43	13.90	9.20	10.07	8.71	4.51	1.18	1.86	1.10
German National People’s Party	10.27	15.07	19.45	20.49	14.25	7.03	5.91	8.34	□7.97
German Democratic Party, later German State Party	18.56	8.28	5.65	6.34	4.81	3.78	1.01	0.95	0.85
Economic Party of the Middle Classes, later Reich Party of the Middle Class	n/a	0.08	1.71	2.29	4.51	3.90	0.40	0.31	n/a
Communist Party of Germany	**	**2.09	12.61	8.94	10.62	13.13	14.32	16.86	12.32
Center Party	*19.67	13.64	13.37	13.60	12.07	11.81	12.44	3.00	11.25
Bavarian People’s Party	*	4.16	3.23	3.74	3.07	3.03	3.23	3.09	2.73
Other Parties	1.59	3.23	6.92	5.19	9.51	10.00	2.66	12.07	1.62

#1 Party by Votes

#2 Party by Votes

#3 Party by Votes

Red: Hard Left. Wanted to replace the German republic with a Marxist-style socialist state.

Light Red: Moderate Left. Supported the German republican form of government.

Green: Moderate. Supported the republican form of government.

Light Blue: Moderate Right. Supported the republican form of government.

Blue: Hard Right. Wanted to replace the German republic with a monarchy or dictatorship.

Note: German parties covered the political spectrum. Dividing them into five categories along a single left-right spectrum is of course a simplification. Large parties sometimes were assemblages of competing interests; some parties shifted along the spectrum over time.

The “Other Parties” category comprises many smaller parties, as Reichstag elections often featured 16 or

more parties. Some were specialized narrow-interest parties that did not necessarily fall on the left-right spectrum. For example, the Polish People's Party⁵⁴⁷ advocated for the interests of Germany's Polish minority and the Wendish Party that of Germany's Sorbs.

n/a: The party either did not exist at the time of these elections or did not run in the elections.

† The Nazi Party had come into power in 1933 before the March 1933 elections and used intimidation and violence to increase its vote share through abuse of its government powers. The election was thus neither free nor fair, but the Nazis still fell short of an outright majority. However, they also had support of the German National People's Party, which allowed the Nazis to secure a Reichstag majority. They still did not have the two-thirds vote to pass the Enabling Act that gave Hitler dictatorial powers, but they manipulated the Center Party to vote for the act.

* The Center Party and the Bavarian People's Party, both of which mainly drew their support from German Catholics, contested the 1919 elections as an alliance.

** The Communist Party boycotted the 1919 elections as it was then attempting to take over Germany through revolution. It did contest the 1920 elections but its support was low because of its recent violence.

□ The German National People's Party contested the 1933 elections in an alliance called the Battle Front of the Black-White-Red, these colors being associated with Imperial Germany.

Brief Notes on Selected Parties:

Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD): The SPD had its origins as a temporarily banned Marxist party in Imperial Germany to the center-left SPD of modern-day Germany. During the Weimar Republic period of the 1920s and 1930s, it was a Marxist party that wanted to transform Germany from capitalism and private ownership of important property into a state with "social ownership" of the "means of production". While this is a classic Marxist tenet, it seems best to classify the Weimar SPD as a moderate-left party rather than hard left: It consistently supported the functioning of the Weimar Republic, unlike the hard-left Communist Party of Germany which wanted to overthrow the republic and create a Soviet-style dictatorship of the proletariat.

The SPD was instrumental in founding the Weimar Republic. It was quite willing to joining centrist coalitions and opposed the rise of extremist left and right parties.

Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany: During World War I, most nationally-based European socialist parties supported their own governments' war efforts. This was controversial, since it violated the ideals of international socialism and meant socialist parties were on different sides in the war. For example, the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) supported the German war effort, while the French Socialist Party

547 There was also a Polish People's Party in Poland itself.

supported the French war effort. Some socialists who adhered to the international ideal split from their parties. In Germany, the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany was formed in 1917 from anti-war members of the pro-war SPD. After WW1, it occupied the political ground between the moderate-left Social Democratic Party of Germany and the revolutionary hard left. However, the political differences between the two parties dwindled, and they merged in 1922, leaving just a small group of holdouts to continue as the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany. This party never recovered its popular support and in 1931 merged with the small Socialist Workers' Party of Germany.

National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nazi): The Nazi Party was officially the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP, from the party name *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*). "Socialist" was in to the party's name partly to broaden its appeal among left-leaning workers and not out of any true interest in international Marxist-style socialism with its program of class warfare. "National socialism" tried to evoke a blending of German nationalism coupled with social-welfare aspects (for "Aryans" only, regardless of class). However, the Nazi Party had several factions, some of which like the SA emphasized the socialist side of national socialism more than other others. Hitler would violently neutralize the SA after he gained dictatorial power.

The Nazi Party was very small and did not participate in Reichstag elections until 1924. It had to compete in the two 1924 elections as the "National Socialist Freedom Movement", since the Nazi Party itself had been banned due to its participation in a failed coup attempt in 1923. The ban expired in 1925, with the Nazi Party competing in elections in its own name thereafter.

The name "Nazi" came from a contraction of *Nationalsozialistische* and was coined as a belittling term by opponents of the Nazis⁵⁴⁸. While a few NSDAP members did call themselves Nazis, "Nazi" was shunned by most of the party, with the party's full name or NSDAP abbreviation being used.

Center Party: The Center Party is classified as moderate, but this is a simplification. The party mostly attracted German Catholics, who had a wide set of political views ranging from mildly left to centrist to mildly right to conservative. This give the party considerable political flexibility, allowing it to join a wide range of government coalitions. By the late 1920s, the party was drifting right on issues and became more of a moderate right party.

German Democratic Party: The liberal German Democratic Party was renamed the *German State Party* in 1930 when it merged with the corporatist People's National Reich Association. This union of liberalism and corporatism did not work, and the Reich Association soon broke away. However the German State Party did not change its name back to the German Democratic Party. (Corporatism is a political system where the government is under the control of large interest block, aka "corporate groups". A corporate group can be any

548 "Nazi" was coined in imitation of "Sozi", which stood for *Sozialdemokrat*. A Sozi was a member of the SPD, the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (Social Democratic Party of Germany).

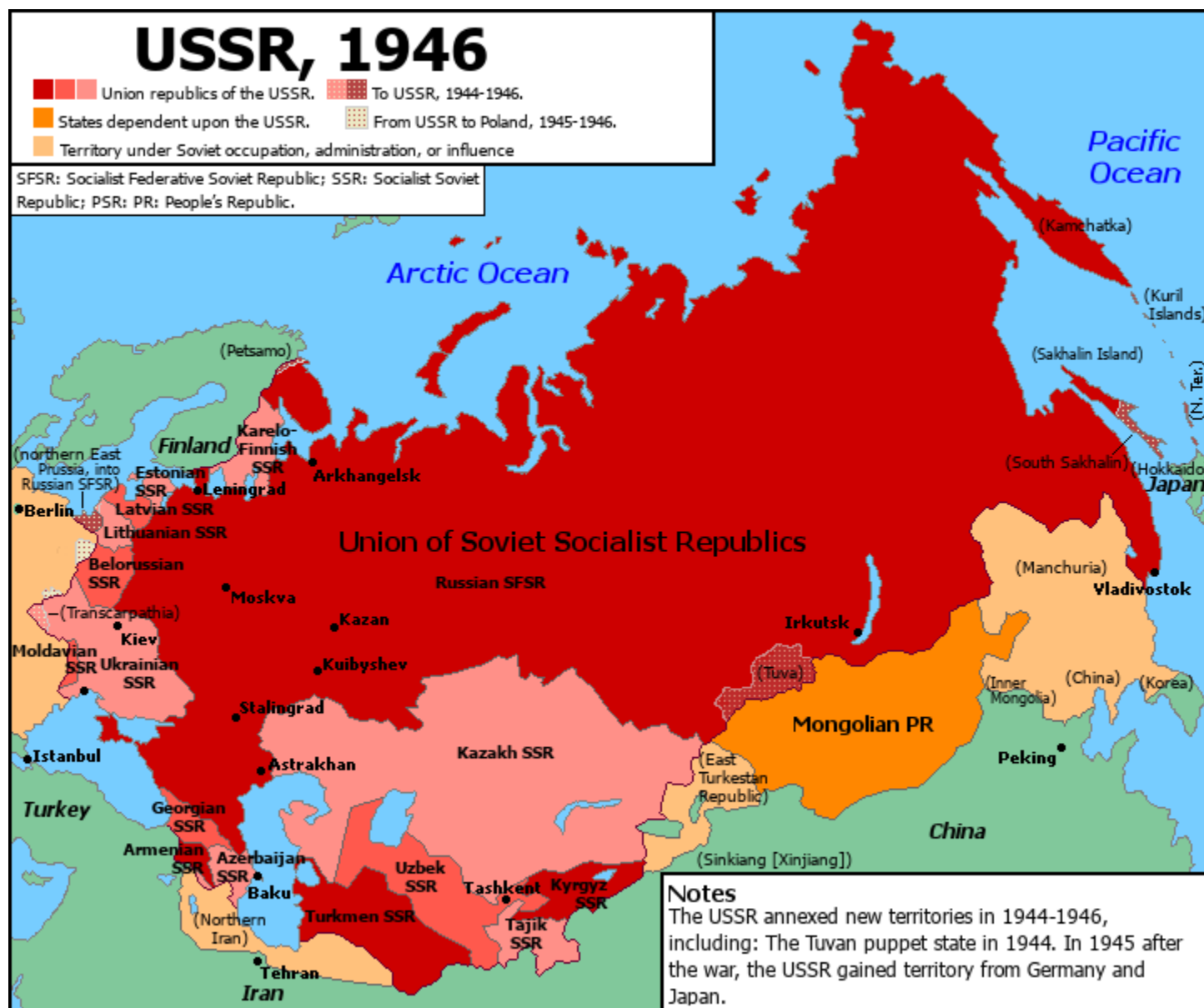
powerful association, not just businesses or corporations. Corporate groups could be agricultural associations, military groups, labor associations, etc.)

The Economic Party of the Middle Classes: This party was formed in 1920 as a conservative party favoring the interests of the German middle classes: landowners, homeowners, craftsmen, and small-scale merchants. In 1925 it renamed itself the *Reich Party of the Middle Class*. Its popular support was low because many members of the German middle classes were attracted to other parties.

In addition to the parties shown above, very many smaller parties competed in the Reichstag elections.

16.F The USSR in the Late 1940s

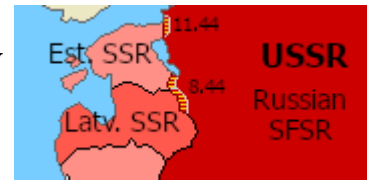
The Soviet Union during and after its Great Patriotic War against Germany is outside the scope of this guidebook. This appendix is a brief summary of territorial changes due to the USSR's decisive victory in the war.



The Estonian, Karelo-Finnish SSR, Latvian, Lithuanian, and Moldavian SSRs had been created in 1940 and were the last union republics formed in the Soviet Union. Less than a year later, Germany and other Axis powers invaded the USSR in June 1941 and plunged the country into an existential war. All of the new SSRs except part of the Karelo-Finnish SSR were completely lost, as were all of the Belorussian and Ukrainian SSRs. The western regions of Russian SFSR were also lost. The Soviets stopped and then defeated the Germans at

Stalingrad in 1942–1943. The Red Army then progressively drove the Axis out of the USSR, advanced into eastern Europe, and triumphed over Germany in May 1945.

Although no new union republics were created during the war or in its aftermath, Soviet borders did change. Internally, as the Red Army pushed into the Baltic region, they readjusted the borders of the Estonian and Latvian SSRs in favor of the Russian SFSR. In August



1944, Estonia's southeastern border and Latvia's northeastern border were moved westwards. This reversed the 1920 territorial gains of Estonia and Latvia beyond their 1917 borders. In November 1944, Estonia's traditional northeastern border with Russia was pushed west to the course of the Narva River, perhaps to make the USSR more defensible in case the Baltic region became independent again.

In October 1944, the Soviets apparently decided that the pretense of the puppet Tuvan People's Republic being an independent country was no longer useful, and they incorporated the region into the Russian SFSR as the Tuva Autonomous Region⁵⁴⁹. It is perhaps no coincidence that Tuva lost its nominal independence in at this time, as the autumn of 1944 was when the Soviet Union started to expand its borders in Europe.

The process had started in September 1944, when Finland and the USSR negotiated an armistice agreement, resulting in Finland quitting the war. The armistice restored the borders (with some minor changes) from the 1940 Winter War peace treaty and also transferred the Petsamo area of Finland to the USSR. At the time, this area was actually under German control, but a Soviet offensive in October 1944 drove the Germans out. This area subsequently became the Pechenga district in the Russian SFSR⁵⁵⁰.

The Soviet-Polish border also came into play at this time. Although the Soviets invaded, occupied, and annexed the eastern part of Poland in 1939, the two countries never officially went to war with one another, and both ended up on the same side after the Germans invaded the USSR. However, relations between the Soviet Union and the Polish government in exile were poor, with no agreement between them possible on their post-war borders. The Polish government of course wanted the 1939 pre-war border restored, while the Soviet government of course wanted to keep the territory it gained in Poland from the secret 1939 German-Soviet protocol that divided eastern Europe between them. While western Allied

549 *Tuvinskaya Avtonomnaya Oblast*. Tuva became an ASSR of the Russian SFSR in 1961. It is now the Republic of Tyva (sometimes still spelled as Tuva) in the Russian Federation. It is officially autonomous within the federation but with no right to become independent.

550 In 1947, Finland sold a small Finnish area in the region to the USSR, which also became part of the district.

countries did not recognize these 1939 border changes, this mattered little as the end of the war neared, except for some diplomatic squabbling. The Red Army now dominated eastern Europe, which meant Stalin would get what he wanted.

The Soviet response to the Polish exile government was to create a rival “provisional” Polish government, the Polish Committee of National Liberation (PKWN)⁵⁵¹. This was a puppet government controlled by Polish communists who took their orders from the Soviets. In September 1944, the Soviets had the PKWN officially request some border changes with the USSR. Ostensibly, the PKWN was asking for Soviet territory to be transferred to Poland, and the USSR readily agreed. However, the borders involved were not Poland’s pre-war borders but those that had resulted from the German-Soviet pact. It actually meant that the PKWN was in effect conceding almost all of eastern Poland to the USSR. (Further minor changes to the Soviet-Polish border were subsequently made, up to 1951.)

In October 1944, the Red Army captured Carpathian Ruthenia, which had been the easternmost region of Czechoslovakia in 1938 before ending up in Hungary. The Soviets had agreed to turn over any Czechoslovakian territory they capture to Czechoslovakian civilian control, but refused to honor this agree for Carpathian Ruthenia. The region had a mixed population of many ethnic groups, with Ukrainians and Rusyns in the majority, and the Soviets wanted to annex the region into Ukraine. (They claimed the Rusyns, who spoke a language similar to Ukrainian, were just a subgroup of Ukrainians.) Instead, they set up a puppet committee of locals who called for the region to be incorporated into the Ukrainian SSR. With the Red Army in control, the Czechoslovakian government agreed to relinquish the region to the USSR after the war, and in June 1945 Carpathian Ruthenia became the Transcarpathian Region⁵⁵² of the Ukrainian SSR.

East Prussia had been the easternmost region of pre-war Germany. After the war, the region was divided between the USSR and Poland, with the Soviets occupying the northern part. At the Potsdam Conference in mid-1945, the US and Britain agreed in principle that the Soviet-occupied portion of East Prussia would become part of the USSR. In April 1946, the Soviets annexed this territory. In July, they renamed it the Kaliningrad Region, with the historic city of Königsberg becoming Kaliningrad⁵⁵³.

551 In Polish, *Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego*, PKWN. This was also called the “Lublin Committee”, after the Polish city it moved to soon after the city’s capture by the Red Army. The committee went on to become the Provisional Government of the Republic of Poland, still a Soviet puppet, and then the Provisional Government of National Unity, which included some non-socialist parties but with the Polish communists in actual control.

552 *Zakarpatskaya Oblast*.

553 The Kaliningrad Region (*Kaliningradskaya Oblast*) became part of the Russian SFSR, even though this territory did not abut the Russian SFSR but instead was adjacent to the Lithuanian SSR. The Soviets, however, planned to settle the region mainly with

Lithuania had acquired the Klaipėda region (aka the Memelland) from Germany after World War I, but Germany regained it in April 1939. The region was incorporated into the Lithuanian SSR following its occupation by the Red Army in 1945.

In August 1945, the USSR went to war with Japan, having committed to do so in negotiations with the western Allies. Japan had already been on the verge of defeat and soon surrendered. The Soviets occupied and then annexed the southern half of Sakhalin Island (the northern half already being Soviet territory) and the Kuril Islands, the chain of islands stretching from Kamchatka in Siberia to the northern Japanese home island of Hokkaido⁵⁵⁴. The Soviets occupied and annexed what the Japanese called the “Northern Territories”, a set of four islands (plus smaller islands and islets) just off the northern coast of Hokkaido. The Soviets claimed the Northern Territories were part of the Kuril Islands, while the Japan maintained otherwise. Japan never recognized the Soviet possession of them, and they remain an unresolved issue to this day between Japan and Russia.

Besides outright annexations, considerable amounts of territory fell under Soviet domination:

- **Northern Iran** had been occupied in 1941 (with Britain occupying the rest of the country). The Soviets attempted to keep part of this territory under puppet regimes but western diplomatic support for Iran induced the Soviets to withdraw in May 1946⁵⁵⁵.
- **Manchuria**, a part of **Inner Mongolia**, and a part of **China** proper had been occupied by Japan but captured by the Soviets in 1945. All this territory belonged to China, and in September 1945 the Soviets began slowly withdrawing from these regions, turning the territory over to the Chinese government. In 1946, civil war broke out between the Chinese government and the Chinese Communists. The Soviets were still occupying Manchuria and turned it over to the Chinese Communists as they withdrew.

Russians and turning it into a secure base in the southern Baltic region. The “Kalinin” in Kaliningrad was for M.I. Kalinin, a Stalin crony and figurehead head of state for the USSR. Kalinin had just died in June 1946, so Stalin had the region and city named in his honor. (The Soviets had planned to rename Königsberg as Baltiysk.)

554 As part of the Kuril Islands, the Soviets occupied and annexed what the Japanese call the “Northern Territories”, a set of four islands plus many small islands and islets just off the northern coast of Hokkaido. Japan maintains these islands are not part of the Kuril Islands and has never recognized the Soviet (now, Russian) possession of them.

555 The Soviet Union set up two puppet states in northwestern Iran in 1945, the Kurdish People’s Government (later the Republic of Mahabad) in Kurdish areas and the Azerbaijan People’s Government in the Azerbaijani region of Iran. The Soviets withdrew from Iran in May 1946 when Iran submitted an official complaint to the United Nations Security Council, and the two puppet states collapsed by the end of the year.

- The Soviet captured the northern half of Japanese-occupied Korea in 1945. The Soviets proceeded to set up a communist people’s committee there in 1946, which later became the government of **North Korea**.
- The Soviet Union had gained considerable influence and rights in Sinkiang (modern Xinjiang) in the 1930s, a western region of China controlled by a pro-Soviet warlord. The warlord switched his allegiance to the Chinese government 1943. In response, the Soviets supported a rebellion in Sinkiang that gained control of some territory there as the **East Turkestan Republic**. The Soviets had considerable influence in this area but also supported the Chinese Communists in their civil war with the Chinese government. In 1949, the Chinese Communists were winning the civil war and captured Sinkiang, including the East Turkestan Republic.
- The Soviet’s most dramatic was in **eastern Europe**. The Soviet Union overran much of the region in 1944–1945 and established governments dominated by local communists in Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Romania. The Soviets did not want a complete break from their wartime allies at first, so in most places the Soviets waited for a few years before the Communists took full control and turned the countries into Communist satellite states.

Soviet Satellite States of Eastern Europe

<i>Country</i>	<i>Communist Domination</i>	<i>Full Communist Control</i>
Bulgaria	From September 1944 with Soviet occupation of Bulgaria.	From September 1946. Country became People’s Republic of Bulgaria .
Czechoslovakia	During 1944–1945 as the Soviets occupied the region. Communists dominated but allowed political participation of selected anti-fascist parties.	From February 1948. Country remained named the Republic of Czechoslovakia until 1960 when it became the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic .
East Germany	January through May 1945 as the Red Army progressively conquered the region. East German communists were not at first even nominally in power as the region was under direct Soviet control via the Soviet Military Administration in Germany.	Soviet occupation was in full control. East German communists began administering parts of the country in 1948 and took over in 1949, establishing the German Democratic Republic .
Hungary	Late 1944 through April 1945 as the Red Army conquered the region. Communists dominated but allowed political participation of selected anti-fascist parties.	Other parties progressively were neutralized or eliminated in 1946–1948. Effective full communist control in 1948. Country became the Hungarian People’s Republic in 1949.
Poland	During 1944 and early 1945 as the Red Army	Other parties progressively were neutralized

Romania	<p>conquered the region. Polish Communists dominated but allowed political participation of selected anti-fascist parties. During 1944 and early 1945 as the Red Army conquered the region. Romanian Communists dominated but allowed political participation of selected anti-fascist parties.</p>	<p>or eliminated in 1946–1947. Effective full communist control in 1947. Country became the Polish People’s Republic in 1952. Other parties progressively were neutralized or eliminated in 1946–1947. Effective full communist control in 1947. Country became the Romanian People’s Republic in 1947.</p>
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The Soviets also gained considerable influence in Yugoslavia and Albania by the end of the war. The communist Yugoslav Partisans progressively gained control of Yugoslavia as Germany was defeated. Red Army troops assisted the Partisans in liberating the northeastern part of country (including Beograd, the capital) in the autumn of 1944. Soviet military forces did not remain in the country, so the Soviet Union did not directly control the Yugoslavia. The communist Yugoslav government aligned Yugoslavia with the USSR after the war, but the two countries fell into disagreement in 1948.

A communist movement in Albania took over that country as Germany withdrew in 1944. Soviet military forces did not enter the country to help the Albanian communists, so the Soviet Union did not directly control the region. The post-war Albanian communists aligned themselves closely with Yugoslavia at first but sided with the Soviet Union after the Soviet-Yugoslav split in 1948. (They later sided with Communist China when they thought the USSR was abandoning Marxist-Leninist purity and later abandoned China over the same issue.)

16.G Military and Naval Forces

This guidebook occasionally mentions military units like divisions and regiments or naval warships like cruisers and destroyers. Which was more powerful, a cruiser or destroyer, a battalion or a brigade? Here’s a quick guide to knowing relative importance if you are unfamiliar with these terms as used in the 1917–1941 time period of this guidebook.

16.G.1 Ground Forces

Ground forces formations and units had a hierarchy of sizes:

Unit or Formation	Typical Composition	Notes
Front (Russian) Army Group (Other)	2 or more armies	The Russians and Soviet used the term front (<i>front</i>), which English military works use

rather than translating as “army group”. Unfortunately, “front” also had another, more generalized military meaning, being the front lines, a theater of war like the “Eastern Front”, or even the territory of a country outside the combat zone (the “home front”).

Army	2–4 corps	Like front, “army” unfortunately also has a more generalized military meaning, meaning the ground forces of a country, sometimes including air forces and even naval forces. Thus, the Imperial German Army, the German ground forces of WW1, had multiple armies on the Eastern Front, including the 8th Army and 10th Army.
Corps	2–4 divisions	
Division	2–4 brigades or regiments	
Brigade (large)	typically 2 regiments	Many countries in WW1 had brigades that each typically had two regiments. These brigades were thus large that regiments and smaller brigades. Most countries abandoned this type of brigade organization after WW1, although a few used it into the early years of WW2.
Regiment, Brigade	2–4 battalions	Various countries had brigades that were equivalent or exactly equal in size to regiments.
Battalion	smaller units, not covered here	Some countries had specialized terms meaning “battalion” for artillery or some other types of non-infantry units. This is outside the scope of this guidebook.
(other)		Other terms for units including “group”,

“legion”, “detachment”, etc. These usually were flexible terms with no fixed organization. A group could range, for example, from a temporary grouping of two armies to a battalion-sized scratch force.

Almost every country followed very similar military organizational schemes, so a regiment, for example, was about the same whether it was Russian, Soviet, German, or some other force. One partial exception was the Red Army in World War II, but this is outside the scope of this work.

Some units evolved over the 1917–1941 time period, such as divisions shedding some infantry but gaining more heavier weapons. Typically, countries all adopted these changes within a few years of one another.

16.G.2 Naval Forces

Warships had a hierarchy of importance and strength:

Warship	Notes
Aircraft Carriers	These were designed so that aircraft could take off from and land on them. They did not carry large guns. Although they first appeared in WW1, they would only come to dominate naval warfare in WW2. The Soviets in the time period of this guidebook did not put any aircraft carriers into commission.
Battleships	These were the largest ships heavily armored and armed with the largest caliber guns. They would also have secondary guns and sometimes older ones carried torpedoes, although it was later realized that torpedo use was best handled by smaller ships.
Battlecruisers	These were like battleships but with less armor and, sometimes, smaller caliber main guns. The weight saving allowed them to be faster than battleships but not as powerful. They were much more powerful than standard cruisers.
Cruisers	These were smaller than battleships or battlecruisers, with less armor and smaller main guns. They also had secondary guns and sometimes carried torpedoes, depending upon their Navy’s preferences. They were designed to be fast warships for use in

situations where speed was important or where large warships were not needed. In fleet operations, they would be used as supplementary forces to the larger warships.

Cruisers were sometimes divided into heavy cruiser and light cruiser categories, which is outside the scope of this guidebook.

Seaplane Carriers

A seaplane carrier could carry seaplanes but, unlike an aircraft carrier, these planes could not take off from and land on carriers. Instead, cranes lowered the aircraft into the water for take off and raised them into the carrier after they landed on the water. A seaplane carrier was thus less capable than an aircraft carrier. The Imperial Russian Navy in WW1 had several seaplane carriers. The Soviets captured and used at least two in 1917–1918 but the Germans or Allies soon captured them all. The Soviets did not subsequently build seaplane carriers.

(A seaplane tender is a ship or boat that supported the operation of seaplanes but did not carry them.)

Destroyers

These were smaller than cruisers, with even less armor and smaller guns. They were quite fast and suited for all sorts of operations from use in independent squadron to being escorts for convoys or larger ships in fleet operations.

(smaller ships and boats)

There were all sorts of smaller warship and boats, like minesweepers, torpedo boats, gunboats, patrol boats, which are not covered in this guidebook.

There were also a number of special-purpose larger warships, like monitors or escort leaders, which are not covered in this guidebook.

Warships could be organized into a variety of naval units for operations. Most of these units are outside the scope of this guidebook, except for fleet and flotilla. The Soviets organized “fleets” in their main bodies of water, such as the Baltic Fleet in the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea Fleet in the Black Sea. The Soviets also used “fleet” in a collective sense to mean Navy. For example, in the late 1930s the Soviet Navy was designed the Military-Naval Fleet (*Voенно-Морской Флот*). Soviet flotillas were for smaller bodies of water, such as the Caspian Flotilla on the Caspian Sea. Some flotillas were independent commands like the Caspian

Flotilla while others were subordinated to fleets, like the North Pacific Flotilla in the Sea of Okhotsk, which was under the Soviet Pacific Fleet.

16.G.3 Air Forces

The Soviets used the ground force terminology and hierarchy for most of their air unit organization. Thus, an air division was a formation of air regiments. The squadron was a subunit of an air regiment.

16.H Names of the Soviet Communist Party

Summary

<i>Time Period</i>	<i>Party Name</i>
1913–1918	Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party (Bolsheviks) <i>Rossiyskaya Sotsial-Demokraticeskaya Rabochaya Partiya (Bolshevikov), RSDRP(B)</i>
1918–1925	Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) <i>Rossiyskaya Kommunisticheskaya Partiya (Bolshevikov), RKP(B)</i>
1925–1952	All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) <i>Vsesoyuznaya Kommunisticheskaya Partiya (Bolshevikov), VKP(B)</i>
1952–1991	Communist Party of the Soviet Union <i>Kommunisticheskaya Partiya Sovetskogo Soyuz, KPSS</i>



Delegates at the 8th party congress, which changed the party's name to the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik). Lenin is at the center of the photo, with Stalin at his right (to the left on the photo) and Kalinin. Kalinin became nominal head of the Soviet state, a figurehead position, while Lenin and later Stalin ran the country. Kalinin always supported Stalin and managed to keep his post and die of natural causes in 1946. His wife, however, was critical of Stalin and in 1938 was arrested, tortured, and sentenced to 15 years in the GULag. She was released in 1945 but then sent into internal exile after Kalinin's death.

The renaming of the Party in March 1918 as the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) was followed by a reorganization to set up branch and affiliate parties for various regions or ethnic group, such as the Armenian Communist Party and the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Belorussia. Some of these parties were created in places of the former Russian Empire that were outside the Soviet state itself. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, also in March 1918, stripped Belorussia, the Ukraine, and other territories from the Soviet state. Rather than the RKP(B) operating directly in, say, Belorussian, the Belorussian branch of the RKP(B) officially operated there. These branch parties were firmly under control of the leaders who ran the RKP(B).

Another factor in the creation of branch parties was the Bolsheviks' policy on "nationalities" (ethnic groups). In 1913, the Bolsheviks had recognized nationalities in the Russian Empire that right to self determination, including independence. Once the Bolsheviks were in power, however, this right became theoretical rather than something that could be realized. Nonetheless, the logic of this policy led to the setting up of subsidiary departments of the RKP(B) in the Russian SFSR, such as a Tatar department for the Tatar ASSR.



A picture from the 14th Party Congress of 1925

This congress renamed the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) into the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik).

The USSR was created in late 1922 by merging the Russian SFSR with the Belorussian SSR, Transcaucasian SFSR, and Ukrainian SSR. Despite the organization of the USSR mostly along ethnic lines with all major groups being equal, the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) continued to function as the country-wide party, with various ethnic branch parties under it.

For example, the Communist Party (Bolshevik) of the Ukraine was the party for the Ukrainian SSR and the Communist Party (Bolshevik) of Belorussia was the party for the Belorussian SSR. The symbolism of having the “Russian” Communist Party as the overarching was not lost on people, as it implied the Russians were the dominant and privileged ethnic group. Accordingly, in 1925 the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) was renamed as the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik). In 1952, it assumed its final name, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

The Party’s name changes in 1925 and 1952 did not resolve an anomaly that would last until 1990. Every union republic but one had its own branch communist party under the all-union party. Thus, the Communist Party (Bolshevik) of the Ukraine was the branch party in the Ukrainian SSR. The exception was the Russian SFSR, which did not have its own branch party. Instead, Communist Party members in this republic were just members of the main Communist Party itself. If this in a way suggested that the Russian SFSR was more important than the other union republics, that was unofficially but actually the case.

In August 1991 a hard-line group including Communists staged a coup against Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachyov but failed to take control of the USSR. This led to the Communist Party being banned in November, weeks before the USSR itself dissolved.

16.I Names of the Soviet State

Summary

<i>Time Period</i>	<i>State Name</i>
7 Nov. 1917 to 25 Jan. 1918	<p><i>Full Official Name:</i> (no official name)</p> <p><i>Default Name (continuation of the previous state name):</i> Russian Republic <i>Rossiyskaya Respublika</i></p>
25 Jan. 1918 to 10 July 1918	<p><i>Full Official Name:</i> Russian Soviet Republic <i>Rossiyskaya Sovetskaya Respublika</i></p>
10 July 1918 to 30 Dec. 1922	<p><i>Full Official Name:</i> Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic <i>Rossiyskaya Sotsialisticheskaya Federativnaya Sovetskaya Respublika</i></p> <p><i>Abbreviations:</i> Russian SFSR <i>Rossiyskaya SFSR</i> RSFSR <i>RSFSR</i></p>
From 30 Dec. 1922 (The USSR was dissolved on 26 Dec. 1991)	<p><i>Full Official Name:</i> Union of Soviet Socialist Republics <i>Soyuz Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik</i></p> <p><i>Abbreviation:</i> USSR <i>SSSR</i></p> <p><i>Other:</i> Soviet Union <i>Sovetskiy Soyuz</i></p>

The Soviet state came into existence on 7 November 1917 when the Bolsheviks took over the capital of the Russian Republic, ended the Provisional Government, and declared their own government. The Bolsheviks were quite busy setting up their government and extended their control over the country, so they did not adopt an official name for the country at this time. Some continued to call it the Russian Republic, although all sort of unofficial names like Bolshevik Russia and Soviet Russia were also used. The Soviets themselves often used phrases like the Soviet Republic, the Republic of Soviets, or just the Republic, even after they adopted an official name.



Schastlivyy Rabochiy v Sovdepiya
A Happy Worker in the Sovdepiya

This 1919 anti-Soviet propaganda poster shows an emaciated worker sitting on a pile of paper currency, emphasizing the food shortages and high inflation the Soviet state was experiencing.

The lack of an official name allowed the opponents of the Soviets an opportunity for political ridicule, and they called the Soviet state *Sovdepiya*, after the many soviets of deputies that formed in 1917, such as the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. The Soviets proclivity for abbreviations and portmanteaus led them to call a soviet of deputies a *sovdep* (from **sov**et **depy**tatov). Their opponents then turned this into the fictional state name of *Sovdepiya*. During the Russian Civil War, *Sovdepiya* remained in popular use by anti-Soviet groups long after the Soviets named their state.

16.J Emblems of the Soviet State

The treaty that formed the USSR in late 1922 specified that the USSR would have its own flag, emblem, and state seal, without specifying what they would be. Actually, the treaty specified a *gerb*, the Russian word for a coat of arms. However, the Soviet symbol was not created using traditional heraldic rules, so in English it became called the Soviet emblem rather than coat of arms.

Summary

<i>Time Period</i>	<i>State Name</i>
1922–1923	<i>Emblem:</i> (mandated but not specified) The treaty mandated an emblem without specifying what it would be.

1923–1936

Emblem:



“Proletarians of all countries, unite!” appears on the ribbon in six languages: Armenian, Azerbaijani, Belorussian, Georgian, Russian, and Ukrainian. These were the main languages of the four founding union republics of the USSR. (Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Georgian were for the Transcaucasian SFSR.) The state emblem did not track the evolution of the union republics until its revision in 1936.

Beside the revolutionary language on the ribbon, the central design bore symbolism of world revolution: the hammer and sickle over Africa, Europe, Asia, and North America.

1936–1946

Emblem:



The emblem was revised to add “Proletarians of all countries, unite!” in six more languages in addition to the original five: Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik, Turkmen, and Uzbek. This was a total of 11 languages, one for each of the union republics of the USSR in 1936. (The Transcaucasian SFSR was broken up into the Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Georgian SSRs in 1936.)

Five more union republics were added to the USSR in 1940, but the emblem was not revised until 1946.

1946–1956

Emblem:



The USSR had grown to 16 union republics in 1940 and did not any more after defeating Germany in World War II. The emblem was revised in 1946 to add the main languages of the remaining five union republics: Estonian, Finnish (for the Karelo-Finnish SSR), Latvian, Lithuanian, and Romanian (for the Moldavian SSR).

1956–1991

Emblem:




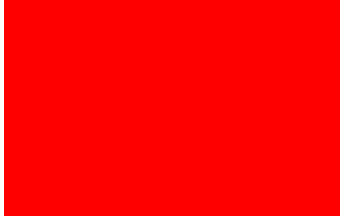
The Karelo-Finnish SSR had been created in 1940 from territory captured from Finland in the Winter War plus the adjoining Karelian part of the Russian SFSR. Most likely this SSR existed as a threat to Finland, providing a ready-made entity to absorb more Finnish territory. However, the war ended without Finland ceding more land to the USSR except for the Petsamo area in the far north, which went into the Russian SFSR, not the Karelo-Finnish SSR.

After the war, Soviet-Finnish relations were conducted so that Finland remained a neutral country that posed no threat to the USSR or its foreign policy. With no need for a Karelo-Finnish SSR any more, in 1956 the USSR simply turned the SSR into the Karelian ASSR, a part of the Russian SFSR. This was the only union republic ever to be abolished and absorbed into another union republic.

This emblem remained in use for the rest of the existence of the USSR, although a minor revision to Belorussian inscription was made in 1958.

16.K Flags of the Soviet State

Summary

<i>Time Period</i>	<i>State Name</i>
1917–1918	<p><i>Official Flag:</i> (no official flag)</p> <p><i>Default Flag (continuation of the previous state flag):</i></p>  <p>This was the state flag of the Russian Empire and the flag of the 1917 Russian Provisional Government/Russian Republic. When then Soviets took over, they at first did not adopt their own flag for their state, so by default this Russian Empire/Russian Republic flag remained the state flag. Some historical works suggest the Soviets rarely used this flag but others claim it was used until 1918 or even 1920.</p> <p>This flag was also used by at least some of the groups comprising the Whites, the Soviet's opponents in the Russian Civil War.</p> <p><i>Unofficial Flag:</i></p>  <p>Unofficially, the Soviet state used the Red Banner, an all-red flag with no writing, symbols, or other designs.</p>

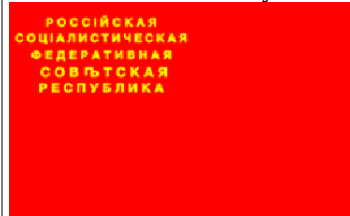
1918–1922

Decreed Flag:



In April 1918, the Soviets decreed that their flag would be a red flag with the inscription, *Rossiyskoy Sotsialisticheskaya Federativnaya Sovietskaya Respublika* in Cyrillic (*Росси́йской Социалистическая Федеративная Совѣтская Респу́блика*; note the use of *i* and *ѣ*, Cyrillic letters that would be dropped from the alphabet in a spelling reform). However, the decree did not specify the flag in full, such as the size ratio of the flag, its shade of red, and details like color, placement, and typography of the inscription.



Was this flag even used? Some works claim there is no evidence this flag was ever actually made or used. Some works have designs (two are shown above), sometimes with the implication it was actually used. Some works claim that a version of this flag was used at the Soviet embassy in Berlin, Germany, in 1918, with the following design:





Official Flag:



In June 1918 a new design adopted with stylized Cyrillic for the state's initials, *RSFSR*. In late 1922, the Russian SFSR stopped being the Soviet state and became a union republic of the new Soviet state, the USSR.

1922–1924	<p><i>Official Flag:</i> (mandated but not yet finalized)</p> <p><i>First Design:</i></p>  <p>The treaty that formed the USSR in late 1922 specified that the USSR would have its own flag, emblem, and state seal, without specifying what they would be. In July 1923, the Soviets decided their flag would be the state emblem on a red flag. Unfortunately, this has led several historical works to claim or imply this flag existed from the formation of the USSR in 1922 and was in use until 1924. This design was not adopted!</p> <p><i>Second Design:</i></p>  <p>The complicated state emblem made the July 1923 flag too difficult to easily manufacture. In November 1923, the Soviets proposed a greatly simplified design, as shown above. Unfortunately, this has led several historical works to claim this flag became the state flag in 1924. In actuality, this proposal was never approved. Instead, a new design was proposed and then approved in April 1924 (see below).</p> <p>So, what was the flag of the USSR from 1922 to 1924? My sources on the Soviet flag do not say. It seems likely the Russian SFSR flag continued to be used until the flag of the USSR was ready. For example, a 1950s Soviet regulation proclaimed that the Russian SFSR flag was a symbol of “the voluntary unification of the RSFSR with other equal republics into the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics”.</p>
1924–1936	<p><i>Official Flag:</i></p>  <p>In April 1924, this flag design was proposed and then approved a few days later. Subsequent flags would just be minor revisions of this design.</p>

1936–1955	<i>Official Flag:</i> 
1955–1991	<i>Official Flag:</i> 

16.L Names of the Soviet Secret Police

I often use “secret police” for the Soviet secret police force, since their actual name changed frequently. This section covers the actual names of these organizations.

The “secret” in secret police does not imply the existence of these forces were supposed to be kept secret from the Soviet people. They were well known and often openly publicized. Instead, the secret meant they often operated in secret or covert actions. The GUGB of the NKVD became notorious for arresting people in the middle of the night without due process.

Summary

<i>Time Period</i>	<i>Official Name</i>
1917–1918	<p>All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for the Fight against Counter-Revolution and Sabotage (Cheka, VCheka) <i>Vserossiyskaya Chrezvychaynaya Komissiya po Borbe s Kontrrevolyutsiei i Sabotazhem</i> (ChK, VChK) “Cheka” was the Russian pronunciation of the abbreviation “ChK”.</p>
1918–1922	<p>All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for the Fight against Counter-Revolution, Speculation, and Corruption (Cheka, VCheka) <i>Vserossiyskaya Chrezvychaynaya Komissiya po Borbe s Kontrrevolyutsiei, Spekulyatsiei i Prestupleniyami po Dolzhnosti</i> (ChK, VChK) “<i>Spekulyatsiei</i>” is often translated into English as “Profiteering” rather than “Speculation”. “<i>Prestupleniyami po Dolzhnosti</i>” literally translates as “Crimes of Position” but “Corruption” is what is meant.</p>
1922–1923	<p>NKVD/State Political Directorate (GPU) <i>NKVD/Gosudarstvennoe Politicheskoe UkraVlenie</i> (GPU) The Cheka was reorganized and went from being an independent commission to a directorate of the NKVD, the People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs of the Russian SFSR. The Russian SFSR was the Soviet state until December 1922, when the USSR was formed. The Russian SFSR became one of four union republics. As the USSR government was organized in 1923, the GPU would be transferred from the Russian SFSR level to the USSR level (see next entry).</p>

1923-1934	<p>Joint State Political Directorate (OGPU) <i>Obedinyonnoe Gosudarstvennoe Politicheskoe Upravlenie</i> (OGPU) “<i>Obedinyonnoe</i>” is sometimes translated as “United” or “Unified” instead of “Joint” and means it was a USSR-level country-wide directorate. The OGPU was also sometimes unofficially called the All-Union State Political Directorate, as “all-union” (<i>vesesoyuznyy</i>) was a term the Soviets used for other country-wide organizations, such as the All-Union Congress of Soviets.</p>
1934–1941	<p>NKVD/Main Directorate of State Security (GUGB) <i>NKVD/Glavnoe Upravlenie Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti</i> (GUGB) Although union republics had their own individual people’s commissariats of internal affairs, an NKVD at the USSR level was only created in 1934. At this time, the OGPU was subordinated to this NKVD as a main directorate.</p>
1941	<p>People’s Commissariat of State Security (NKGB) <i>Narodnyy Komissariat Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti</i> (NKGB) GUGB was removed from the NKVD and became its own people’s commissariat in February 1941.</p>
1941–1943	<p>NKVD/various security main directorates, directorates, and departments In July 1941 soon after the war with Germany began, for efficiency of operations the NKGB was re-subordinated to the NKVD. However, rather than reforming the GUGB itself, the NKGB’s various security main directorates, directorates, and departments simply came directly under authority of the NKVD headquarters.</p>
1943–1946	<p>People’s Commissariat of State Security (NKGB) <i>Narodnyy Komissariat Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti</i> (NKGB) In 1943, with Germany now being defeated, the security main directorates, directorates, and departments were removed from the NKVD and reformed into the NKGB.</p>
1946–1953	<p>Ministry of State Security (MGB) <i>Ministerstvo Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti</i> (MGB) In 1946, the Soviets renamed their “people’s commissariats” as “ministries”, without any change in actual functioning.</p>

1953-1954	MVD/various security main directorates, directorates, and departments The MGB was merged into the MVD (<i>Ministerstvo Vnutrennikh Del</i> ; Ministry of Internal Affairs) as various security main directorates, directorates, and departments.
1954–1991	Committee for State Security (KGB) <i>Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti</i> (KGB) The state security functions were separated from the MVD and formed into the KGB. As an unsuccessful attempt to limit the power of state security, the new organization was symbolically only designated a committee and not a ministry. However, it operated in the Soviet government at the same level as the ministries and remained extremely powerful.

16.M Political Control of the Military

The Communist Party and Soviet state used political commissars and political officers to monitor the loyalty of the Soviet military to the state and Party and to indoctrinate the military in Communist ideology. These organizations (there were two once the Navy became an independent service) were frequently redesignated, so for simplicity I just refer to them as the “political officers” or “political administration”. Here are their official designations in 1918–1946:

Year	Name	Abbreviation
<i>Over the Red Army (which included the Soviet Navy until late 1937)</i>		
1918	All-Russian Bureau of Military Commissars	VBVK, from V serossiyskoye B yuro V oyennykh K omissarov
1919	Political Department of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic	PO RVSR, from P oliticheskii O tdel R evolyutsionnogo V oennogo S oveta R espubliki
1919–1922	Political Directorate of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic	PUR or PUR RVSR, from P oliticheskoe U pravlenie R evolyutsionnogo V oennogo S oveta R espubliki
1922–1924	Political Administration of the Revolutionary Military Council of the USSR	PUR RVS SSSR, from P oliticheskoe U pravlenie R evolyutsionnogo V oennogo S oveta SSSR
1924–1940	Political Administration of the Workers’ and Peasants’ Red Army	PU RKKA or PURKKA, from P oliticheskoe U pravlenie R abochi- K restyanskoy K rasnoy A rmii
1940–1941	Main Directorate of Political Propaganda of the	GUPP RKKA, from G lavnoe U pravlenie

	Workers' and Peasants' Red Army	P oliticheskoy P ropagandy R aboche- K restyanskoy K rasnoy A rmii
1941–1946	Main Political Directorate of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army	GPU RKKKA, from G lavnoe P oliticheskoe U pravlenie R aboche- K restyanskoy K rasnoy A rmii
<i>Over the Soviet Navy (once it was an independent military service)</i>		
1938–1940	Political Administration of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Fleet	PU RKKF or PURKKF, from P oliticheskoe U pravlenie R aboche- K restyanskogo K rasnogo F lota*
1940–1941	Main Directorate of Political Propaganda of the Navy	GUPP VMF, from G lavnoe U pravlenie P oliticheskoy P ropagandy V oenno- M orskogo F lota
1941–1946	Main Political Directorate of the Navy of the USSR	GPU VMF SSSR, from G lavnoe P oliticheskoe U pravlenie V oenno- M orskogo F lota SSSR

*The Navy had been designated the Red Fleet (*Krasnyy Flot*) when it was a branch of the Red Army but was redesignated the Navy (*Voenno-Morskoy Flot* or VMF; literally meaning Military-Naval Fleet) when it became an independent armed service. Apparently, the Navy's Political Directorate in 1938–1940 still retained "Red Fleet" in its own designation.

16.N The Red Army Oath, 1918

Solemn Oath

1. I, son of the laboring people, citizen of the Soviet Republic, assume the title of warrior in the Worker-Peasant Army.

2. Before the laboring classes of Russia and the entire world, I accept the obligation to carry this title with honor, to study the art of war conscientiously, and to guard national and military property from spoil and plunder as if it were the apple of my eye.

3. I accept the obligation to observe revolutionary discipline and unquestioningly carry out all orders of my commanders, who have been invested with their rank by the power of the Worker-Peasant government.

4. I accept the obligation to restrain myself and my comrades from all conduct that might debase the dignity of citizens of the Soviet Republic, and to direct all my thoughts and actions to the great cause of liberating the laboring masses.

5. I accept the obligation to answer every summons of the Worker-Peasant government to defend the Soviet Republic from all danger and the threats of all enemies, and to spare neither my strength nor my very life in the battle for the Russian Soviet Republic, for the cause of socialism and the brotherhood of peoples.

6. If I should with malicious intent go back on this my solemn vow, then let my fate be universal contempt and let the righteous hand of Revolutionary law chastise me.

(This is the translation of the text of the oath as presented on a 1918 Red Army recruiting poster. See <https://soviethistory.msu.edu/1917-2/red-guard-into-army/red-guard-into-army-texts/solemn-oath-on-induction-into-the-worker-peasant-red-army/>.)

16.0 Revolutionary Military Council (Decree)

ALL-RUSSIAN CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE DECREE

dated 30 September 1918

ON THE REVOLUTIONARY MILITARY COUNCIL (REGULATIONS)⁵⁵⁶

1) The Revolutionary Military Council of the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic is the organ of the highest military power in the country.

All the forces and means of the people are placed at the disposal of the Revolutionary Military Council for the needs of defending the borders of the Soviet Republic.

All Soviet institutions undertake to consider and satisfy the requirements of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic in the first place.

2) The Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic absorbs all the rights of the Board of the People's Commissariat for Military Affairs, all members of which are members of the Council.

3) All military institutions are subordinate to the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic and work according to its instructions.

The All-Russian General Staff, the Main Supply Department, the Military Legislative Council, the Higher Military Inspectorate and other military institutions are subordinate to the Revolutionary Military Council.

4) The Chairman of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic is the People's Commissar for Military and Naval Affairs. The relationship between the chairman and the Soviet is equal to the relationship between the People's Commissar and the Collegium, as defined by the Constitution of the Soviet Republic.

5) The Commander-in-Chief has complete independence in all matters of a strategic and operational nature. Corresponding orders of the Commander-in-Chief are countersigned by one of the members of the Revolutionary Military Council. In all other matters, the Commander-in-Chief enjoys the rights of a member of the Collegium.

⁵⁵⁶ Source: https://ru.wikisource.org/wiki/%D0%9F%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B5_%D0%92%D0%A6%D0%98%D0%9A_%D0%BE%D1%82_30.09.1918_%D0%9E_%D0%A0%D0%B5%D0%B2%D0%BE%D0%BB%D1%8E%D1%86%D0%B8%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%BC_%D0%92%D0%BE%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%BC_%D0%A1%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%B5_%D0%28%D0%9F%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%BE%D0%B6%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B5%29 (in Russian).

6) Members of the Revolutionary Council of the Republic on business trips with individual armies are organs of communication, observation and instruction. They do not interfere directly with the practical orders of the commander or the Military Council of a given army, but in extreme cases they have the right to dismiss the commanders and members of the corresponding Military Council, they also have the right to issue orders of a local nature, immediately bringing this to the attention of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic.

7) In those cases when a member of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic is at the same time a member of the Revolutionary Military Council of the front or the army, he enjoys in his work only the rights of a member of this Council.

8) The Chairman of the Revolutionary Military Council is approved by the All-Russian Central Executive Committee; all members of the Revolutionary Military Council, including the Commander-in-Chief, by the Council of People's Commissars.

Chairman of the
All-Russian Central
Executive Committee of Soviets
Ya. Sverdlov

16.P Russian

Where practical I translate Russian words rather than transliterate them. For example, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was *Союз Советских Социалистических Республик* in Cyrillic. This transliterates to *Soyuz Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik*, but this far less useful for English speakers than its translation: *Union of Soviet Socialist Republics*. Some terms, however, cannot be easily translated and are transliterated instead. Further, Russian place names are always transliterated for what I hope are obvious reasons: *Нижний Новгород* is *Nizhniy Novgorod*, not “New Novgorod”; *Сталинград* is *Stalingrad*, not “Stalincity” or “Stalin City”.

Here is the *Classic Europa* scheme for transliterating Russian Cyrillic:

Russian Cyrillic		English		Russian Cyrillic		English	
Upper	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper	Lower
А	а	A	a	П	п	P	p
Б	б	B	b	Р	р	R	r
В	в	V	v	С	с	S	s
Г	г	G	g	Т	т	T	t
Д	д	D	d	У	у	U	u
Е	е	E	e	Ф	ф	F	f
Ё	ё	Yo	yo	Х	х	Kh	kh
Ж	ж	Zh	zh	Ц	ц	Ts	ts
З	з	Z	z	Ч	ч	Ch	ch
И	и	I	i	Ш	ш	Sh	sh
Й	й	Y	y	Щ	щ	Shch	shch
К	к	K	k	Ъ	ъ		
Л	л	L	l	Ы	ы	Y	y
М	м	M	m	Ь	ь		
Н	н	N	n	Э	э	E	e
О	о	O	o	Ю	ю	Yu	yu
				Я	я	Ya	ya

Ъ (the hard sign) and Ь (the soft sign) are not transliterated in *Classic Europa*. Some translation schemes do transliterate Ъ as “ and Ь as ’, but others do not. These signs are not letters but instead are symbols indicating how adjacent letters are pronounced. “Nationality” is *национальность* in Russian, which transliterates as *natsionalnost* without the soft signs and as *natsional’nost’* (note the two apostrophes) with the soft signs transliterated. I feel that, unless you speak Russian, including the transliterated signs hinders rather than helps understanding, so *национальность* becomes *natsionalnost* in *Classic Europa*.

Four letters were dropped from the alphabet in a 1918 reform. These letters show up in place names in documents dating before the reform (especially I, i), so they are listed in the following table.

<i>Russian Cyrillic</i>		<i>English</i>	
<i>Upper</i>	<i>Lower</i>	<i>Upper</i>	<i>Lower</i>
И	и	I	i
Ѣ	ѣ	E or Ě	e or ě
Ѡ	ѡ	F	f
Ѳ	ѳ	I or Í	I or í

Other letters were dropped from the alphabet in earlier centuries. These are not listed here.

Notes

In researching matters dealing with the USSR, you often end up dealing with sources written in the Russian language. Russian uses a different alphabet in a different script than English, so one major factor is transliterating from the Russian alphabet of the Cyrillic script⁵⁵⁷ to the English alphabet of the Latin script⁵⁵⁸. There are multiple ways to transliterate Russian Cyrillic into English. You can see this, for example, in some transliterated word endings. For example, *-нныу*, *-нныи*, and *-нны* all are different ways to transliterate the Russian word ending *-нныѡ* (the last letter becomes “y”, “i”, or is just dropped because of the preceding “y”, based on the transliteration system).

Classic Europa attempts to transliterate Cyrillic in a WW2-era style of transliteration, for historical flavor. I researched transliteration in the 1980s during design work for *Fire in the East* and *Scorched Earth*, looking at then-current systems and WW2-era examples. As I recall, one major influence was how the National Geographic Society transliterated the names of Soviet geographical features (cities, rivers, and so on) on the maps they published during the war. I have used this system with one modification (covered below) ever since. Some modern transliteration systems yield different results. For example, *Classic Europa* transliterates *Артем* as “Artyom” while some modern systems would give “Artem”.

557 The Cyrillic script is used for a number of languages, most of which have their own slightly-differing alphabets, such as Belarusian, Bulgarian, Kyrgyz, Russian, Serbian, Tajik, Ukrainian, and so on. For example, the Russian and Ukrainian alphabets mostly use the same letters, although each has four letters the other doesn't.

558 The Latin script is often also called the Roman script. Like with the Cyrillic script, languages using the Latin script have slightly differing letters. For example, the English alphabet has 26 letters and normally does not use diacritical marks except sometimes in loan words and other special cases, while the Polish alphabet had 32 letters and also uses several diacritical marks like *ś*, *ź*, *ę*, and *ł*.

Sidetrip: Two-Way Transliteration (not used in *Classic Europa*)

Some transliteration schemes aspire to two-way transliteration, so that if you transliterate Russian Cyrillic to English Latin and then back to Russian Cyrillic, you end up with the exact characters of the original Russian word. For example, transliterating *Армём* to “Artyom” and back yielding *Армём* is two-way transliteration (but see below), while transliterating *Армём* to “Artem” is one-way transliteration since transliterating it back would yield the incorrect *Артем*. You have no way of telling that the “e” in “Artem” should be Cyrillic *ë* instead of Cyrillic *e*. (Also, both *Армём* and *Артем* are Russian first names⁵⁵⁹, so context doesn’t help here, either.)

While two-way transliteration is a nice ideal, it is rather difficult to achieve without using numerous extra symbols. For example, *Армём* to “Artyom” unfortunately is also problematic! It could also be back-transliterated as *Артыюм*, since you can’t tell with certainty that the “yo” is supposed to be a single letter, *ë*. Instead, transliterating the “y” and “o” as separate letters could instead yield *ы* and *о*, resulting in *Артыюм*, which is also a Russian first name, albeit rarer than *Артем* and *Армём*.)

This complexity means many transliteration schemes, including that of *Classic Europa*, do not support two-way transliteration.

In recent times, I’ve adopted one change to *Classical Europa* transliteration from when I designed *Fire in the East* and *Scorched Earth*. Back then, I attempted to transliterate Cyrillic *e* as “ye” when it was in a stressed position (pronounced like the “ye” in “yes”) and as “e” when unstressed (pronounced like the “ee” in “meet”). I finally realized this was not all that useful, particularly since I was not very good at distinguishing stressed from unstressed! So, now I just transliterate it as “e” in all cases. After all, if you know Russian well enough, you can handle stressed vs. unstressed yourself, and if you don’t, then it doesn’t matter. The biggest practical consequence of this change is that the Armenian city of “Yerevan” on the *Scorched Earth* maps should now be “Erevan”. Maybe I’ll get to redo its map one day.

Sidetrip: The Charms of Cyrillic?

When I first saw written Russian Cyrillic, my reaction was, yuck, what a mess. Once you learn another script, however, you can learn interesting things. Russian letters turned out to be less intimidating than they first appeared, since many are

⁵⁵⁹ They are also last names and names of places, but let’s not complicate things more!

based on Greek letters, which frequently show up in English in mathematical and scientific works. Once I learned the Russian alphabet well enough, I came to appreciate some features of it: “ч” for “ch” and “ш” for “sh” are single letters what are single sounds. The English alphabet could something like use this (although the Cyrillic letters themselves are too similar the English letters “y” and “w” to be used).

One Final Note: Converting Russian to English involved more than translation and transliteration! One things that crops up frequently is how to handle capitalization. Russian capitalizes words much less than does American or British English: the first letter of each word in a proper name, and the first letter of the first word in a sentence or in the title of a work. For titles of works, I convert this Russian scheme to American English capitalization, in which all significant words are capitalized. For example, N.E. Kakurin’s work on the Russian Civil War is *Стратегический очерк гражданской войны*. Translated, it is *Strategic Outline of the Civil War* (not *Strategic outline of the civil war*); transliterated it is *Strategicheskiy Ocherk Grazhdanskoy Voyny* (not *Strategicheskiy ocherk grazhdanskoy voyny*). Many scholarly works follow Russian capitalization rules when transliterating, but I find this to be more confusing than useful in general works like these guidebooks. I follow the Russian capitalization only when using the actual Cyrillic.