

THE STRATEGY OF SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY

A former American government official reexamines the record and pays tribute to Stalin's leadership. How the USSR strengthened the anti-fascist forces of the world.

New Masses reprints the following article from the September 1941 issue of "Current History" by permission of both the magazine and the author. It strikes us as an example of the spirit of honest inquiry which is now impelling wide sections of the American public to revise their former impressions of Soviet policy. In the interest of extending and deepening this inquiry into the truth of our time, New Masses is opening its pages to similar discussion. Our own comment on the article appears in an adjoining column. Mr. Kenneth E. Davis was formerly an information specialist in the Department of Agriculture and is now engaged in free-lance writing.

WHETHER Hitler wins or loses his war on the Eastern Front, his action in attacking the Soviet Union should do much to clarify what has been for us Americans a most confused and confusing situation.

Our confusion began with the signing of the Nazi-Soviet pact of Aug. 23, 1939. It is probable that none of us who felt the full shock of that sudden blow will ever completely recover from it. The world amenable to logic seemed suddenly to have been killed by one stroke of the Soviet pen: a new world, fluid, transitional, and wholly incomprehensible, was born. One of the certainties of our world had been the implacable hostility of Communist Russia and Nazi Germany. Between two such divergent ideologies there could be no possible compromise, no peaceful meeting ground. As certainly as the earth was round, Stalin would never make a deal with Hitler.

And yet it happened—and at a moment of intense crisis, when the world hovered on the verge of another world war. Stalin, it would seem, had taken a leaf from Chamberlain's notebook. He had become of all things an "appeaser" suddenly doing an about-face in his strategy and making of Chamberlain's foreign policy a boomerang—"to save the Soviet Union." Cynically, deliberately, Stalin turned his back on "collective security" and pushed the world over the brink of the precipice—"to save the Soviet Union." His ruthless nationalism was no better (if no worse) in wisdom and virtue than the "Tory Dialectic" of the British government.

This was the obvious if incredible interpretation; this is how things looked on the surface. And this is the interpretation everywhere presented in what we read—the interpretation that writers are still presenting in their analyses of the most recent development, the German invasion of Russia.

For instance, the *New Republic* in its issue of June 30 says: "If we now emphasize the fact that Stalin brought his troubles upon himself we do so not for the pleasure of be-

ing able to say 'I told you so,' but because of the lesson to be learned. The Soviet Union under Stalin has sacrificed one by one practically all the principles which made the Russian Revolution twenty-four years ago flame like a glorious hope. . . . His last and greatest concession came when he shook hands with the deadliest enemy of Communism . . . and by so doing released upon this planet the horrors of a second world war. It is safe to assume that even a few days ago Stalin was prepared to make stupendous sacrifices in order to avoid the German assault. No one ever tried appeasement harder than he did."

And *Time*, in its issue of June 30, says: "For the past two years there have been few moments when Franklin Roosevelt could pity either Stalin or Hitler. But that Sunday morning (the morning of German attack) he could pity Stalin, who had started the war by signing the pact which he thought would keep Russia safe. Stalin, by turning Hitler loose on the rest of the world, apparently saved his own skin—but this piece of smartness had now boomeranged."

For two years we have been asked to believe that Stalin, who as head of the Communist Party was among the first to draw the attention of the doubting nations of the West to the world threat of fascism, who argued with irrefutable logic against policies of "appeasement," and who had only a few years before purged the Russian Communist Party and the Russian army of allegedly pro-Nazi elements, became all of a sudden as incredibly stupid as Chamberlain and proceeded to build a gallows for his own hanging.

This does not explain the facts and indeed is no real analysis at all. For instance, as the *New Republic* asked in its issue of June 23, "Why should they (the German strate-

gists) choose to attack Russia while they are still busy with Britain, and the United States is just over the horizon?" Certainly the German High Command must have been aware of the tremendous actual and potential fighting strength of the Soviet Union. The only answer the *New Republic* offers, in its issue of June 30, is the blanket assertion that Hitler "wants Russian oil and wheat and wants to make his rear secure before he starts his last great assault upon the British Isles." But this leaves out of account the fact that the focal point for the entire conflict has now changed—the major war at this writing is no longer Germany versus Britain but Germany versus Russia.

APPARENTLY we Americans have made no serious attempt to understand the choice that Stalin was forced to make in 1939, and in consequence of this initial error we have come to ignore Russia "as an unknown quantity," as if a power of such magnitude could possibly be ignored, either now or later during the period of postwar reconstruction. Surely it is time we revised our views of Soviet policy, for if we continue to regard the Russians as "enemies" incredibly foreign to our ways of feeling and thinking, our chances for developing a permanently peaceful world order at the close of this conflict will certainly be slim.

In making our revised estimate of Stalin's policy we must begin with the assumption that Hitler meant what he said in *Mein Kampf*, namely, that he does intend to conquer the entire world. Recent history certainly justifies this assumption. We must also assume that Stalin was well aware of Hitler's intentions long before the rest of the world's leaders took the German fuhrer with the requisite seriousness. This assumption, too, is certainly justified by the history of the last decade. We must remember that the Communists fought fascism more consistently than any other organized group, all through the 1930's. They joined in the Popular Front in France; they helped China against Japan and they—almost alone among left wingers—fought and died for their principles in the armies of loyalist Spain. The Soviet Union, as all the world knows, went "all out" for collective security against fascist aggression as an international policy.

What was the situation, then, in August 1939?

1. The policy of collective security had failed to gain practical results rapidly enough to justify its continuance in the face of an immediate fascist threat. It had failed, not because of Russia's lack of zeal or good faith, but because of the unalterable opposition of the leaders of the Western democracies.

2. Those leaders, whose basic strategy for



the last six years had been to use fascism as a buffer against Communism and to employ Hitler as a tool to crush the Soviet Union, still dominated their governments. The men of Munich were still in charge—Chamberlain, Daladier, and their “appeaser” supporters. These men and governments could obviously not be counted upon to give Russia effective aid in case Russia were attacked. They were psychologically unprepared to do so.

3. They were also physically unprepared to do so. France was torn by internal dissension; there were many in high places who preferred Hitlerism to the making of needed social and economic adjustments within France; and French military leaders, as all the world knew, were preparing to fight only a purely defensive war behind their Maginot Line. Britain—weak in planes and mechanized equipment, and with productive capacities at a relatively low ebb—was unprepared to defend herself adequately, much less give active aid to Poland and Russia.

4. On the other hand, Germany was totally prepared for war, and she was determined that it begin in the summer of 1939. Her diplomatic strategy in the developing Polish crisis was, naturally, to keep her enemies as few and as divided as possible, but if Britain and France backed up their promise to aid Poland in case of Germany's aggression in Poland it was of small importance. Hitler and the German High Command were well aware that neither France nor Britain would have any effect whatsoever on the military results in Poland. The question was, not whether the war was to come that year or not, but rather, whether the initial drive was to be against Russia or against the Western democracies after Poland was crushed, as she certainly would be in a few weeks. *If Hitler was to conquer the world he must crush both Russia and the Western democracies. His decision in 1939 will be based upon his weighing of relative costs. Will it cost more to take on Russia now, or later, after the democracies are crushed?*

5. Russia, then, stood alone against the tremendous weight of Hitler aided probably by Finland, almost certainly by the central European countries and Italy (if needed), and (something we must not forget) by an armed and eager Japan ready to pounce at the first favorable opportunity on Russia's rear. Against such tremendous odds, what were Stalin's chances of victory in case he were, at that moment, attacked? The national boundaries drawn in the Treaty of Versailles left Leningrad in an exposed position only twenty miles from the fortified Finnish border. The Ukraine is hard to defend against highly mobile mechanized forces. The Russian heavy goods industry had probably not at that time produced war materials in anything like sufficient quantity to balance those of Hitler—much less a Hitler allied with Finland, central Europe, Italy, and Japan. In short, the Russian chances for victory in case of an immediate attack of such enormous weight, were slight indeed.

Some Points of Difference

THESE are several conceptions and formulations in Mr. Davis' article with which NEW MASSES feels compelled to take issue. In so doing, we do not mean to minimize the significance or value of the author's ideas. To us, this article is evidence of the deep searching of mind and soul which has been going on among Americans of all faiths and classes in the past four months, these critical months for the future of our own country and the whole world.

There are millions of Americans today trying to get a deeper and clearer understanding of the Soviet Union and its place in world affairs. As Mr. Davis implies, this effort to reevaluate the past two years is a crucial one—if our hopes for a permanent solution of postwar problems are not to be dashed. But actually, we need not wait until then. An honest reexamination and reevaluation of the past is of utmost importance today because our immediate obligation is unity of action against the terrible menace of Hitler.

To begin with, there are some matters of formulation which, while they might be considered secondary, nevertheless cannot be ignored. For example, Mr. Davis speaks of “Molotov's issuing a call for world revolution.” The author's intentions are honorable; he wishes to show that the USSR did not abandon the working classes of the world after the non-aggression pact. Yet the phrase is dangerous—or at the very best—naïve. Revolutions are the expressions of a most profound will-to-change on the part of the vast majority of people. No one can make genuine revolutions from the outside of any country; nor can revolutions be conjured up by mere “calls” from any one man.

The fact is that Mr. Davis probably misinterpreted a passage in Molotov's speech on the twenty-second birthday of the USSR, in November 1939—at any rate, the whole reference in the present stage of affairs is harmful. The Soviet Union is the keystone of a vast front of entire nations and peoples. This front is fighting—not for strictly socialist, but for the most elementary democratic objectives. It is fighting our own War of Independence and the Great French Revolution all over again—fighting to safeguard the existence of whole peoples and their most elementary democratic rights. Any other concept of this present struggle would be wrong, as well as dangerous to the struggle itself.

But the major misconception lies in the passage in which Mr. Davis says that Stalin's decision, not Hitler's, brought about the present war. This comes perilously near Hitler's own claim that the Soviet Union was about to attack him—a venal lie which Hitler employs to escape responsibility for the most criminal deed of his murderous career.

The truth is that the USSR maintained its political and strategic independence during the period of the non-aggression pact. It did not appease fascism, was prepared to continue its peaceful construction of socialism, at the same time making preparations for any eventuality. Hitler could not live at peace with his neighbors because he was planning world conquest. No analysis which correctly emphasizes the Soviet Union's intransigence toward fascism ought to blur Hitler's responsibility for the holocaust of the past four months.

The passage which Mr. Davis himself italicized is really the most valuable, the one in which he says that in order to achieve world domination Hitler knew “he must crush both Russia and the Western democracies.” That is the heart of our present problem. In other words, Russia and the Western democracies are bound by a common link: namely that they are the formidable obstacles in Hitler's path to world domination. Hitler is therefore their mutual and common enemy.

If this is true, and we believe it is, then Mr. Davis misstates the issue when he says at another point that “the major war is no longer Germany versus Britain but Germany versus Russia.” This is untrue. Because if it is true that Hitler must crush both Russia and the Western democracies, it follows that the attack on Russia is also an attack on the Western democracies. They all stand or fall together. Hence, this is not a war between Germany and Russia, but a war of Germany against the whole civilized world.

It must be thought about and written about in these terms. And it must be fought in these terms.

THE EDITORS.

These, it seems, are the hard cold facts, requiring “realistic analysis,” that Stalin faced in August 1939. It is absurd to assume that Stalin placed any faith whatsoever in the permanent efficacy of an “appeasement” policy—though it was naturally to his in-

terest to make Hitler think that he did so. In view of the assumptions and facts presented here, the logical conclusion is that Stalin was well aware that, sooner or later, Hitler would attack the Soviet Union. But if the

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