

Below is Chapter 9 in: Geyer, Michael and Sheila Fitzpatrick (2009). *Beyond Totalitarianism: Stalinism and Nazism Compared*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

## States of Exception

*The Nazi-Soviet War as a System of Violence,  
1939–1945*

Mark Edele and Michael Geyer

Step forward: We hear that you are a good man. . . . Listen, we know you are our enemy. Therefore we now shall put you against a wall. But in consideration of your merits and virtues, it will be a good wall, and we shall shoot you with good bullets from good guns, and we shall bury you with a good shovel in good soil.

(Bertolt Brecht, “Verhör des Guten”)

And as to you, when the time has come that man will be his brother’s keeper, look back on us with forbearance.

(Bertolt Brecht, “An die Nachgeborenen”)<sup>1</sup>

The trouble is that neither the Wehrmacht nor the Red Army considered merit and virtue and, inasmuch as they buried the dead, they did not bury them in good soil. Neither did those born afterward show forbearance, for they were either too caught up in the dark times they tried to escape after defeat or never saw the darkness in the bright light of victory. The Soviet Union and the German Reich fought a war that denied virtue and honor to enemy soldiers and set entire people against each other in a life-and-death struggle. Memorializing

<sup>1</sup> Tritt vor: Wir hören / Daß Du ein guter Mann bist. . . . So höre: Wir wissen / Du bist unser Feind. Deshalb wollen wir Dich / Jetzt an eine Wand stellen. Aber in Anbetracht deiner Verdienste / Und guten Eigenschaften / An eine gute Wand und dich erschießen mit / Guten Kugeln guter Gewehre und dich begraben mit / Einer guten Schaufel in guter Erde. Bertolt Brecht, “Verhör Des Guten [Me-Ti/ Buch Der Wendungen],” in *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Bertolt Brecht (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1967), 462–3. Ihr aber, wenn es so weit sein wird / Daß der Mensch dem Menschen ein Helfer ist / Gedenkt unserer / Mit Nachsicht. Idem, “An die Nachgeborenen [Svedenborger Gedichte],” in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 9, 722–5, here 725.

Research for this essay was made possible in part (for Mark Edele) by a University of Western Australia Research Grant (UWARG) (2006) and (for Michael Geyer) by a fellowship of the American Academy in Berlin (2004) and a Humboldt Forschungspreis (2007). Thanks to Josh Sanborn and Elena Shulman for kind permission to quote from unpublished work. Special thanks to Peter Holquist for his contributions to this essay in an early stage of the discussion.

the war did not bring, or has not brought yet, together what the war had torn asunder.<sup>2</sup> In the new century, there are some indications that the time for forbearance or, in any case, for commemoration in the spirit of mutuality may yet come.<sup>3</sup> However, the moment is most certainly right for a reconsideration of the single most destructive war of the twentieth century, the war between Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, and to approach this war not as a German or a Soviet affair, respectively, but as a ferocious and brutal antagonism in a wider field of European and global war.<sup>4</sup>

The lethal encounter between the militarized polities of Germany and the Soviet Union on what the Germans called the “Eastern Front” (*Ostfront*) and the Soviets the “Great Patriotic War” (*Velikaia Otechestvennaia voina*) can only be essayed in the literal sense; that is, as an experiment or, in one of the OEDs definitions, a “first tentative effort in learning.”<sup>5</sup> The reasons differ. Simply put, our knowledge about the Soviet side, judges one of the premier military historians of this conflict, “remains appallingly incomplete.”<sup>6</sup> Notwithstanding manifestos calling for historians of Russia finally to focus on the war,<sup>7</sup> so far only few studies have emerged that go beyond the excellent operational studies of John Erickson, David Glantz, and Jonathan House.<sup>8</sup> As Catherine Merridale – whose work is among the few exceptions to that rule – has

<sup>2</sup> “Kluffen der Erinnerung: Rußland und Deutschland sechzig Jahre nach dem Krieg.” *Osteuropa* 55, no. 4–6 (2005).

<sup>3</sup> Margot Blank, ed., *Beutestücke: Kriegsgefangene in der deutschen und sowjetischen Fotografie, 1941–1945, Katalog zur Ausstellung im deutsch-russischen Museum Berlin Karlshorst* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2003); Olga V. Kurilo, ed., *Der Zweite Weltkrieg im deutschen und russischen Gedächtnis* (Berlin: Avinus, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Evan Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East: The Nazi-Soviet War 1941–1945* (London: Hodder, 2005); Norman Davies, *No Simple Victory: World War II in Europe, 1939–1945* (New York: Viking, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> For starting points see Jörg Baberowski and Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, *Ordnung durch Terror: Gewaltexzesse und Vernichtung im nationalsozialistischen und stalinistischen Imperium* (Bonn: Dietz, 2006), 71–90; Richard Overy, *The Dictators: Hitler’s Germany, Stalin’s Russia* (New York: Norton, 2006), 512–25; and Ian Kershaw, *Fateful Choices: Ten Decisions that Changed the World, 1940–1941* (New York: Penguin Press, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> David M. Glantz, *Colossus Reborn: The Red Army at War, 1941–1943* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 611.

<sup>7</sup> Amir Weiner, “Saving Private Ivan: From What, Why, and How?” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1, no. 2 (2000): 305–36. He repeated the charge in “In the Long Shadow of War: The Second World War and the Soviet and Post-Soviet World,” *Diplomatic History* 25, no. 3 (2001): 443–56.

<sup>8</sup> David M. Glantz and Jonathan House, *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995); David M. Glantz, *Barbarossa: Hitler’s Invasion of Russia, 1941* (Stroud: Tempus, 2001); id., *The Battle for Leningrad: 1941–1944* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002); John Erickson, *The Road to Stalingrad: Stalin’s War with Germany*, vol. 1 (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1975); id., *The Road to Berlin: Stalin’s War with Germany*, vol. 2 (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1983). Recent additions to the genre include Mawdsley, *Thunder*; and Chris Bellamy, *Absolute War: Soviet Russia in the Second World War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007).

recently pointed out, we still know very little “about the lives, background and motivation of the [Soviet] troops themselves.”<sup>9</sup> The main struggle is to find sufficient evidence to back up the vast claims popular historians have made about Stalin and the Soviet Union at war.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, we know much, much more about the German side. In fact, the density of historical research on the “Eastern Front,” on occupation and collaboration, as well as on annihilation and extermination is staggering.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the Nazi-Soviet war has been subject to a host of documentaries, films, exhibitions, often with extensive Russian footage and documentation that have engendered intense public debates.<sup>12</sup> Germans now know, or can know, what kind of war their war on the Eastern Front was. But knowledge of the German war, deep and vast as it is, can only become insight if and when it is matched and, indeed, entangled with the knowledge of the other side. For war, and surely war of this

<sup>9</sup> Catherine Merridale, “Culture, Ideology and Combat in the Red Army, 1939–45.” *Journal of Contemporary History* 41, no. 2 (2006): 305–24; here: 305. See also her seminal *Ivan’s War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939–1945* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006); Kenneth Slepyan, *Stalin’s Guerrillas: Soviet Partisans in World War II* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006); and Amir Weiner, “Something to Die For, a Lot to Kill For: The Soviet System and the Barbarisation of Warfare, 1939–1945,” in: *The Barbarization of Warfare* ed. George Kassimeris (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 101–25. Important Russian-language contributions include *Velikaia Otechestvennaia voina 1941–1945*, Kniga 4: *Narod i voina* (Moscow: Nauka, 1999) (quoted hereafter as: *Narod i voina*); and Elena S. Seniavskaia, *Frontovoe pokolenie 1941–1945. Istoriko-psikhologicheskoe issledovanie* (Moscow: RAN institut Rossiiskoi istorii, 1995).

<sup>10</sup> Television has superseded historiography in this respect. John Erickson handles the relative lack of sources quite well in *The Russian Front, 1941–1945*, four videocassettes (182 min.), directed by John Erickson, Michael Leighton, Lamancha Productions, and Cromwell Productions, 1998, while later Western TV productions are rather weaker. However, see the remarkable hit on Russian TV, *Štrafbat* [Penal Battalion], dir. Nikolaj Dostal’, perfs. Aleksei Serebriakov, Iurii Stepanov, and Aleksandr Bashirov, 525 min., Kachestvo DVD, Russia 2004; or the film *Svoi*, dir. Dimitrii Meskhiev, perfs. Bogdan Stupka, Konstantin Khabensky, and Sergei Garmash, color, 105 min., DVD (Moscow: ORT Video 2004).

<sup>11</sup> Rolf-Dieter Müller and Gerd R. Ueberschär, eds., *Hitlers Krieg im Osten 1941–1945: Ein Forschungsbericht* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2000). The list has grown considerably since. See Rolf-Dieter Müller and Hans Erich Volkmann, eds., *Die Wehrmacht: Mythos und Realität* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1999); Bruno Thoß and Hans-Erich Volkmann, eds., *Erster Weltkrieg – Zweiter Weltkrieg, ein Vergleich: Krieg, Kriegserlebnis, Kriegserfahrung in Deutschland*. (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2002). See the comprehensive series *Militär-geschichtliches Forschungsamt*, ed., *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, 10 vols. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1979–2008). See also the essays by Gerlach and Werth, Baberowski and Doering-Manteuffel, Browning and Siegelbaum, as well as Fitzpatrick and Lüdtko in this volume.

<sup>12</sup> Wulf Kansteiner, *In Pursuit of German Memory: History, Television, and Politics after Auschwitz* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006); Eike Wenzel, *Gedächtnisraum Film: Die Arbeit an der deutschen Geschichte in Filmen seit den sechziger Jahren* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2000); Hannes Heer, *Vom Verschwinden der Täter: Der Vernichtungskrieg fand statt, aber keiner war dabei*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 2004); Christian Hartmann, Johannes Hürter, and Ulrike Jureit, eds., *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht: Bilanz einer Debatte* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2005).

magnitude, is only accounted for inasmuch as both sides see each other and see themselves reflected in the other in their deadly encounter. We may doubt on practical and philosophical grounds that they will ever see the same, but as long as the two sides perceive and, thus, recognize each other, they can at least begin recalling and writing a history in which Brecht's wisdom may apply – in hindsight if not necessarily with forbearance. Whether this history will then be a suitable instrument for mending the tear that ruptured the bond between the two nations is another question.<sup>13</sup>

Given the unequal development of historiography, the ambition of this essay may be foolish – not only to provide a sketch of a history of the adversaries' conduct of war, but also to reflect on the peculiar, expansive, and intensive system of violence that made both German and Soviet societies subjects and objects of destruction. That is, we have to account for a war that reached inside to remake the respective war-fighting society in a war of excisions much as it reached outside in order to subjugate and, indeed, destroy, annihilate, and exterminate the enemy – all the while it was fought in bloody battles by huge armies with utmost intensity along a hyperextended front. We think of the former as a “civil war,” that is, a war that aimed at remaking (and obliterating) entire populations, and the latter as a “war of destruction” with its own dynamic toward all-out annihilation. And this does not even account yet for the fusion of interior and exterior war in the territories and with the people in between that became pawns in the hands of both sides.<sup>14</sup>

Our argument unfolds in a number of steps.

First, the unparalleled lethality of this theater of war had its roots not simply in the destructive ideology of the one or the other side, or in a universal dynamic of total war. Rather, the devastating nature of this war, we suggest, is the consequence of the inimical interrelationship of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. This was a war fought with utter unrestraint from the start, the result of the assessment of the enemy as peculiarly heinous. From the start, this was not a “conventional” war, but a war in which the imperative was to win by whatever means necessary or to perish entirely.

Military institutions and militarized societies are highly self-contained and self-involved, and this is quite apart from the self-encapsulation of the two

<sup>13</sup> Heinrich Böll, Lev Kopelev, and Klaus Bednarz, *Warum haben wir aufeinander geschossen?* (Bornheim-Merten: Lamuv-Verlag, 1981), is the conciliatory version of the story.

<sup>14</sup> One of the sites for this debate is the German and Soviet occupation of Poland. See Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, *Between Nazis and Soviets: Occupation Politics in Poland, 1939–1947* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004); Maria Szonert-Binienda, *World War II through Polish Eyes: In the Nazi-Soviet Grip* (Boulder, CO, and New York: Columbia University Press, 2002). Another site is the ornery question whether the Red Army could have intervened to prevent the destruction of Warsaw in 1944. See the newest assessment by David M. Glantz, “The Red Army's Lublin-Brest Offensive and Advance on Warsaw (18 July–30 September 1944),” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 19, no. 2 (2006): 401–44. On the question of absolute war, see Alan Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction: Culture and Mass Killing in the First World War* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

regimes.<sup>15</sup> Their mutual hatred sufficed to unleash extreme violence. However, they always also engage the other – if only to learn how better to destroy the enemy. In this case, both sides needed the other (the image and, as it turns out, combat and occupation practice) in order to perpetuate and deepen their respective practices of “destructive war” or what some scholars call “degenerate war,” that is, first and foremost extreme and unrestrained violence.<sup>16</sup> This unrestraint had its own dynamic – an escalation that emerged locally and from the bottom up as it were. By deliberately removing checks on violence, the two combatants set in motion – each in its own time – a relentless process of escalation that was near impossible to stop, even when and where restraint appeared strategically or politically prudent. It is commonly overlooked, given the atrocities of 1941, that the conduct of war got more ferocious, and more deliberately ferocious, as the war progressed.

Second, the Nazi-Soviet war was an all-out civil war between two militarized polities. That is, this war was fought as a war on an interior and on an exterior front, a deliberate overthrow of military tradition (and in this sense quite literally a revolution in military affairs).<sup>17</sup> It was a war between two armed camps from the outset but was fought with and against society from the start. Again, this war had its own logic of escalation. At its most intense, it became radicalized into a war of all-out extermination – either threatened as in the Soviet case or practiced as in the German one. The Holocaust, we argue, is the literally pivotal aspect of this civil war of all-out extermination. Inasmuch as this radicalization turned war into a life-and-death struggle, not of armies, but of entire people and nations, we might also characterize this

<sup>15</sup> On German autism: Michael Geyer, “Restaurative Elites, German Society and the Nazi Pursuit of War,” in *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany: Comparison and Contrast*, ed. Richard Bessel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 134–64; Gerd Koenen, “Zwischen Antibolschewismus und ‘Ostorientierung’: Kontinuitäten und Diskontinuitäten,” in *Strukturmerkmale der deutschen Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Anselm Doering-Manteuffel (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2006), 241–52. On parallel, but separate military development, see Mary R. Habeck, *Storm of Steel: The Development of Armor Doctrine in Germany and the Soviet Union, 1919–1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003). On Soviet isolationism, see Raymond A. Bauer, Alex Inkeles, and Clyde Kluckhohn, *How the Soviet System Works: Cultural, Psychological, and Social Themes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), 26; Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1995), 225; Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 5.

<sup>16</sup> The former, very useful term and concept was coined, in the context of the American Civil and Indian wars, by Charles Royster; see Charles Royster, *The Destructive War: William Tecumseh Sherman, Stonewall Jackson, and the Americans* (New York: Random House, 1991). The latter, more problematic term can be found in Martin Shaw, *War and Genocide: Organized Killing in Modern Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press in association with Blackwell, 2003).

<sup>17</sup> A similar case is argued, albeit for October 1942, by MacGregor Knox, “1 October 1942: Adolf Hitler, Wehrmacht Officer Policy, and Social Revolution,” *The Historical Journal* 43, no. 3 (2000): 801–25.

process as “barbarization.”<sup>18</sup> Rather than denoting sheer lethality (escalation) or extermination (radicalization), “barbarization” captures the mythical or, as it were, “barbarian” understanding of a war locked in a state of exception, in which each side fights (or insists they must fight) until one side is utterly and completely subjugated, incapable of renewing itself on its own devices. The victor survives as “the last man standing”; the vanquished is not only dead, but also ravished. We should note in passing that this barbaric “ideology” is a persistent potential of modern, Western war.<sup>19</sup>

Third, useful as these distinctions may be, they do not capture the fundamentally asymmetric nature of the conduct of war between the two combatants. Seen as a totality, the war in the “East” started with a rapid-fire escalation of unrestraint on the German side (in which practice surpassed ideology) and was countered by a distinct radicalization and barbarization in the context of defense measures by the Soviets, which in turn triggered a radicalization and barbarization process on the side of the aggressor. The all-out defensive war of the Soviets in response to the German onslaught mobilized the entire nation and was fought on an interior and an exterior front. It was fought as a civil or, in view of the French precedent in 1792/3, as a national-revolutionary war, as an upheaval of the nation to wipe out its interior and exterior enemies. The German equivalent became fully apparent in 1941–2, when German warfare was recalibrated into a war of extermination – also a war against interior and exterior enemies but single-mindedly focused on eradicating them with the Holocaust serving as its aggressive prong and the utter despoliation of the people and the territory of the Soviet Union as its regressive or retreating one. In the German, as in the Russian, case we need to remember that 1941 was just a beginning. The war reached its zenith in 1943–4.

Fourth, the corollary of both escalation and radicalization on a subjective and psychological level was a process of “brutalization,” a term that is most appropriate for describing and analyzing the “passions of war” to use Clausewitzian terminology. Soldiers on both sides committed extraordinary atrocities and the likelihood of their doing so increased with their sense of impunity and just cause, such as revenge. Beyond a sizable core of what we call cadres of totalitarian violence, who were prepared for and ideologically committed to this kind of brutalized conduct, the majority of soldiers and officers were drawn into and out of acts of brutalization, largely dependent on time and place. Hate propaganda, word of mouth, and experience interacted to incite slaughter and atrocity, a compulsion to destroy, ravage, and kill.

Again asymmetry prevails. On the German side even the passions of war were driven, more often than not, by cold calculation and the deliberate, and

<sup>18</sup> George Kassimeris, ed., *The Barbarization of Warfare* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

<sup>19</sup> David A. Bell, *The First Total War: Napoleon’s Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know It* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007) calls this same phenomenon “total war.”

efficacious, use of extreme unrestraint. Anger, fear, and rage of individual soldiers were a subsidiary to this calculus.<sup>20</sup> An extreme level of discipline prevailed, and was demanded, in the midst of utter destruction – certainly in terms of self-image, but also in practice. On the Soviet side, by contrast, the passions of war were systematically unleashed, coupled with brutal coercion against one’s own, as this turned out to be the most successful means to make peasant soldiers fight and die for a regime which only a decade earlier had declared all-out war on this same majority of the population. Alas, these passions, once unleashed, could not be stopped, when it mattered politically, in 1944–5. Soviet soldiers went on a rampage when prudence dictated restraint by a victor who had long abandoned its initial, irrational, and utterly panicked call for an all-out war of extermination.

#### WHEN PRACTICE EXCEEDS EXPECTATION: OPERATION BARBAROSSA

Preparations for the war against the Soviet Union commenced on 31 July 1940 with Hitler’s order “to finish off Russia” amidst wider strategic deliberations concerning the continuation of war.<sup>21</sup> Directive 21, of 18 December 1940, established the goal of the military operation: to envelop and destroy the vast majority of Soviet forces “in a quick campaign” while preventing their retreat by way of deep penetration. With the Red Army annihilated, a new defense perimeter against “Asian Russia” would be established along a general line reaching from Arkhangel’sk to the river Volga.<sup>22</sup> Although there were cautionary voices, the goal seemed attainable, because the Red Army appeared ill equipped and badly trained, and the Soviet Union was expected to fall apart once the Communist regime was destroyed.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> An interesting case of German self-perception that sets calculated institutional terror against savage, social terror is Jonathan E. Gumz, “Wehrmacht Perceptions of Mass Violence in Croatia, 1941–1942,” *Historical Journal* 44, no. 4 (2001): 1015–38.

<sup>21</sup> The following is greatly indebted to Jürgen Förster, whose work on Barbarossa may well be considered the *Urtext* of all subsequent studies on Barbarossa. While the English translation of the 10-volume series is solid, we prefer the German edition. Jürgen Förster, “Unternehmen ‘Barbarossa’ als Eroberungs- und Vernichtungskrieg,” in *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, Vol. 4: *Der Angriff auf die Sowjetunion*, eds. Horst Boog et al. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1983), 498–538; id., “Die Sicherung des ‘Lebensraumes,’” in *Der Angriff auf die Sowjetunion*; id., “‘Verbrecherische Befehle,’” in *Kriegsverbrechen im 20. Jahrhundert*, eds. Wolfram Wette and Gerd R. Ueberschär (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2001), 137–51.

<sup>22</sup> Gerd R. Ueberschär and Wolfram Wette, “*Unternehmen Barbarossa*”: *Der deutsche Überfall auf die Sowjetunion, 1941: Berichte, Analysen, Dokumente* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1984), 18–22; Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, ed., *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht: Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941–1944, Ausstellungskatalog* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2002), 39–41, with the first three pages.

<sup>23</sup> Jürgen Förster, “Hitlers Wendung nach Osten: Die deutsche Kriegspolitik 1940–1941,” in *Zwei Wege nach Moskau: Vom Hitler-Stalin-Pakt zum ‘Unternehmen Barbarossa,’* ed. Bernd Wegner (Munich; Zurich: Piper, 1991), 113–32.

The rationale for aggression was strategic: Control of the Russian space and its resources made Germany “invulnerable” in an age of global power.<sup>24</sup> The goal was not occupation, certainly not liberation, but imperial and colonial conquest – the “securing and ruthless exploitation of the land” and settlement in choice areas.<sup>25</sup> Expectation dictated a war without regard for the enemy. Instead of peace there would be subjugation. By the same token, the Nazi and military leadership agreed that Operation Barbarossa would be war in a new key.<sup>26</sup> This was to be war against a fanatical regime whose agents counted on subversion and treachery and held society in an iron grip. Such wars had for a long time been the staple of nationalist myth, which made war into a heroic life-and-death struggle between races.<sup>27</sup> But it was World War I that set the mold, forming the experience that haunted the Nazis’ and the Wehrmacht’s leadership in their preparations for an attack on the Soviet Union. In their view Operation Barbarossa was, at one and the same time, an eminently “just war” that ascertained the sovereignty and well-being of the German people in a hostile world and a highly unconventional war.<sup>28</sup> Much could be learned from the past, and especially the German military leadership did not step out of tradition lightly. But there was also a sense that this war would break the mold.

Three initiatives in particular established the ground rules for the conduct of war. First, war would be fought as a combined strategic operation with a military, a security, and an economic component. To this end, a division of labor – typically haphazard, but overall effective – was worked out between the Wehrmacht, Himmler’s security forces, and an economic apparatus (to which we should add the civilian occupation apparatus). What matters is less the division between the military, security, and political and economic institutions than the shared preparation for the destruction on the Soviet regime and its roots in society and the instant wholesale pillage of people and territory. There was agreement not only on the principle (that enemy groups within the civilian populations must be destroyed), but also on the substance (that Jews and Bolsheviks were the agents of the regime to be annihilated).<sup>29</sup> Further, it was understood that German requests for provisions were to be satisfied before

<sup>24</sup> Andreas Hillgruber, *Hitlers Strategie; Politik und Kriegführung, 1940–1941* (Frankfurt am Main: Bernard & Graefe Verlag für Wehrwesen, 1965).

<sup>25</sup> Andreas Hillgruber, “Die ‘Endlösung’ und das deutsche Ostimperium als Kernstück des rassenideologischen Programms des Nationalsozialismus,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 20 (1972): 133–53.

<sup>26</sup> As mentioned, Poland served as precedent. Alexander B. Rossino, *Hitler Strikes Poland: Blitzkrieg, Ideology, and Atrocity* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003).

<sup>27</sup> Richard Bessel, *Nazism and War* (New York: Modern Library, 2004); Felix-Lothar Kroll, *Utopie als Ideologie: Geschichtsdenken und politisches Handeln im Dritten Reich* (Paderborn: Schöningh Verlag, 1998).

<sup>28</sup> Birgit Kletz, *Europa aus Rasse und Raum: Die nationalsozialistische Idee der neuen Ordnung* (Münster: Lit, 2000); Jürgen Förster, “Hitlers Entscheidung für den Krieg gegen die Sowjetunion,” in *Der Angriff auf Die Sowjetunion*, 27–68.

<sup>29</sup> Jürgen Förster, “Wehrmacht, Krieg und Holocaust,” in *Die Wehrmacht: Mythos und Realität*, eds. Rolf-Dieter Müller and Erich Volkmann (Munich: Beck, 1999), 948–63.



those of the occupied.<sup>30</sup> The debate on these preparations remains unsettled, but the basic fact is that the German leadership prepared a war against an entire society, attacking with the purpose of destroying the regime and killing its agents in order to exploit what was expected to be inchoate masses – the human and natural resources of the Soviet territory. The utter disregard for Soviet human life was built into the combined operation to subdue the Soviet Union.

The second thrust of preparations focused on generating the “ruthlessness” necessary for fighting a treacherous enemy. Soldiers were to be made ready to fight – not only an enemy army and society, but so-called fanatics and criminals amidst the enemy. Propaganda about the Soviet regime grotesquely played up Jewish-Bolshevik cadres and thus contributed to the everyday brutality of the war.<sup>31</sup> But the German military had never really banked on images and motivations and did not do so in this case either.<sup>32</sup> Instead, they granted preventative immunity for criminal conduct in the pursuit of war and, because war making targeted the civilian population, impunity also pertained to the “treatment of the local population.”<sup>33</sup> The Decree on the Exercise of Military Jurisdiction put “military necessity over a consideration what is lawful.”<sup>34</sup> The power of definition rested entirely with the commanding officer, who was also called upon to ascertain military discipline. The purpose was to create an armed force that was at one and the same time unrestrained in pursuit of its goals and a uniquely disciplined instrument in their conduct. The combination of sheer destructiveness and extreme discipline remained tenuous, but much as we might emphasize bloodlust or the compulsion to kill (“Shoot every Russian that looks askance”),<sup>35</sup> the cold rage of disciplined annihilation was the order of the day and defined German warfare.<sup>36</sup> No doubt, the latter also served as cover for individual and group brutalization.

The third strand of war preparations authorized targeted murder. The Decree for the Treatment of Political Commissars, the famous Commissar

<sup>30</sup> Christian Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde: Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weissrussland 1941 bis 1944*, 2nd ed. (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2000); Klaus Jochen Arnold, *Die Wehrmacht und die Besatzungspolitik in den besetzten Gebieten der Sowjetunion: Kriegführung und Radikalisierung im “Unternehmen Barbarossa”* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2004).

<sup>31</sup> Förster, “Unternehmen ‘Barbarossa’ als Eroberungs- und Vernichtungskrieg,” 440–7.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Geyer, “Vom massenhaften Tötungshandeln, oder: Wie die Deutschen das Krieg-Machen lernten,” in *Massenhaftes Töten: Kriege und Genozide im 20. Jahrhundert*, eds. Peter Gleichmann and Thomas Kühne (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2004), 105–42.

<sup>33</sup> Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht: Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941–1944, Ausstellungskatalog*, 49.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 46–8. Förster, “Unternehmen ‘Barbarossa’ als Eroberungs- und Vernichtungskrieg,” 435: “Return to old customs of war. One of the two enemies must fall; do not conserve the incubators of hostile attitudes, but liquidate” (Gen. Müller).

<sup>35</sup> Hitler, according to *Aktenvermerk*, 16 July 1941, International Military Tribunal, *Trial of the Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal, Nuremberg: 14 November 1945–1 October 1946* (Nuremberg: Secretariat of the Tribunal, 1947), 86–94, here 92.

<sup>36</sup> Discipline as a key element in unleashing extraordinary violence is rather understudied. But see the impressive study by Birgit Beck, *Wehrmacht und sexuelle Gewalt: Sexualverbrechen vor deutschen Militärgerichten 1939–1945* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2007).

Order, ordered that Soviet commissars and other undesirables such as Jews were to be separated in order to be killed.<sup>37</sup> The targeted groups in the Commissar Order were specific, but the Guidelines for the Behavior of Troops in Russia widened the list, demanding “ruthless and energetic measures against Bolshevik agitators, partisans, saboteurs, Jews, and [the] complete eradication of any active or passive form of resistance.”<sup>38</sup> In the end, the list of people and groups to be executed remained fuzzy. But the main enemy was racial: because the cruel and perfidious war was instigated by the Jewish-Bolshevik regime and its agents, so the main rationale, extermination of Jews and Commissars, was the chief priority. Others – such as female soldiers, Asian minorities, “asocials” – were associated with the main target group, the common military denominator being that they lacked honor and were by their very nature suspect of perfidy. Targeted killing thus appears both as the prerequisite for bringing down the regime and the means for (re)establishing a more natural order of things. Specific task groups (*Einsatzgruppen*) were set up in order to expedite the process. Typically, they facilitated killing away from the troops and were supposed to minimize the opportunity for “atrocities” (*Metzeleien*).<sup>39</sup> As far as the military leadership was concerned, maintaining discipline and, whenever possible, distance was the only qualification for deliberate murder, which otherwise found ready support.

The fervor to get the Army of the East set up for a quick and decisive campaign and the cold passion of avenging defeat and revolution remade the Wehrmacht into a school of extreme violence. Much of what was planned, built on older precedent; a great deal emerged from interwar learning processes about World War I and about the postwar civil wars;<sup>40</sup> but the entire setup amounted to a distinct revolution in military affairs. First, the plan for a quick and decisive victory that relied on overwhelming force fit the German military tradition.<sup>41</sup> But now any restraints on the use of force were lifted in the pursuit of the war’s goals. Extreme violence was built in as it were. Second, the pursuit of quick and overwhelming victory had produced a great deal of collateral (civilian) death and damages in the past (as in Belgium),<sup>42</sup> but now the murder

<sup>37</sup> Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, “Kommissarbefehl und Massenexekutionen sowjetischer Kriegsgefangener,” in *Anatomie des SS-Staates: Gutachten des Instituts für Zeitgeschichte*, ed. Hans Buchheim (Olten: Walter-Verlag, 1965), 161–278. See also Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, ed., *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht: Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941–1944, Ausstellungskatalog*, 52–3.

<sup>38</sup> Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, ed., *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht: Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941–1944, Ausstellungskatalog*, 54–5.

<sup>39</sup> Förster, “Unternehmen ‘Barbarossa’ als Eroberungs- und Vernichtungskrieg,” 438.

<sup>40</sup> On right-wing German violence, Richard Bessel, *Political Violence and the Rise of Nazism: The Storm Troopers in Eastern Germany, 1925–1934* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984); Dirk Schumann, *Politische Gewalt in der Weimarer Republik 1918–1933: Kampf um die Straße und Furcht vor dem Bürgerkrieg* (Essen: Klartext, 2001).

<sup>41</sup> Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practice of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 2005).

<sup>42</sup> Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Die Bibliothek von Löwen: Eine Episode aus der Zeit der Weltkriege* (Munich: C. Hanser, 1988).

of entire enemy groups, foremost Bolsheviks and Jews, was premeditated and deemed an essential and necessary condition for victory. The German conduct of war fused military and civilian elements into an unprecedented, murderous totality. Third, the desire to establish the security of the territory, especially the fear of partisans, had led to hostage taking and shooting already in Belgium in 1914.<sup>43</sup> But the plans for pacification of the occupied territory once again broke the mold in that they made terror the operative principle in the short run and counted on the permanence of violent subordination in the long run (for which task forty to fifty divisions were to be readied after victory). The colonial precedent looms large,<sup>44</sup> but terror as a tool of pacification was novel. Military planners broke the mold of experience in preparing for Barbarossa. Hitler's intervention and his overarching rationale were responsible for this development inasmuch as he opened up the opportunity for the all-out pursuit of quick victory. Thus, while military preparations were utilitarian (how best to achieve quick victory), the recourse to absolute, unrestrained violence was entirely ideological. *Not kennt kein Gebot* is, of course, an old maxim, but the Wehrmacht leadership prepared for extreme violence because they held that they had to exterminate in order to subject, and not just defeat and occupy, the enemy and its territory.

If the general rule holds that nothing is ever quite as extreme in practice as it is in theory, this rule was the first thing to go, when Operation Barbarossa commenced on 22 June 1941. Historians have rightly cautioned us that the war in the East had many faces, that accommodation was as much an aspect of the war as brutalization.<sup>45</sup> But during Barbarossa the inherent frictions of war did not moderate, but rather unleashed and escalated extreme violence. Accommodation, wherever and whenever it occurred, was pierced by mass murder and sooner or later gave way to destructive war. Newest research shows how unsettled midlevel German officers in the field were about the unrelenting violence especially against the civilian population and how counterproductive many of them considered it to be.<sup>46</sup> But in 1941 none of this altered the ratcheting up of violence both at the front and behind the front.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>43</sup> John N. Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).

<sup>44</sup> Jürgen Zimmerer, "Die Geburt des "Ostlandes" aus dem Geiste des Kolonialismus: Die nationalsozialistische Eroberungs- und Beherrschungspolitik in (post)kolonialer Perspektive," *SozialGeschichte: Zeitschrift für die historische Analyse des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts* 19, no. 1 (2004): 19–43.

<sup>45</sup> One of the first and still the most important contribution is Theo J. Schulte, *The German Army and Nazi Policies in Occupied Russia* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1989).

<sup>46</sup> Christian Hartmann, "Verbrecherischer Krieg – Verbrecherische Wehrmacht? Überlegungen zur Struktur des deutschen Ostheeres 1941–1944," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 52, no. 1 (2004): 1–75; Johannes Hürter, "Die Wehrmacht vor Leningrad: Krieg und Besatzungspolitik der 18. Armee im Herbst und Winter 1941/42," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 49, no. 3 (2001): 377–440.

<sup>47</sup> Bernhard Chiari, *Alltag hinter der Front: Besatzung, Kollaboration und Widerstand in Weißrußland 1941–1944* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1998); Manfred Oldenburg, *Ideologie und*

Two points are worth making. First, the actual practice of Operation Barbarossa exceeded what had been prepared. Within months, Operation Barbarossa turned from its preplanned security measures to a free fall into utter destruction, callous and inhuman negligence, and all-out extermination.<sup>48</sup> The murder of targeted enemy groups escalated from the first days of the campaign on. The rapid German advance and the occupation of major cities created conditions of endemic famine – not unlike the “hunger plan” for Soviet cities that had come up in the context of economic preparations for Barbarossa.<sup>49</sup> There is a heated debate whether such a “plan” existed in the first place, but the practice of war made real what preparations had left in the realm of potentialities. Second, the killing and dying of soldiers and civilians – and there were more civilian casualties than military ones – during the first six months of the war were so horrendous that many historians treat the rest of the war as a continuum of violence. But the difficult truth is that the escalation of violence during Operation Barbarossa was followed by much worse between 1942 and 1944 – and again in 1944/5.<sup>50</sup> While war rarely follows a linear path, in this war – German and Soviet soldiers agreed<sup>51</sup> – the crooked line led straight to hell.

The reasons for this escalation – alternatively called “barbarization” or “radicalization” by historians – in the conduct of war in summer and fall 1941 are still debated. Was it the preemptive, ideologically motivated overkill of the directives, the criminal decrees, and the guidelines for the troops that were responsible?<sup>52</sup> Or was it the situation on the ground, the exigencies of a harsh war against an implacable enemy that led from planned overkill to a free fall

*militärisches Kalkül: Die Besatzungspolitik der Wehrmacht in der Sowjetunion 1942* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2004).

<sup>48</sup> Andrej Angrick, “Das Beispiel Charkow: Massenmord unter deutscher Besatzung,” eds. Christian Hartmann, Johannes Hürter, and Ulrike Jureit (Munich: Verlag C. H. Beck, 2005), 117–24. Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, ed., *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht: Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941–1944, Ausstellungskatalog*, 179–85.

<sup>49</sup> Norbert Kunz, “Das Beispiel Charkow: Eine Stadtbevölkerung als Opfer der deutschen Hungerstrategie 1941/42,” eds. Christian Hartmann, Johannes Hürter, and Ulrike Jureit (Munich: Verlag C. H. Beck, 2005), 136–44. Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, ed., *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht: Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941–1944, Ausstellungskatalog*, 328–46.

<sup>50</sup> For an overview and discussion of Soviet civilian and military casualty figures see Michael Ellman and S. Maksudov, “Soviet Deaths in the Great Patriotic War: A Note,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 46, no. 4 (1994): 671–80; for detailed figures of military casualties see G. F. Krivosheev, ed., *Grif sekretnosti sniat: Poteri vooruzhennykh sil SSSR v voinakh, boevykh deistviakh i voennykh konfliktakh: Statisticheskoe issledovanie* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo, 1993); and the discussion in G. F. Krivosheev and M. F. Filimoshin, “Poteri vooruzhennykh sil SSSR v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine,” in *Naselenie Rossii v xx veke: Istoricheskie ocherki, 1940–1959*, Vol 2, eds. Iu. A. Poliakov and V. B. Zhiromskaia (Moscow: Rosspen, 2001), 19–39.

<sup>51</sup> Stephen G. Fritz, *Frontsoldaten: The German Soldier in World War II* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995); Merridale, *Ivan's War*.

<sup>52</sup> Hannes Heer, “The Logic of the War of Extermination: The Wehrmacht and the Anti-Partisan War,” in *War of Extermination: The German Military in World War II 1941–1944*, eds. Hannes Heer and Klaus Naumann (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2000), 92–126.

into extreme violence?<sup>53</sup> There is general agreement that Omer Bartov's once dominant interpretation does not hold, because the "barbarization" of the conduct of war he describes takes hold before the preconditions he sets for this turn (destruction of small groups, depletion of materiel) become apparent.<sup>54</sup> We rather see a willful destructiveness at work that escalates relentlessly. This spiral of violence is made more explicit by the internal doubts about the usefulness and, less so, moral appropriateness of ratcheting up violence especially behind the front, without ever being able to stop it.<sup>55</sup> In our view, this escalation across the board during the first months of Barbarossa was conditioned first and foremost by the imperative of decisive victory and the unrestraint that was meant to achieve this end. This imperative generated a groundswell of violence from the bottom up that was further advanced by the pervasive insecurity due to the quick advance. This situation reminds us of 1914. But again, the difference is telling. The German military had learned from the failure of the Schlieffen Plan that only utmost unrestraint, deliberate overkill, would lead to victory and, therefore, escalation preceded frictions rather than followed them. However, we must keep in mind that what followed escalation was much worse: a radicalization and recalibration of violence, still in the expectation of victory, but in the knowledge that the war would continue beyond Barbarossa.

In 1941, even the victorious advance of the Army of the East was a double-edged affair. The Wehrmacht appeared to be absolutely invincible and the Soviet enemy infinitely inferior. Even when the military advance was slowed down at Smolensk, there seemed to be nothing that could stop it. A sense of elation captured not just Hitler and the military leadership, but also the rank and file and the people at home. This euphoria gave rise, in summer 1941, to some of the more elaborate fantasies of turning Russia into a veritable Garden of Eden – a paradise, from which evil was to be expelled once and for all. In Hitler's flights of rhetoric German happiness unmistakably was linked

<sup>53</sup> K. Arnold, *Die Wehrmacht und die Besatzungspolitik in den besetzten Gebieten der Sowjetunion: Kriegführung und Radikalisierung im "Unternehmen Barbarossa."*

<sup>54</sup> Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front, 1941–45: German Troops and the Barbarisation of Warfare*, 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave, 2001). Christoph Rass, *Menschenmaterial: Deutsche Soldaten an der Ostfront – Innenansichten einer Infanteriedivision 1939–1945* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2003); Christian Gerlach, "Verbrechen deutscher Fronttruppen in Weißrußland 1941–1944: Eine Annäherung," in *Wehrmacht und Vernichtungspolitik; Militär im nationalsozialistischen System*, ed. Karl Heinrich Pohl (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 89–114.

<sup>55</sup> Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, ed., "Handlungsspielräume" in *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht: Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941–1944, Ausstellungskatalog*, 579–627. Compare with Bernd Boll and Hans Safrian, "On the Way to Stalingrad: The 6th Army in 1941–42," in *War of Extermination: The German Military in World War II 1941–1944*, eds. Hannes Heer and Klaus Naumann (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2000), 237–71; Johannes Hürter, "Auf dem Weg zur Militäropposition: Treskow, Gersdorff, der Vernichtungskrieg und der Judenmord: Neue Dokumente über das Verhältnis der Heeresgruppe Mitte zur Einsatzgruppe B im Jahre 1941," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 52, no. 3 (2004): 527–62; Timm C. Richter, "Handlungsspielräume am Beispiel der 6. Armee," in *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht: Bilanz einer Debatte*, eds. Christian Hartmann, Johannes Hürter, and Ulrike Jureit (Munich: Verlag C. H. Beck, 2005), 60–8.

to purging evil and that was to exterminating the Jewish and the Bolshevik enemy.<sup>56</sup> We see a rapid escalation of the murderous aspects of the German conduct both from the bottom up and from the top down. Within months the murder of Jews escalated from pogroms and the killing of adult males to the extermination, in September/October 1941, of entire communities of men, women, and children – the beginnings of a systematic and comprehensive practice of extermination.<sup>57</sup>

These murderous effusions of invincibility were also always tinged by the recognition of utter vulnerability. The Army of the East did not slice through the Soviet forces and the Soviet regime did not crumble as was expected. While the Red Army lost nearly 4 million of its soldiers in the German onslaught, it fought tenaciously in an armed retreat. It never folded and radicalized self-defense into all-out destruction. The frontline troops fought with utter brutality. While more than 3 million soldiers ended in captivity, there were many – especially in the later battles in October and November – who were not captured and formed the nucleus of partisan units – or rather of groups of armed young men roaming the countryside – increasing the insecurity of the territory.<sup>58</sup> German forces did not suffice to control the hinterland. They were inadequate to guard the prisoners of war. They were unable to supply themselves and the population. And not least, they were outmanned and even outgunned at the front increasingly in November/December 1941. The response was unequivocal across the board. Deficiencies were mastered with recourse to more brutal fighting at the front, a worsening regime of death marches and mass starvation for prisoners of war, more starvation for the urban population in occupied areas, and more terror in the occupied territories. Extreme unrestraint was the answer to all frictions. In the last quarter of 1941, practice evolved faster than ideology, but escalatory practice was inconceivable without its underlying ideological justification in the first place.

When victory faded out of sight, the deficiencies of Barbarossa became glaringly obvious.<sup>59</sup> In racing from battle victory to battle victory, the Army of the

<sup>56</sup> Hugh Trevor-Roper, ed., *Hitler's Secret Conversations, 1941–1944* (New York: Farrar Straus and Young, 1953), 4; Christopher R. Browning and Jürgen Matthäus, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939–March 1942* (Lincoln and Jerusalem: University of Nebraska Press and Yad Vashem, 2004); Peter Longerich, *Politik der Vernichtung: Eine Gesamtdarstellung der nationalsozialistischen Judenverfolgung* (Munich: Piper, 1998), 352–410.

<sup>57</sup> Browning and Matthäus, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939–March 1942*.

<sup>58</sup> Slepyan, *Stalin's Guerrillas*.

<sup>59</sup> Bernard R. Kroener, “Der ‘Erfrorene Blitzkrieg’: Strategische Planungen der deutschen Führung gegen die Sowjetunion und die Ursachen ihres Scheiterns,” in *Zwei Wege nach Moskau: Vom Hitler-Stalin-Pakt zum “Unternehmen Barbarossa,”* ed. Bernd Wegner (Munich; Zurich: Piper, 1991), 133–48; Karl-Heinz Frieser, “Die deutschen Blitzkriege: Operativer Triumph – Strategische Tragödie,” in *Erster Weltkrieg – Zweiter Weltkrieg: Krieg, Kriegserlebnis, Kriegserfahrung in Deutschland*, eds. Bruno Thoß and Hans-Erich Volkmann (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2002), 182–96.

East dug an ever deeper hole for itself. The troops up front were called upon to fight more relentlessly, the economic agencies plundered more egregiously, and the security forces expanded their mass killings in leaps and bounds. This escalation of violence was not some kind of anonymous “dynamic,” but it was driven by the precepts that Wehrmacht and Nazi leadership had set for themselves: to fight without mercy, to treat the conquered population as dispensable, and to kill Jews and Bolsheviks as the instigators of resistance. Especially between September and November 1941, the entire spectrum of violence was relentlessly ratcheted up.<sup>60</sup>

The deleterious reality of the war overtook even the vilest imagination.<sup>61</sup> Long before the situation became truly critical, in the winter counteroffensive of 1941–2, German soldiers, security forces, and occupiers were ready to think of the war they fought as a life-or-death struggle. It was either win and live or lose and die.<sup>62</sup> And they acted accordingly. The German term for this sentiment was *Verbitterung* (embitterment). Against all dictates of prudence and against any pangs of mercy, German forces fought with “increasing bitterness.”<sup>63</sup> A series of midlevel orders, most famously the one by General Reichenau, expressed this general sentiment in their own, more or less Nazified language, but they all expressed the conviction that only utter ruthlessness would defeat the enemy.<sup>64</sup> Quite on their own, the soldiers did the Nazis’ bidding and sought their own final solutions for bringing this war to an end.

It is harebrained to deduce that the Soviet Union’s striking back was responsible for the German escalation of violence.<sup>65</sup> The Red Army was responsible for withstanding the German onslaught. It was responsible for undoing the German battle plan and the expectations for a quick victory. It certainly contributed to the feeling of insecurity and the growing bitterness, but if anything German duress reinforced ideology. German soldiers had come to find an exceptional enemy – and they found more of it than they had ever dreamed. Therefore, we must now turn to the Soviet side with the simple caveat to readers that, at this point, they desist from making premature conjectures about the German

<sup>60</sup> Geoffrey P. Megargee, *War of Annihilation: Combat and Genocide on the Eastern Front, 1941* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 73–128.

<sup>61</sup> See the material in Klaus Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten–Nationalsozialistischer Krieg?: Kriegserlebnis, Kriegserfahrung 1939–1945* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1998); Walter Kempowski, *Das Echolot: Barbarossa ’41: Ein kollektives Tagebuch* (Munich: Knaus, 2002); K. Arnold, *Die Wehrmacht und die Besatzungspolitik in den besetzten Gebieten der Sowjetunion: Kriegführung und Radikalisierung im “Unternehmen Barbarossa.”*

<sup>62</sup> Omer Bartov, “Von unten betrachtet: Überleben, Zusammenhalt und Brutalität an der Ostfront,” in *Zwei Wege nach Moskau: Vom Hitler-Stalin-Pakt zum “Unternehmen Barbarossa,”* ed. Bernd Wegner (Munich and Zurich: Piper, 1991), 326–44.

<sup>63</sup> K. Arnold, *Die Wehrmacht und die Besatzungspolitik in den besetzten Gebieten der Sowjetunion: Kriegführung und Radikalisierung im “Unternehmen Barbarossa,”* 180.

<sup>64</sup> Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, ed., *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht: Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941–1944, Ausstellungskatalog*, 331.

<sup>65</sup> Joachim Hoffmann, *Stalins Vernichtungskrieg 1941–1945*, 3rd rev. ed. (Munich: Verlag für Wehrwissenschaften, 1996).

radicalization of violence that ensued when the spell of German invincibility was broken.

#### WAR BY ANY MEANS

When, on 22 June 1941, the Third Reich invaded the Soviet Union with overwhelming force, it crushed through the mass of Soviet forces deployed along the western border in the newly occupied territories and in three prongs pushed deep into Soviet territory. Soviet casualties were enormous. Time and again, the Red Army appeared to be teetering on the abyss. The Red Air Force was nearly wiped out. But although German forces pushed ever deeper, the Soviet defenders fought tenaciously and slowed the German thrust sufficiently to overthrow German expectations. Many historians consider the Battle of Smolensk a key turning point in this respect. By the same token, as horrific as Soviet casualties were, the Red Army and the Soviet regime managed to stage a fighting retreat. Neither the army nor the regime shattered as Hitler had expected. That they proved to be far sturdier than foreseen exacerbated the debate within the German military and political leadership of how, if at all, this enemy could be defeated. The Soviet army and the regime fought back and they fought aggressively to a fault. They took on the enemy by whatever means available (“pikes, swords, home-made weapons, anything you can make in your own factories”)<sup>66</sup> and they drove home the point as quickly as possible that anyone who did not do likewise would be treated as an enemy as well.<sup>67</sup>

The immediate reflex of the Soviet military was not to organize defensive battles or retreat to defense positions, but to attack. The goal of battle, not unlike the German doctrine, was the complete destruction of the enemy. On 22 June 1941, at 0715 hours, the People’s Commissar of Defense ordered “the Soviet forces to engage the enemy with all means at their disposal and annihilate them.”<sup>68</sup> This strategy of relentless counterattack was improved over time, but never abandoned, as the fighting at Moscow in 1941–2, Operation Mars in 1942, and the battles of Stalingrad and Kursk in 1942 and 1943 show. While many rank and file soldiers made a run for it or surrendered, enough refused to give up and kept on fighting doggedly.<sup>69</sup> A small minority of civilians (largely communists), NKVD personnel, and some surrounded Red Army units went

<sup>66</sup> Moscow’s answer to request for weapons, related by Khrushchev in his memoirs. Quoted in Geoffrey Hosking, *A History of the Soviet Union 1917–1991*, final ed. (London: Fontana Press, 1992), 271.

<sup>67</sup> The most in-depth study of the first phase of the war is Glantz, *Colossus Reborn: The Red Army at War, 1941–1943*.

<sup>68</sup> Anatoli Chor’kov, “The Red Army during the Initial Phase of the Great Patriotic War,” in *From Peace to War: Germany, Soviet Russia and the World, 1939–1941*, ed. Bernd Wegner (Oxford: Berghan Books, 1997), 417.

<sup>69</sup> On the German reaction see K. Arnold, *Die Wehrmacht und die Besatzungspolitik in den besetzten Gebieten der Sowjetunion: Kriegführung und Radikalisierung im “Unternehmen Barbarossa.”*



into hiding and started partisan warfare behind the enemy's lines. These were, to be sure, futile attempts at this stage of the war, but they did have the desired effect of provoking disproportionate German reprisals.<sup>70</sup>

The standard accounts of the beginning of the war stress the lack of Soviet preparations, the chaos, and incompetence.<sup>71</sup> As far as military and strategic readiness is concerned, this is very much to the point. The Soviet armed forces were in the middle of an enormous expansion and a partial redeployment to new positions. Equipment had not arrived and the available technology was substandard. Trained personnel was lacking as were the necessary technology and infrastructure to keep the tanks rolling and the planes flying; because radios were a rarity, communication in battle both within a branch of arms and across different arms was hard or impossible. The officer corps had been subjugated (and partially decimated) in the Great Purges; there was a lack of qualified leadership on all levels, at times including such basic "qualifications" as mere literacy or the ability to read a map; and the power of political officers (reintroduced shortly after the invasion) predominated over that of military specialists. The army was, in other words, in shambles.<sup>72</sup>

However, seen from a different vantage point, the Soviet Union was very much ready for war. This was a society which in many ways resembled a wartime economy in peacetime. The Soviet system was conceived during what Peter Holquist has called a "continuum of crisis" stretching between World War I and the end of the Russian civil war in 1921. The mono-organizational society which emerged in this cauldron of violence was, in terms of institutional structure and a whole range of practices, a child of total war. The language and thought of Bolshevism were highly militaristic, too. Communists loved to talk of "fronts" and "assaults" even when talking about plainly civilian matters. The party itself was understood in military terms as the "vanguard" of the

<sup>70</sup> The literature on partisan warfare is huge but largely focuses on the German side. For a recent and archivally based view of the Soviet side see Slepian, *Stalin's Guerrillas*. See also Karel C. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine under Nazi Rule* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 275–85. Ben Shepherd, *War in the Wild East: The German Army and Soviet Partisans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). On NKVD behind German lines see V. N. Khaustov et al., eds., *Lubianka. Stalin i NKVD-NKGB-GUKP "Smersh."* 1939–mart 1946 (Moscow: Demokratiia, 2006), 330–4; 345–7.

<sup>71</sup> Aleksandr M. Nekrich, *1941, 22 iun'ia*, 2nd rev. ed. (Moscow: Pamiatniki istoricheskoi mysli, 1995). The theme has reemerged in the discussion about whether or not there was a Soviet plan to attack Germany. The latest English-language overview is in Bellamy, *Absolute War*, 99–135. For a good sample of the controversy see Iu. N. Afanas'ev, ed., *Drugaia voina 1939–1945* (Moscow: RGGU, 1996), 32–224. See also Gabriel Gorodetsky, *Grand Delusion: Stalin and the German Invasion of Russia* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1999).

<sup>72</sup> A. A. Pechenkin, "Byla li vozmozhnost nastupat'?" *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, no. 3 (1995): 44–59; Richard Overy, *Russia's War: A History of the Soviet War Effort: 1941–1945* (New York: Penguin, 1997), 30–3, 89–90; Roger Reese, *Stalin's Reluctant Soldiers: A Social History of the Red Army 1925–1941* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996); id., *Red Commanders: A Social History of the Soviet Army Officer Corps, 1918–1991* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 134–57; Glantz, *Colossus Reborn*, 466–71; Glantz and House, *When Titans Clashed*, 5–45.

proletariat. Stalin's Revolution from Above was a reaction to perceived military threats, and the explicit goal was the creation of an industrialized society which could withstand modern warfare. The result was a highly centralized polity already mobilized in peacetime and thus well prepared for war.<sup>73</sup>

In terms of mentality, also, much of Soviet society was already mobilized. War had been a recurrent phenomenon in the forty years since the turn of the century. And these wars became more and more total: the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5 was still a relatively conventional conflict, although it already drew in enough of civilian society to trigger a first revolution in 1905. World War I necessitated the mobilization of all resources for the war effort and overtaxed the imperial political system; Russia imploded into two revolutions in 1917 which triggered the civil war of 1918–21 – a truly total, if not “totalitarian” war that not only called for the complete mobilization of resources by the warring parties, but also undid the distinction between combatant and noncombatant. In this war, the goal was not to force concessions out of the adversary (“politics by other means”), but to produce complete physical destruction of the enemy and all his allies. In the mentality born of this conflict – which would form part of the ground on which Stalinism was built – politics became an extension of war, not the other way around.<sup>74</sup>

The experience of unfettered violence formed the mental background to the peculiarly Soviet reaction to the German invasion. This was not a society where

<sup>73</sup> Roger Pethybridge, *The Social Prelude to Stalinism* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1974), 73–131; Sheila Fitzpatrick, “War and Society in Soviet Context: Soviet Labor before, during, and after World War II,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 35 (Spring 1989): 37–52; John Barber and Mark Harrison, *The Soviet Home Front, 1941–1945: A Social and Economic History of the USSR in World War II* (London and New York: Longman, 1991), 13–18; Mark von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship: The Red Army and the Soviet Socialist State, 1917–1930* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990); Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914–1921* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Joshua Sanborn, *Drafting the Russian Nation: Military Conscription, Total War, and Mass Politics 1905–1925* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003).

<sup>74</sup> On the role of the Civil War in the mentality of Bolshevism and Stalinism see, for example, Robert C. Tucker, “Stalinism as Revolution from Above,” in *Stalinism: Essays in Historical Interpretation*, ed. R. C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1977), 77–108; esp. 103. Sheila Fitzpatrick, “The Legacy of the Civil War,” in *Party, State, and Society in the Russian Civil War: Explorations in Social History*, eds. William Rosenberg, Diane P. Koenker, and Ronald G. Suny (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 385–98; and id., “The Civil War as a Formative Experience” in *Bolshevik Culture*, eds. Abbott Gleason, Peter Kenez, and Richard Stites (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 57–76. On the replay of Civil War traditions – often by those who had “missed” it – see id., “Cultural Revolution as Class War,” *Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928–1931*, ed. S. Fitzpatrick (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 8–40, esp. 18, 25. For broader perspectives on the history of violence and violent *mentalités* see Stefan Plaggenborg, “Weltkrieg, Bürgerkrieg, Klassenkrieg: Mentalitätsgeschichtliche Versuch über die Gewalt in Sowjetrußland,” *Historische Anthropologie* 3 (1995): 493–505; id., “Gewalt und Militanz in Sowjetrußland 1917–1930,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 44, no. 3 (1996): 409–30; and E. S. Seniavskaja, *Psikhologija voyny v xx veke: Istoricheskii opyt Rossii* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1999). For the importance of these for the war see Weiner, “Something to Die For.”

peace was normal and war best avoided. This was a political system “whose innate harshness replicated life in the military in many ways.”<sup>75</sup> In principle, war was seen as inevitable and had been expected for decades. A children’s novel of the 1920s not only predicted world Communism to arrive by the late 1950s, but also made it clear to its young readership what to expect between the miserable present and the bright future – revolutionary war as world war.<sup>76</sup> The Civil War in Spain was a major staple of popular culture in the 1930s, and movies with titles like *If Tomorrow Brings War* (1938) celebrated the coming conflict.<sup>77</sup> Soviet citizens fantasized about “Spain” in their daydreams, which they recorded in their diaries; at night they sometimes dreamed their way into the slaughter, participating in a more heroic reality than their mundane and often numbing everyday existence afforded. Soon, they could act out such wishes in real life.<sup>78</sup> A particularly impressive example of this psychological-cum-cultural preparation for the coming conflict and one’s own likely violent death was the writer Alexander Afinogenov. In 1940 he started writing a play called *On the Eve*. It documented “the eve and the first days of the great war that, he was sure, was imminent.” Within days of the beginning of Barbarossa, the play was commissioned and the author “had only to endow the abstract enemy forces of his first draft with the faces of the invading Nazi forces.”<sup>79</sup>

The symbolic means to engage the coming violence were thus readily available.<sup>80</sup> Russian nationalism had developed as a strong theme throughout the 1930s, which explains why the conflict could be termed the (*Great*) *Patriotic War* right from the outset.<sup>81</sup> The corollary – the repression, deportation, or

<sup>75</sup> Glantz, *Colossus Reborn*, 589.

<sup>76</sup> Innokenty Zhukov, “Voyage of the Red Star Pioneer Troop to Wonderland” (1924), in *Mass Culture in Soviet Russia: Tales, Poems, Songs, Movies, Plays, and Folklore, 1917–1953*, eds. James von Geldern and Richard Stites (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 90–112.

<sup>77</sup> Seniavskaia, *Frontovoe pokolenie*, 75–6; A. B. Zubov, “Pobeda, kotoruiu my poteriali,” *Druugaia voina*, 384–5; von Geldern and Stites, eds., *Mass Culture in Soviet Russia*, 316–18; Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 10, 69, 171; Marius Broekmeyer, *Stalin, the Russians, and Their War*, trans. Rosalind Buck (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 3–5.

<sup>78</sup> Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2006), 92–3.

<sup>79</sup> Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind*, 340.

<sup>80</sup> On the war preparations of the propaganda apparatus see Vladimir Aleksandrovich Nevezhin, “Rech’ Stalina 5 maia 1941 goda i apologiia nastupatel’noi voiny,” *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, no. 2 (1995): 54–69.

<sup>81</sup> Iu. A. Poliakov, “Istoki narodnogo podviga,” in *Narod i voina*, 13; David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931–1956* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2002). The comparison with the “patriotic war” (*otechestvennaia voina*) against Napoleon was already made in Molotov’s radio address of 22 June 1941. *Izvestiia*, 24 June 1941, reprinted in V. P. Naumov, ed., *1941 god. V 2-kh knigakh*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond “Demokratiia,” 1998), 434–5, here: 435. Although historians sometimes claim otherwise, this war soon became “Great” in Soviet propaganda, which used the terms *Velikaia Otechestvennaia voina* and *Otechestvennaia voina* interchangeably for war. Compare the uses of the term in the documents from 1941 and 1943 in V. A. Zolotarev, ed., *Glavnye politicheskie organy vooruzhennykh*

execution of members of “enemy nations” – was also not a result of the war but an escalation of practices of the past decade.<sup>82</sup> The criminalization of captivity was, likewise, in place. Already the Criminal Code of 1926 had defined “giving oneself over to the enemy” (*sdat’sia v plen*) as treason, if it was not caused by the “battle situation”; in the 1930s, the security organs were keenly interested in people who had been POWs during World War I or in the Soviet-Polish war; and during the winter war with Finland in 1939–40 recovered captives had been treated as traitors.<sup>83</sup> The Red Army’s propaganda apparatus threatened soldiers already on 24 June 1941 with “the highest form of punishment” for the “treason and betrayal” of “giving oneself into captivity.”<sup>84</sup> The repressive policies against POWs connected to Stalin’s order No. 270 of 16 August 1941 were thus just reinforcements and radicalizations of what was already in place.<sup>85</sup> Something similar can be said about the brutality against their own troops, which would characterize the wartime Red Army and which was symbolized in the famous “blocking detachments” (*zagraditel’nye otriady*). New disciplinary regulations introduced on 12 October 1940 had given commanders far-reaching authority to punish subordinates – including “employing force or weapons.”<sup>86</sup>

*sil SSSR v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg. Dokumenty i materialy*. Vol. 17–6, Russkii Arkhiv. Velikaia Otechestvennaia (Moscow: Terra, 1996), 20, 39, 45, 69, 235, with Mawdsley, *Thunder*, 460 fn. 3, and Bellamy, *Absolute War*, 3.

<sup>82</sup> Terry Martin, “The Origins of Soviet Ethnic Cleansing,” *The Journal of Modern History* 70, no. 4 (1998): 813–61; Pavel Polian, *Ne po svoei vole... istoriia i geografiia prinuditel’nykh migratsii v SSSR* (Moscow: OGI, 2001); Kate Brown, *A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); N. L. Pabol’ and P. M. Polian, eds., *Stalinskie deportatsii 1928–1953*, Rossiia XX vek. Dokumenty (Moscow: Demokratiia, 2005); Jeffrey Burds, “The Soviet War against ‘Fifth Columnists’: The Case of Chechnya, 1942–4,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 42, no. 2 (2007): 267–314.

<sup>83</sup> L. G. Ivashov and A. S. Emelin, “Nravstvennye i pravovye problemy plena v Otechestvennoi istorii,” *Voenna-istoricheskii zhurnal*, no. 1 (1992): 47–8; V. Danilov, R. Manning, and L. Viola, eds., *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni: Kollektivizatsiia i raskulachivanie: Dokumenty i materialy v 5 tomakh 1927–1939. Tom 5, kn. 2: 1938–1939* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2006), 53–5; V. K. Luzherenko, “Plen: tragediia millionov,” in: *Narod i voina*, 188.

<sup>84</sup> Zolotarev, ed., *Glavnye politicheskie organy voozruchennykh sil SSSR*, 24.

<sup>85</sup> There is a large literature on Soviet POWs during and after the war. For a guide up to the mid-1990s see Jörg Osterloh, *Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene 1941–1945 im Spiegel nationaler und internationaler Untersuchungen: Forschungsüberblick und Bibliographie*, 2nd rev. ed. (Dresden: Hannah-Arendt-Institut für Totalitarismusforschung e.V. and der TU Dresden, 1996). Basic Russian-language reading includes Pavel Polian, *Zhertvy dvukh diktatur: Ostarbaityry i voennoplennyye v tret’em reikbe i ikh repatriatsiia* (Moscow: Vash Vybor TsIPZ, 1996); V. P. Naumov, “Sud’ba voennoplennykh i deportirovannykh grazhdan SSSR. Materialy komissii po reabilitatsii zhertv politicheskikh repressii,” *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia* no. 2 (1996): 91–112; Luzherenko, “Plen: tragediia millionov,” and Aron Shneer, *Plen: Sovetskie voennoplennyye v Germanii, 1941–1945* (Moscow: Mosty kultury, 2005). The German classic is Christian Streit, *Keine Kameraden: Die Wehrmacht und die sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen 1941–1945* (Bonn: Dietz, 1997).

<sup>86</sup> Pechenkin, “Byla li vozmozhnost nastupat’?” 48–49; Zolotarev, ed., *Glavnye politicheskie organy voozruchennykh sil SSSR*, 325 n.11.

Finally, the hate propaganda which became so central to the war effort of the Soviets had a history which went back at least as far as World War I and the Civil War.<sup>87</sup> The representation of the animallike German soldier in wartime posters was not simply a symbolic expression of the enemy's real-life monstrosity. It was that, too, but it also drew on an established pictorial repertoire – the fascist monster of the 1930s.<sup>88</sup> Soviet propagandists were thus ready for this war, and the atrocity agitation was at full pitch long before German behavior could confirm these expectations.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, important groups of Soviet citizens – what we might call the cadres of totalitarian violence – were not only mentally, but also practically prepared for this war. A (due to the purges) thinning, but nevertheless important section of the officer corps had gained prior wartime experience in the fierce Russian and Spanish Civil Wars.<sup>90</sup> In fact, the top circles of power during the war years included many men whose worldview was deeply influenced by the savage fighting of 1918–21 – Timoshenko, Voroshilov, Kulik, Budennyi, Zhukov, and of course Stalin himself.<sup>91</sup> The latter's conduct during the Civil War pointed to things to come – preference for severe discipline and force over persuasion, callous sacrifice of soldiers, and disregard for obscene casualty numbers.<sup>92</sup>

Likewise, the civilian population included people like Iosif Prut, an utterly peaceful scriptwriter, who two decades earlier had liquidated anti-Soviet rebels

<sup>87</sup> Frank Kämpfer, *Der rote Keil: Das politische Plakat: Theorie und Geschichte* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1985); Hubertus Jahn, *Patriotic Culture in Russia during World War I* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1995); Richard Stites, ed., *Culture and Entertainment in Wartime Russia* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995); Victoria Bonnell, *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1997); Mark Edele, "Paper Soldiers: The World of the Soldier Hero According to Soviet Wartime Posters," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 47, no. 1 (1999): 89–108; Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin! Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Stephen M. Norris, *A War of Images: Russian Popular Prints, Wartime Culture, and National Identity 1812–1945* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006); E. S. Seniavskaia, *Proivniki Rossii v voynakh xx veka: Evoliutsiia 'obraza vraga' v soznanii armii i obschestva* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2006); Denise J. Youngblood, *Russian War Films: On the Cinema Front, 1914–2005* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007).

<sup>88</sup> For example, see the following posters: V. Deni and N. Dolgorukov, "Fashizm – eto voina" (1936); reprinted in *Simvoly epokhi v sovetskom plakate*, ed. T. G. Koloskova (Moscow: Gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii muzei, 2001), #81; or I. Dolgopolov and Iu. Uzbekov, "Doloi fashistskikh podzhigatelei voiny!" (1938); reprinted in *Plakaty pervykh let sovetskoi vlasti i sotsialisticheskogo sotrudnichestva (1918–1941): Katalog*, eds. I. P. Avdeichik and G. K. Iukhnovich (Minsk: "Polymia," 1985), 112.

<sup>89</sup> See, for example, *Krasnaia zvezda*, 26 June 1941, 1 and 3.

<sup>90</sup> Reese, *Red Commanders*, 150.

<sup>91</sup> V. A. Torchinov and A. M. Leontiuk, *Vokrug Stalina: Istoriko-biograficheskii spravochnik* (St. Petersburg: Filologicheskii fakul'tet Sankt-Peterburgskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta, 2000), 479; Kevin McDermott, *Stalin: Revolutionary in an Era of War* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 34–40; Robert Service, *Stalin: A Biography* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 163–75, 337.

<sup>92</sup> Service, *Stalin*, 170. On the Civil War legacy and Stalin's learning process during the war see also Mawdsley, *Thunder*, 207.

in Central Asia, delivering the head of one of these “bandits” as proof of an accomplished mission to his commander.<sup>93</sup> Such men brought their knowledge of all-out civil warfare with them into the army. They joined thousands of younger communists who had participated in the civil war against the peasantry in the early 1930s and had been well-enough schooled in dialectics to see the violence of collectivization and the ensuing mass famine as historically necessary and thus progressive.<sup>94</sup> Finally, large numbers of NKVD personnel had learned during the Great Purges that the physical destruction of enemies – even potential foes – was part of the course of revolutionary action. And, of course, Stalin himself thought of violence as a normal ingredient of political struggle.<sup>95</sup> Once his empire expanded beyond its initial borders (Poland 1939, the Baltic states and Bessarabia in 1940), the subjected peoples were treated to a terror regime at times bordering on genocide. The forest of Katyn, where in 1940 several thousand Polish officers were buried after their execution on direct orders by the Politburo, became the symbol for the brutality of Stalin’s “revolution from abroad.”<sup>96</sup> While the Nazi fantasy world of Aryan people of light locked in mortal combat with bloodthirsty Jewish-Bolshevik subhumans of the night has little to recommend itself as a description of reality, the Germans did not need to invent much when it came to the brutality of Stalin’s regime. The Katyn mass graves, as well as the 1941 slaughter of at least 8,789 and maybe as many as 100,000 prisoners, whose corpses were left behind by retreating NKVD troops, are the most infamous examples.<sup>97</sup> These horrific episodes, which German propagandists quickly seized upon and the Soviets immediately denied, were consistent with the “mass operations of repression of anti-Soviet elements” in 1937 and 1938, when all kinds of undesirables had been liquidated. The main difference was that in the late 1930s carefully planned quotas for shootings were distributed, while in 1941 the massacres

<sup>93</sup> Iosif Prut, *Nepoddaiushchiisia o mnogikh drugikh i koe-cto o sebe* (Moscow: “Vagrius,” 2000). On the incident with the “bandit’s” head see *ibid.*, 117–18.

<sup>94</sup> A famous example is the later dissident Lev Kopelev. See his memoirs *The Education of a True Believer*, trans. Gary Kern (London: Wildwood House, 1981); and *No Jail for Thought*, trans. Anthony Austin (London: Secker & Warburg, 1977). On the collectivizers see also Lynne Viola, *The Best Sons of the Fatherland: Workers in the Vanguard of Soviet Collectivization* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

<sup>95</sup> Service, *Stalin*, 336–56.

<sup>96</sup> Ch. Magaichik, “Katyn’;” N. S. Lebedeva, “Chetvertyi razdel Pol’shi i katyn’skaia tragediia,” both in *Drugaiia voina*, 225–95; Jan T. Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland’s Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia*, expanded ed. (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), 228–9; R.W. Davies, *Soviet History in the Yeltsin Era* (New York: St. Martin’s Press in association with Centre for Russian and East European Studies, University of Birmingham, 1997), 18–19, 45.

<sup>97</sup> Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 456–7; Gross, *Revolution from Abroad*, 228; Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 14–17 (with the more conservative number of executions, those accounted for in Soviet archives, p. 14). The most in-depth study of these episodes is Bogdan Musial, “Konterrevolutionäre Elemente sind zu erschießen”: *Die Brutalisierung des deutsch-sowjetischen Krieges im Sommer 1941*, 2nd ed. (Berlin and Munich: Propyläen, 2001).

happened in the chaos of retreat.<sup>98</sup> Also reminiscent of the Great Terror was the initial hunt for scapegoats for the military catastrophe of the first weeks of war – frontline generals were accused of treason, arrested, and shot.<sup>99</sup>

In this immediate escalation of self-defense into a civil war against enemies within as well as without, the Soviet leadership could rely on the loyalty of a core group of cadres ready to defend “the revolution,” cost it what it may. Such support, however, was not enough to win this war. It was clear that the majority of Soviet citizens – the peasants and ex-peasants against whom the regime had waged war since collectivization – were unlikely to fight for Bolshevism.<sup>100</sup> Already in 1928 Stalin had predicted that in case of an attack, the regime needed to be prepared to hold out for six months, as this was the time “the peasant” needed “to come to his senses, become familiar with the dangers of war, to understand what’s going on and pull himself together for the common task of defending the country.”<sup>101</sup> In order to help the *muzhiki* familiarize themselves with these dangers the regime immediately radicalized the conduct of war, once it became clear that the Red Army was unable to stop the German juggernaut at the border. All-out war would, it was hoped, slow the German advance long enough for “the peasant” to come “to his senses.” On 29 June the government ordered the complete evacuation or destruction of “all valuable property” and the immediate organization of guerrilla warfare if a region had to be abandoned to the enemy.<sup>102</sup> Shortly thereafter, in his first public appearance after the invasion, the Supreme Commander called the German challenge a “matter of life and death of the Soviet state, of life and death of the peoples of the USSR.” This was “no ordinary war” and it would be fought with all means necessary. All of society immediately was to be mobilized for war; soldiers and civilians were told to “defend every inch of Soviet soil, fight to the last drop of blood for our towns and villages,” while those who refused to do so – “whiners and cowards, panic-mongers and deserters” – had

<sup>98</sup> See Paul Hagenloh, “‘Socially Harmful Elements’ and the Great Terror,” in *Stalinism: New Directions*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 286–308; J. Arch Getty and Oleg V. Naumov, eds., *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932–39* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 470–80. For an example that engages German atrocity propaganda, see M. Lesnov, “Dokumenty odnogo srazheniia,” *Krasnaia zvezda*, 22 October 1941, 3.

<sup>99</sup> See the interrogation protocol of General D. G. Pavlov and the State Defense Committee resolution of 16 July 1941. Both reprinted in: *1941 god. Dokumenty v 2-kh knigakh*, ed. L. E. Reshin et al., Vol. 2 (Moscow: Demokratiia, 1998), 455–68; 472–3. For a summary Merridale, *Ivan’s War*, 85–8.

<sup>100</sup> This was in fact the case, as recent research shows: Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 12–13. On the war with the peasantry see Lynne Viola et al., eds., *The War against the Peasantry, 1927–1930: The Tragedy of the Soviet Countryside* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005); V. Danilov, R. Manning, and L. Viola, eds., *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni*.

<sup>101</sup> Stalin’s speech at the July Plenum of the Central Committee, evening of 9 July 1928, reprinted in *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni*, vol. 1: 319–31, here: 326–7.

<sup>102</sup> SNK and CC directive, signed by Molotov and Stalin, 29 June 1941, reprinted in *1941 god. Dokumenty*, vol. 2, 446–8, here: 447.

no place “in our ranks.” When retreat was unavoidable, anything the enemy could use – from means of transport to fuel, from cows to grain – was to be either evacuated or destroyed; in the occupied territories a partisan war was to be unleashed, destroying infrastructure, attacking the German troops and their collaborators, killing them wherever they were to be found and thus to “create unbearable conditions for the enemy.”<sup>103</sup>

This was a program for total war and a radicalization of the initial response, formulated by Molotov immediately after the German invasion. Still expecting that the Red Army could stop the aggressor quickly, the Commissar for Foreign Affairs focused on “bloodthirsty fascists” as the enemy, who had forced “the German people” into this war. He asked for discipline and patriotism, but not for an all-out war.<sup>104</sup> This was on 24 June. By early July, the Soviets had clearly taken off whatever gloves they might have worn. However, it was not yet a program for a war of extermination against the invaders. That was the next step, a further radicalization caused by the experience with the German conduct of war. Four months after his initial address to the Soviet people, in a speech on 6 November 1941, Stalin quoted from captured Wehrmacht documents and accepted warfare on German terms:

The German invaders want a war of extermination (*istrebitel'naia voina*) with the peoples of the USSR. Well, then, if the Germans want a war of extermination, they will get it. (Thunderous, lengthy applause).

Henceforth our task, the task of the peoples of the USSR, the task of the soldiers, commanders and political workers of our army and navy will be to exterminate (*istrebit'*) each and every German who has forced his way as an occupier onto our homeland. (Thunderous applause; exclamations: “That’s right!” Shouts of “Hurray!”)

No mercy to the German occupiers!

Death to the German occupiers! (Thunderous applause).<sup>105</sup>

This speech was widely propagated at the front, flanked by talks with titles such as “Atrocities of the Fascist cannibals towards captured and wounded Red Army soldiers, commanders, and political workers.”<sup>106</sup> In the process, the few subtleties of the message quickly got lost – in Stalin’s careful wording this was a program to exterminate, not “each and every German” but “each and every German who has forced his way as an occupier onto our homeland.” “Excesses” could thus be blamed on subordinates, but the main goal was reached. Confronted with an enemy who promised not just to defeat the Bolsheviks but to annihilate them and enslave whatever was left of the Soviet people the response was a complete, total war of annihilation of the enemy

<sup>103</sup> Stalin’s radio address from 3 July 1941, reprinted in Stalin, *O Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine Sovetskogo Soiuz* (Moscow: Izd-vo “Kraft,” 2002), 11–16.

<sup>104</sup> Molotov’s radio address, 22 June 1941, *Izvestiia*, 24 June 1941.

<sup>105</sup> *Pravda*, 7 November 1941, 1–2, here: 2.

<sup>106</sup> “Direktiva GlavPU RKKa, no. 0178,” (14 November 1941), reprinted in *Glavnye politicheskie organy vooruzhennykh sil SSSR*, 83–4; see also “Direktiva GlavPU RKKa, no. 268,” (7 December 1941), in *ibid.*, 87–90.



by whatever means necessary and at whatever cost to their own side. As the Supreme Commander advised his military leaders on 13 November 1941, the best way to deal with Germans entrenched in a village was to “completely destroy the settlement and burn it to the ground,” burying the enemy under the rubble.<sup>107</sup>

This radicalization of war making was one aspect of the attempt to concentrate the mind of “the peasant.” Brutal discipline, the threat and actual administration of violence against those unwilling or unable to fight, and the systematic unleashing of the passions of war through a savage atrocity propaganda were the other aspects of the program. The results were at times so counterproductive that by early 1942, Stalin tried to pull back a little. In an order to the troops on the anniversary of the founding of the Red Army, the Supreme Commander stressed that the Soviet Union was waging a defensive war of liberation, not an offensive, imperialist war of conquest:

Sometimes the foreign media jabber, that the Red Army has the goal to exterminate (*istrebit'*) the German people and to destroy the German state. That, of course, is stupid nonsense and silly slander of the Red Army. The Red Army could not have such idiotic goals . . . It would be funny to identify Hitler's clique with the German people, the German state. History teaches that the Hitlers come and go, but the German people, the German state, live on.

. . . The Red Army captures German soldiers and officers and saves their lives, if they surrender. The Red Army destroys German soldiers and officers, if they refuse to put down their weapons and [continue] to attempt, gun in hand, to enslave our Homeland. . . . “If the enemy does not surrender, he will be destroyed.”<sup>108</sup>

It seems that this was meant as a real deescalation of the war of extermination, not just as an address to the Allies or enemy soldiers. German military intelligence learned in December 1941 that officers had prohibited the wild shooting of prisoners.<sup>109</sup> Ambiguities remained, however. The new pronouncement was promoted to the troops together with the November call for a war of extermination. Speeches and lectures, talks and articles informed the front line that the Red Army “destroys German soldiers if they refuse to put down their weapons and [continue] to attempt to enslave our Homeland.” The stress was still on destruction, and the alternative was hidden in incomplete excerpts: “If the enemy does not surrender, he will be destroyed.” (Toward the enemy lines, the message was more straightforward: “The Red Army captures German soldiers and officers and saves their lives, if they surrender.”)<sup>110</sup> Still, this was a partial deescalation, flanked also by attempts to change the approach to senseless

<sup>107</sup> Quoted in *Drugaia voina*, 154.

<sup>108</sup> “Prikaz Narodnogo komissara oborony, no. 55” (23 February 1942), reprinted in Stalin, *O Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine Sovetskogo Soiuza*, 40–4, here: 43, 44.

<sup>109</sup> Jörg Friedrich, *Das Gesetz des Krieges: Das deutsche Heer in Russland, 1941 bis 1945: Der Prozess gegen der Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (Munich: Piper, 1993), 586.

<sup>110</sup> “Direktiva GlavPU RSKA, no. 30;” and “Direktiva GlavPU RSKA, no. 31” (both 26 February 1942), reprinted in *Glavnye politicheskie organy vooruzhennykh sil SSSR, 115–17*. See also the “passes” (*propuski*) for German soldiers, promising fair treatment in captivity, “Direktiva GlavPU RSKA, no. 58,” (18 April 1942), *ibid.*, 129.

sacrifice of men. A month after Stalin's speech, a directive of the Military Council of the Western Front ordered commanders to stop the "thoughtless" and "abnormal" approach to infantry losses and punish those guilty.<sup>111</sup> In May 1942, Stalin advised the leaders of the South-Western front to learn to fight less bloodily, "as the Germans do it."<sup>112</sup>

Meanwhile the Soviet regime in general and Stalin in particular had reasserted control and discipline after months of ferocious fighting. All energies were now concentrated on winning the war, and the control of many nonessential sectors was all but given up. The management of housing and the consumption of the civilian population devolved onto the local and sometimes enterprise level, cultural policies were relaxed, the Orthodox Church was drafted into the war effort, and after an initial reinstatement of the authority of the irritating commissars (*voennye komissary; politruki*) on 16 July 1941, unity of command was firmly given to the officer corps from 9 October 1942 onward.<sup>113</sup> At the top, the party-state had been centralized in the new State Defense Committee (GKO) with Stalin at its head, but its members, bestowed with plenipotentiary powers, were much freer to act than they had been in the 1930s. They became "semiautonomous leaders." Access to the top decision makers was relatively unrestricted for high-level military as well as civilian leaders, who could now show up uninvited if matters demanded. Republic and regional authorities were strengthened, too, to help them solve problems and reach production targets. Stalin did meddle with military affairs, but by and large he functioned as a central coordinator and let the professionals do their work.<sup>114</sup>

<sup>111</sup> 30 May 1942. Reprinted in *Skrytaia pravda voiny: 1941 god. Neizvestnye dokumenty* (Moscow: Russkaia kniga, 1992), 228–9.

<sup>112</sup> 27 May 1942, quoted in *Drugaiia voina*, 154.

<sup>113</sup> On devolution of control during the war see P. Charles Hachten, "Property Relations and the Economic Organization of Soviet Russia, 1941–1948" (Ph.D. diss., The University of Chicago, 2005). On the organization of the home front see John Barber and Mark Harrison, *The Soviet Home Front, 1941–1945: A Social and Economic History of the USSR in World War II* (London and New York: Longman, 1991). On food supply see William Moskoff, *The Bread of Affliction: The Food Supply in the USSR during World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). On the cultural relaxation see Stites, *Culture and Entertainment in Wartime Russia*; on religion see Daniel Peris, "God Is Now on Our Side": The Religious Revival on Unoccupied Soviet Territory during World War II," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1, no. 1 (2000): 97–118; and Tatiana A. Chumachenko, *Church and State in Soviet Russia: Russian Orthodoxy from World War II to the Khrushchev Years*, trans. Edward E. Roslof (Armonk, NY, and London: M. E. Sharpe, 2002). On commissars and single command in the army see Zolotarev, ed., *Glavnye politicheskie organy vooruzhennykh sil SSSR*, 326 n. 17, 331 n. 48; Merridale, *Ivan's War*, 107–8; Glantz, *Colossus Reborn*, 475.

<sup>114</sup> On the GKO see Yoram Gorlizki and Oleg Khlevniuk, *Cold Peace: Stalin and the Soviet Ruling Circle, 1945–1953* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 17, 46–7; Mawdsley, *Thunder*, 206–9; Bellamy, *Absolute War*, 228–30. On Stalin during the war see Service, *Stalin*, 410–87. On the management of the wartime economy see G. Kumaney, *Govoriat stalinskie narkomy* (Smolensk: Rusich, 2005).

Everything was now geared toward making the Red Army, not least with Lend & Lease support, into a more efficient, more motorized, more industrial, and more lethal force – nothing else mattered.<sup>115</sup> In the end, in 1943–4 Stalin did get what he had spoken of in 1941 – a mass army with an industrialized core. It is easy to overstress the level of mechanization – the “army of quality” made up maybe 20 percent of the overall forces; cavalry played an important role in the war of movement until the end; and requisitioned peasant carts rather than Studebaker trucks made infantry units able to keep up with the tank forces. This war was won by the horse as much as the tank.<sup>116</sup> Nevertheless, this (given the casualties) new army was now able to use tank forces “effectively” and implement prewar theories of “deep battle” – the Soviet equivalent of the Blitzkrieg.<sup>117</sup> It was, if not better trained, better equipped, more mobile, and altogether more efficient and effective in fighting war. It was the army that overwhelmed the defenses of Army Group Center in 1944 in the most stunning battle victory of World War II and in January 1945 began its fighting advance toward Berlin that crushed the remnants of the German Army of the East.<sup>118</sup> This military recovery allowed a deescalation of the all-out war against enemies within and without. A more forward-thinking military now began to view civilians and soldiers left behind the front in German-occupied territory not only as likely traitors but also as potential partisans.<sup>119</sup> And not least, the Soviet regime began to pursue a more active, revolutionary politics that aimed to draw Germans in POW camps, at the front, and even back in Germany (by way of letters written by prominent POWs)<sup>120</sup> onto their side,

<sup>115</sup> A. S. Iakushevskii, “Arsenal pobedy,” in *Narod i voina*, 73–114; A. S. Orlov, “My i soiuzniki,” in *ibid.*, 205–17; Mawdsley, *Thunder*, 185–223; Mark Harrison, “The USSR and Total War: Why Didn’t the Soviet Economy Collapse in 1942?” in *A World at Total War: Global Conflict and the Politics of Destruction, 1937–1945*, eds. Roger Chickering, Stig Förster, and Bernd Greiner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 137–56.

<sup>116</sup> For an illuminating memoir about the life in the infantry see Gabriel Temkin, *My Just War: The Memoirs of a Jewish Red Army Soldier in World War II* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1998). On the two armies – the 80 percent “imposing bludgeon” and the 20 percent mobile forces constituting “the swift sword” – see Glantz, *Colossus Reborn*, 618–19. “Army of quality” and “army of quantity” are John Erickson’s terms. See *Stalin’s War with Germany*, vol. 2: *The Road to Berlin*, 84. For the continued importance of cavalry and the horse see Bellamy, *Absolute War*, 169, 249, 283, 333–4, 602, 603, 678–9, 680; and Mawdsley, *Thunder*, XVII, 26, 64, 122, 127, 217–18, 303. For life in the cavalry see Aleksandr Rodin, *Tri tysiachi kilometrov v sedle* (Moscow: IPO Profizdat, 2000).

<sup>117</sup> David M. Glantz, “Developing Offensive Success: The Soviet Conduct of Operational Maneuver,” in *Soviet Military Doctrine from Lenin to Gorbachev, 1915–1991*, ed. Willard Frank and Philip Gillette (Westport, CT, and London: Greenwood Press, 1992), 133–73; Mawdsley, *Thunder*, 22, 175, 221–3; Bellamy, *Absolute War*, 490–1, 602–3.

<sup>118</sup> Antony Beevor, *The Fall of Berlin, 1945* (New York: Viking, 2002).

<sup>119</sup> Slepian, *Stalin’s Guerillas*. Alexander Hill, *The War behind the Eastern Front: The Soviet Partisan Movement in North-West Russia, 1941–1944* (London and New York: Frank Cass, 2005).

<sup>120</sup> Frank Biess, *Homecomings: Returning POWs and the Legacies of Defeat in Postwar Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

having abandoned its initial internationalism following the first flush of the German attack.<sup>121</sup> By the same token, the Soviet regime was the first major combatant to turn to war crimes trials in the effort to separate (military and civilian) criminals from the mass of Germans that fought the war.<sup>122</sup>

We telescope this entire development because the problem that we face is how and why this militarily superior and, effectively, newly recruited and trained army turned out to be the one that engaged in massive atrocities, rape, pillage, and sadistic murder in its sweep into central Europe and into the German lands long after the initial call for a war of extermination against the aggressor had been given up – and this is quite apart from the systematic pursuit of a political strategy that aimed at securing Soviet control of the liberated and occupied territories. Again, we ask our readers to hold their judgment for the moment, because part and parcel of this story is the way in which the German conduct of war reacted first to the tenacity of the Soviet retreat, which turned the notion of a short war into an illusion, and, after 1942–3, to the inexorable advance of Soviet forces against a retreating Wehrmacht.

#### EXTREME VIOLENCE

The sense of vulnerability even in victory was greatly exacerbated by the nature of the Russian retreat.<sup>123</sup> It confirmed the prejudices many of the Wehrmacht officers and soldiers harbored and played into the hands of Nazi propaganda. As before with the German escalation of violence, reality (of Soviet ruthlessness) trumped imagination. There was an element of protective rhetoric involved, but German soldiers and officers also recognized, as they did with increasing frequency in late fall and winter 1941–2, that they confronted their own escalation of violence when encountering starving and freezing women, children, and emaciated Soviet POWs.<sup>124</sup> At this point, not unlike in World War I, soldiers entered a space of combat, in which they only had themselves and their value judgments to depend on.<sup>125</sup> In this situation, it mattered immensely that the

<sup>121</sup> Sabine R. Arnold and Gerd R. Ueberschär, *Das Nationalkomitee "Freies Deutschland" und der Bund deutscher Offiziere* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1995).

<sup>122</sup> Earl Frederick Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin: The German Defeat in the East* (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1968).

<sup>123</sup> K. Arnold, *Die Wehrmacht und die Besatzungspolitik in den besetzten Gebieten der Sowjetunion: Kriegführung und Radikalisierung im "Unternehmen Barbarossa,"* overstates his case about effects, but he is right in his insistence that the Soviet reaction left a deep imprint on German soldiers. See the supporting evidence in Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten – Nationalsozialistischer Krieg?: Kriegserlebnis, Kriegserfahrung 1939–1945*; Martin Humburg, *Das Gesicht des Krieges: Feldpostbriefe von Wehrmachtssoldaten aus der Sowjetunion 1941–1944* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1998).

<sup>124</sup> Hürter, "Die Wehrmacht vor Leningrad: Krieg und Besatzungspolitik der 18. Armee im Herbst und Winter 1941/42."

<sup>125</sup> Thomas Kühne, *Kameradschaft: Die Soldaten des nationalsozialistischen Krieges und das 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006).

only “virtue” drilled into them and repeated by propaganda was unrestrained ruthlessness in pursuit of victory – or utter defeat.

The immediate response to Soviet atrocities was a brutalization of war making. We tend to think of brutalization in terms of mass murder and of the mindset of perpetrators.<sup>126</sup> But mass murder, in which Wehrmacht units although frequent participants were not the main actors, occurred in the context of a groundswell of military acts of cruelty. A typical case in point was the use of human shields, as, for example, in the effort to seize Brest against desperate resistance;<sup>127</sup> typical also was the murder of prisoners of war who seemed dangerous or were ballast for the advancing troops (or for the detachments that guarded them);<sup>128</sup> reckless destruction and unstoppable pilfering in the guise of living off the land were frequently mentioned.<sup>129</sup> Hostage taking and shooting were routine, as were the seizure, internment, and murder of suspect civilians and the bombardment of civilian evacuees in flight.<sup>130</sup> We know of many of these incidents only because commanding officers perceived of them as threats to their unit’s discipline. In the first instance, these acts of cruelty indicate the everyday reality of the “criminal orders” among frontline units. They made cruelty a routine matter.

Cruelty was justified with reference to Soviet atrocities. German soldiers responded fiercely to the shooting of wounded soldiers and especially to (the actual experience and rumors of) mutilations of their bodies.<sup>131</sup> They retaliated in kind and closed ranks for fear of falling into the hands of the enemy. The presumption of treachery in the civilian population, again backed up mostly by rumor, increased the readiness to destroy and kill. German soldiers reacted violently to the fighting retreat of the Soviet forces with their scorched earth tactics. Soldiers came to anticipate booby-trapped buildings or delayed mines in towns; they faced the decomposing victims of Soviet political murders with mind-numbing regularity; they were confronted with a remarkably efficient system for the evacuation of people and things and the systematic destruction of what was left behind; they abhorred the sheer destructiveness of the Soviet

<sup>126</sup> Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993); Christopher Browning, “German Killers: Behavior and Motivation in the Light of New Evidence,” in *Nazi Policy: Jewish Workers, German Killers*, ed. Christopher Browning (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 143–69.

<sup>127</sup> Gerlach, “Verbrechen deutscher Fronttruppen in Weißrußland 1941–1944: Eine Annäherung.”

<sup>128</sup> Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, ed., *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht: Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941–1944, Ausstellungskatalog*, 218–26.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 298–9.

<sup>130</sup> See Niemiecki Instytut Historyczny w Warszawie, ed., “Grösste Härte–”: *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht in Polen September–Oktober 1939: Ausstellungskatalog* (Osnabrück: Fibre, 2005).

<sup>131</sup> Examples for this process can be found in Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten–Nationalsozialistischer Krieg?: Kriegserlebnis, Kriegserfahrung 1939–1945*; Heer, *Vom Verschwinden der Täter*, 118.

retreat.<sup>132</sup> The shocking reality of Soviet retreat clearly excited their imagination.<sup>133</sup> It led to a brutalization of their conduct, a readiness to use excessive force, and rallied them behind calls for an escalation of violence. In response to Soviet self-defense, German soldiers, whether Nazis or not, developed a dogged determination to crush a fiendish enemy – exactly the kind of image that the propaganda for Barbarossa had insinuated. This shared resolve made it easier, much easier, for the many and diverse human beings that made up the Army of the East to think of the war against the Soviet Union as “another place” in which only the ruthless would survive and norms of civility could and would be set aside. It generated a kind of solidarity that over time would make the Wehrmacht into a people’s army – a fighting body unified by their experience of a war of survival.<sup>134</sup>

However, it was fear, the sheer terror of survival, that made the Army of the East into a “community of fate” that was ready to use extraordinary violence as a matter of course. If you are in hell, you do as the devil does:

We are a sworn community of fate, together we know how to find a way to die. . . . I give orders to shoot so and so many commissars and partisans without even blinking (*besinnungslos*); it is him or me – it is damned simple. . . . [W]e are fighting here for our own naked lives, daily and hourly, against an enemy who in all respects is far superior.<sup>135</sup>

This was the *cri de coeur* not of a simple soldier, but of Lieutenant General Stieff writing home on 7 December 1941. The Soviet counteroffensive had broken his sense of invincibility; he hung on for dear life and fought a merciless war. Panic and a good deal of hysteria replaced the sense of invincibility that had predominated only months earlier.<sup>136</sup> “Who ever talks about

<sup>132</sup> Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 17–34; Rebecca Manley, “The Evacuation and Survival of Soviet Civilians, 1941–1946” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2004); Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, ed., *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht: Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941–1944, Ausstellungskatalog*, 91–185. Klaus Jochen Arnold, “Die Eroberung und Behandlung der Stadt Kiew durch die Wehrmacht im September 1941: Zur Radikalisierung der Besatzungspolitik,” *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen* 58, no. 1 (1999): 23–63.

<sup>133</sup> Evidence collected in Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten – Nationalsozialistischer Krieg?: Kriegserlebnis, Kriegserfahrung 1939–1945*; Humburg, *Das Gesicht des Krieges: Feldpostbriefe von Wehrmachtssoldaten aus der Sowjetunion 1941–1944*; Hans Joachim Schröder, *Die gestobenen Jahre: Erzählgeschichten und Geschichtserzählung im Interview: Der Zweite Weltkrieg aus der Sicht ehemaliger Mannschaftssoldaten* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1992); Thilo Stenzel, *Das Rußlandbild des ‘kleinen Mannes’: Gesellschaftliche Prägung und Fremdwahrnehmung in Feldpostbriefen aus dem Ostfeldzug (1941–1944/45)* (Munich: Osteuropa-Institut, 1998).

<sup>134</sup> Bernard R. Kroener, “Auf dem Weg zu einer ‘nationalsozialistischen Volksarmee’: Die soziale Ordnung des Heeresoffizierkorps im Zweiten Weltkrieg,” in *Von Stalingrad zur Währungsreform: Zur Sozialgeschichte des Umbruchs in Deutschland*, ed. Martin Broszat (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1988), 651–82; Kühne, *Kameradschaft: Die Soldaten des nationalsozialistischen Krieges und das 20. Jahrhundert*.

<sup>135</sup> Hellmuth Stieff, *Briefe*, ed. Horst Mühleisen (Berlin: Siedler, 1991), 140.

<sup>136</sup> Johannes Hürter, *Hitlers Heerführer: Die deutschen Oberbefehlshaber im Krieg gegen die Sowjetunion 1941/42* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2006), 318–50.

winning? Surviving is everything!”<sup>137</sup> Stieff’s response marks in an exemplary fashion the end point of a process, in which experience and expectation had been adjusted, within the bounds of common prejudice, in the rapidly escalating violence of Operation Barbarossa. His comment was an early sign of things to come. German soldiers increasingly fought without hope for a future – and with few escapes. Survival was the rule of the game – and now the old rule did apply: *Not kennt kein Gebot*. Alas, it still mattered who defined the exception.

The winter panic, while important for reshuffling the military leadership and putting Hitler in command of the army, was momentary. The more important aspect was the replacement of the programmatic overkill of Operation Barbarossa, by what many historians quite correctly perceive as a more pragmatic conduct of war.<sup>138</sup> The only problem is that – contrary to the meaning of pragmatism – this more pragmatic approach also turned out to be the far more radical one.<sup>139</sup> In 1941–2 Nazi Germany and, in this context, the Army of the East, entered a phase of extermination warfare. Three dimensions of this warfare require our attention: the war against the Jews, which reached its apogee in 1942–3; the war with and against the Soviet population, which climaxed in the same two years; and the systematic pursuit of scorched earth tactics in 1943–4. In these years, war radicalized – in actual fact was radicalized – by a series of German decisions that defined the exception as a murderous life-or-death-struggle across the entire territory of the Soviet Union.<sup>140</sup> This three-pronged radicalization was the distinctly German imprint on the war. When the Red Army finally gained the upper hand in summer 1944, war continued to be exceedingly cruel in the subjection of German civilians. It was certainly deadlier than ever for the German forces, but it ceased to be a life-and-death struggle. Germany and the Germans, contrary to what Nazi ideologues believed, would suffer grievously under Soviet control, but they would survive.<sup>141</sup>

<sup>137</sup> Comment of an ordinary soldier, quoted in Christian Hartmann, *Halder: Generalstabschef Hitlers 1938–1942* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1991), 294.

<sup>138</sup> Oldenburg, *Ideologie und militärisches Kalkül: Die Besatzungspolitik der Wehrmacht in der Sowjetunion 1942*.

<sup>139</sup> On German casualties, Rüdiger Overmans, *Deutsche militärische Verluste im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1999). On Soviet casualties, see above.

<sup>140</sup> For a similar argument, see Hew Strachan, “Time, Space and Barbarisation: The German Army and the Eastern Front in Two World Wars,” in *The Barbarization of Warfare*, ed. George Kassimeris (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 58–82. See also Omer Bartov, “From Blitzkrieg to Total War: Controversial Links between Image and Reality,” in *Stalinism and Nazism: Dictatorship in Comparison*, eds. Ian Kershaw and Moshe Levin (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 158–84; Christian Gerlach, “La Wehrmacht et la radicalisation de la lutte contre les partisans en Union Soviétique,” in *Occupation et répression militaire allemandes: La politique de “maintien de l’ordre” en Europe occupée, 1939–1945*, eds. Gaël Eismann and Stefan Martens (Paris: Institut historique allemand, 2007), 71–88.

<sup>141</sup> Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945–1949* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995).

The strategic background for this transition was the recognition that the Soviet Union would not fall and that the Nazi-Soviet war would continue. It was equally shaped by the fact that, beginning in December 1941, the Third Reich fought a global war. The main consequence at home was a reluctant mobilization of the civilian population.<sup>142</sup> This mobilization was accompanied by an initially hesitant reconsideration of the industrial labor and, more unwillingly, the military value of populations in the East, including prisoners of war.<sup>143</sup> Ideological reluctance, foremost expressed by Hitler, was bested by crude efficiencies. Women were mobilized; “Slavic” auxiliaries were used in the Wehrmacht and recruited by force for work behind the front (*Organisation Todt*), as well as for industry and agriculture in the Reich.<sup>144</sup>

We find a parallel recalibration of the conduct of war – from a Barbarossa-type overkill to the systematic pursuit of extermination of all those whom the Nazi (and military) leadership defined as their deadly enemies. What emerged from this recalibration of war was a thoroughly racialized and mobilized Nazi “community of fate.” This war of extermination was fractured into many microtheaters. Systematic destruction bent to local circumstances. But effectively a military and eventually a German “community of fate” fought war as an all-out life-and-death struggle, a war of bare life as it were, on both an external and an internal front.<sup>145</sup> This was not a war imposed on Germany. Typically, it was a war the military and political leadership chose to fight – and chose preemptively to fight in a situation in which they were no longer in full control of their future, although the possibility of defeat was still far off.

The key to the recalibration of war was the extermination of any and all Jews in the German sphere of control.<sup>146</sup> Indications for this radicalization of the war against the Jews were omnipresent in October/November 1941 – with the mass killings of Jews as hostages in Serbia, mass executions of entire communities (men, women, and children) in Galicia, the beginning deportation

<sup>142</sup> Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (New York: Viking, 2006).

<sup>143</sup> Ulrich Herbert, *Hitler's Foreign Workers: Enforced Foreign Labor in Germany under the Third Reich* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>144</sup> Bernhard R. Kroener, “‘Menschenbewirtschaftung,’ Bevölkerungsverteilung und personelle Rüstung in der zweiten Kriegshälfte (1942–1944),” in *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, Vol. 5/2, *Kriegsverwaltung, Wirtschaft und personelle Ressourcen 1942–1944/45*, ed. Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt (Munich: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1999), 777–995. A critical study on the *Organisation Todt* is still missing. Franz Wilhelm Seidler, *Die Organisation Todt: Bauen für Staat und Wehrmacht, 1938–1945* (Koblenz: Bernard & Graefe, 1987).

<sup>145</sup> Martin Dean, “The German Gendarmerie, the Ukrainian Schutzmannschaft and the ‘Second Wave’ of Jewish Killings in Occupied Ukraine: German Policing at the Local Level in the Zhitomir Region, 1941–1944,” *German History* 14, no. 2 (1996): 168–92.

<sup>146</sup> Christopher R. Browning, “The Euphoria of Victory and the Final Solution: Summer–Fall 1941,” *German Studies Review* 17, no. 3 (1994): 473–81; Tobias Jersak, “Die Interaktion von Kriegsverlauf und Judenvernichtung: Ein Blick auf Hitlers Strategie im Spätsommer 1941,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 268, no. 2 (1999): 311–74; Klaus Jochen Arnold, “Hitlers Wandel im August 1941: Ein Kommentar zu den Thesen Tobias Jersaks,” *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 48, no. 3 (2000): 239–50.



of German Jews into eastern ghettos, and not least the establishment of camps designed for the purpose of murdering people en masse.<sup>147</sup> This turn was firmed up in December 1941 with explicit reference to the strategic situation and, subsequently, worked into a bureaucratic modus operandi under the leadership of Himmler and his security apparatus at the Wannsee Conference in January 1942.<sup>148</sup> What matters about these deliberations is the recognition by the Nazi leadership that the “final solution” of the “Jewish problem” could not wait until after victory. “In the final analysis,” Hermann Göring made clear, the war “is about whether the German and Aryan prevails here, or whether the Jew rules.”<sup>149</sup> Therefore, the comprehensive and systematic campaign against the Jewish populations in Europe was fought, as a war on the interior front, in its own theater of war, and it was fought as a war of extermination, the killing of any and all. It reached its high point in 1942, when nearly one-half of all Jews killed in the entire war were murdered. But the campaign did not let up until the Third Reich was defeated and conquered.<sup>150</sup> This was neither extermination under the guise of war nor extreme violence accompanying “ethnic cleansing.” Rather Jews were identified as “the most perilous enemy” in a war that the Nazis fought to the death.<sup>151</sup> The campaign for the extermination of the Jewish population also proved to be the most lethal campaign of the entire war.

It is no coincidence that the first people killed in the new extermination facility in Auschwitz were politically suspect Soviet prisoners of war. The destruction of the social institutions and agents of the Soviet regime had been the war plan for the campaign against the Soviet Union all along. But in late 1941 this war began to stretch and was fought without fronts. While the war planners had a highly developed sense of racial (and political, ethnic, religious) differences and while the theaters of war were institutionally subdivided between security forces and military forces, all enemies of the Third Reich and any conceivable form of overt or covert opposition came under attack in a war that covered with increasing ferocity and lethality all fronts and stretched from the zone of “combined” (military and security) operations all the way back to Germany with its millions of slave laborers. In this war “pragmatism,” the concentration on military functionality, proved to be the crooked path to hell, because

<sup>147</sup> Longerich, *Politik der Vernichtung: Eine Gesamtdarstellung der nationalsozialistischen Judenverfolgung*, 352–400, 441–60.

<sup>148</sup> Christian Gerlach, “The Wannsee Conference, the Fate of German Jews, and Hitler’s Decision in Principle to Exterminate All European Jews,” *Journal of Modern History* 70, no. 4 (1998): 759–812. Somewhat different readings by Browning and Matthäus, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939–March 1942*, and by Peter Longerich, *The Unwritten Order: Hitler’s Role in the Final Solution* (Stroud and Charleston, SC: Tempus, 2001).

<sup>149</sup> Quoted in Peter Fritzsche, *Life and Death in the Third Reich* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 187.

<sup>150</sup> With the proper emphasis on 1942–4: Longerich, *Politik der Vernichtung: Eine Gesamtdarstellung der nationalsozialistischen Judenverfolgung*.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

pragmatism was always already front loaded.<sup>152</sup> Hell was a place, in which small “communities of fate,” outmatched frontline troops, undermanned security forces in the rear areas, and an increasingly brutal security force in the occupied territories as well as overage police forces at home, did whatever it took to terrorize an unruly enemy population into submission and to keep the Red Army at bay by all means available.

There was always concern that more violence, an even harsher regime of fighting, could only worsen the situation by strengthening resistance.<sup>153</sup> Starvation plans were modified; collaboration was encouraged. The German appeals, much to the chagrin of the more ideologically committed leadership (above all Hitler), met with considerable success even in 1943–4. Stalin’s fears about the unreliability of Soviet peoples were quite warranted because collaboration proved essential for the German war effort (and is still understudied). The Army of the East alone came to use more than a half-million Soviet workers, and likely many more, and that does not account for all those who were dragooned into labor services for the armed forces behind the front and in the rear.<sup>154</sup> But none of this altered the fact that the war at the front and in the rear became not less, but more destructive. Indeed, it turned into a war of extermination in its own right. The ideologically preplanned subjection of the local populations, the use of selective terror to deter resistance was “radicalized” into a pervasive regime of massacre, starvation, and spoliation.

The Wehrmacht and the rear administration had every reason to be more prudent in their treatment of the local population – and this is what many frontline and rear formations set out to do, only to push themselves ever deeper into a quagmire of their own making.<sup>155</sup> There was never enough food for everyone. Because locals resisted labor recruitment and demand increased exponentially, German authorities turned ever more violent in their

<sup>152</sup> This is the dilemma that generated military opposition. Hürter, “Auf dem Weg zur Militäropposition: Treskow, Gersdorff, der Vernichtungskrieg und der Judenmord: Neue Dokumente über das Verhältnis der Heeresgruppe Mitte zur Einsatzgruppe B im Jahre 1941,” 527–62.

<sup>153</sup> Ben Shepherd, “Hawks, Doves and Tote Zonen: A Wehrmacht Security Division in Central Russia, 1943,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 37, no. 3 (2002): 349–69; Peter Lieb, “Täter aus Überzeugung? Oberst Carl von Andrian und die Judenmorde der 707: Infanteriedivision 1941/42,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 50, no. 3 (2002): 523–57.

<sup>154</sup> Franz Wilhelm Seidler, *Die Kollaboration, 1939–1945* (Munich: Herbig, 1995); Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, ed., *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht: Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941–1944, Ausstellungskatalog*, 398–409. S. I. Drobiazko, *Pod znamenami vrage: Antisovetskie formirovaniia v sostave germanskikh vooruzhennykh sil, 1941–1945* (Moscow: Exmo, 2005). It is usually argued that the Wehrmacht units did not have a “tail.” The reality is that they had an invisible one, which was not counted because it consisted of “Slavic” auxiliaries.

<sup>155</sup> Bernhard Chiari, “Grenzen deutscher Herrschaft: Voraussetzungen und Folgen der Besetzung der Sowjetunion,” in *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, Vol. 9/2, *Ausbeutung, Deutungen, Ausgrenzungen*, ed. Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt (Munich: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 2005), 877–976.

efforts.<sup>156</sup> On top of all this were extra requisitions, surtaxes, and a host of restrictions that defined the situation on the ground: the wasteful neglect of the colonial fantasies of 1941 gave way to ever more unconstrained and outright vicious forms of exploitation and spoliation that covered everything and everybody and made a mockery out of professions of prudence. By 1942–3, the comprehensiveness and severity of exploitation ran well ahead of all but the most hard-core ideological imagination – again not everywhere and all the time, but enough to taint German rule forever.<sup>157</sup>

Systematic and violent coercion became the pervasive feature of exploitation. If pillage, living off the land, was the political and economic end of violence, it merged increasingly with the sheer physical destruction of people and habitat in the war against partisans. Antipartisan warfare has received a great deal of attention, which tends to focus on the gradations of brutality.<sup>158</sup> As it turns out even the most unrelenting commanders in the antipartisan effort had second thoughts and units acted according to their own judgment of the situation more or less brutally.<sup>159</sup> But differential brutality only matters inasmuch as it occurs in a spectrum of violence, which overall shifted dramatically. We discover in the context of antipartisan warfare that there is a distinct “grammar” of extreme violence.

Again, we need to recapitulate the situation in 1941. Even then the danger of partisans was not entirely made up by the German conquerors.<sup>160</sup> Mostly undermanned German security forces, which were primed to ferret out racial enemies, faced huge numbers of armed men in an situation in which they were incapable of controlling the conquered territory. Himmler’s famous notation of 18 December 1941, “Jewish question/exterminate as partisans,” shows the racialized intent of partisan warfare.<sup>161</sup> Himmler and others like Heydrich, quite typical for the Berlin leadership, indeed thought that they could use the war as subterfuge for their final solution of the Jewish problem. But these ideas also exuded a sense of superiority and control that was even fantastic in 1941 and was slipping away in 1941–2 and was completely gone in 1943. As we

<sup>156</sup> Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, ed., *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht: Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941–1944, Ausstellungskatalog*, 361–428.

<sup>157</sup> Chiari, *Alltag hinter der Front: Besatzung, Kollaboration und Widerstand in Weißrußland 1941–1944*; Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine under Nazi Rule*.

<sup>158</sup> Shepherd, *War in the Wild East*; Timm C. Richter, “Die Wehrmacht und der Partisanenkrieg in den besetzten Gebieten der Sowjetunion,” in *Erster Weltkrieg–Zweiter Weltkrieg: Krieg, Kriegserlebnis, Kriegserfahrung in Deutschland*, eds. Bruno Thoß and Hans-Erich Volkmann (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2002), 837–57.

<sup>159</sup> Lieb, “Täter aus Überzeugung? Oberst Carl von Andrian und die Judenmorde der 707. Infanteriedivision 1941/42”; Sheperd, “Hawks, Doves and Tote Zonen: A Wehrmacht Security Division in Central Russia, 1943.”

<sup>160</sup> Hill, *The War behind the Eastern Front: The Soviet Partisan Movement in North–West Russia, 1941–1944*; Slepyan, *Stalin’s Guerillas*, 5–59.

<sup>161</sup> Richter, “Die Wehrmacht und der Partisanenkrieg in den besetzten Gebieten der Sowjetunion,” 845.

discovered, the “Jewish question,” notwithstanding Himmler’s comment to that end, was not resolved as a partisan issue.

In turn, the partisan question gained urgency in its own right – and it was resolved with an all-out war of terror against partisans and increasingly against the entire civilian population in partisan-controlled or endangered territories. By and large the commanders of the rear security forces were keenly aware of the dilemma they faced. They depended on the goodwill of the population, but goodwill, which was already tested by requisitioning, labor recruitment, and *corvées*, was undermined by brutal antipartisan tactics.<sup>162</sup> The more prudent commanders resolved the problem by prohibiting excess, disciplining arbitrariness and brutality. But they were moving – and driven by Führer directives in 1942 – to ever harsher measures all the same. Directive 46 of 28 October 1942 stated unequivocally: “In the entire eastern territory the war against the partisan is a fight for the complete extermination.” Therefore it had to be fought with “utter brutality,” which was made possible by granting complete immunity in the fight against partisans.<sup>163</sup>

In 1942–3 antipartisan warfare became the quintessence of what we call the “radicalization of war.” Harshness defined as “complete extermination” is certainly one feature. But there is more. First, all Germans on site (and collaborators, although the use of local forces remained a divisive issue) irrespective of function and status were called upon to partake in partisan warfare. Second, partisan territory and its entire population were made into targets of German all-out attacks. That is, partisans were killed, the population deported, animals and foodstuffs were requisitioned, and villages, towns, as well as infrastructure were destroyed. The end result, particularly in the partisan-controlled areas of Belorussia, was so-called *Tote Zonen*, dead zones, which were stripped bare and made uninhabitable. The term for this, *Verwüstung* (desertification), is telling and entirely appropriate.<sup>164</sup> Under these circumstances pacification was impossible and was no longer even intended. This was extreme violence, in which the winner took all – all male and female labor, all foodstuffs, all animals, all shelter – and fought the enemy “without restraint (*ohne Einschränkung*) also against women and children with every means.”<sup>165</sup>

In February 1943, Himmler suggested that all males suspected of partisan activities should be deported as forced labor; in summer 1943 Hitler ordered

<sup>162</sup> Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, ed., *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht: Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941–1944*, *Ausstellungskatalog*, 461–505; Ruth Bettina Birn, “‘Zaunkönig’ an ‘Uhrmacher’: Große Partisanenaktionen 1942/43 am Beispiel des ‘Unternehmens Winterzauber,’” *Militärgeschichtliche Zeitschrift* 60, no. 1 (2001): 99–118.

<sup>163</sup> Walther Hubatsch, *Hitlers Weisungen für die Kriegführung 1939–1945: Dokumente des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht*, unabridged ed. (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1965), 207–9.

<sup>164</sup> Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, ed., *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht: Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941–1944*, *Ausstellungskatalog*, 386–95, 421–8.

<sup>165</sup> Quoted in Richter, “Die Wehrmacht und der Partisanenkrieg in den besetzten Gebieten der Sowjetunion,” 854.

the full-scale evacuation of the “partisan-infected” territory of the northern Ukraine.<sup>166</sup> Such “evacuations” of entire territories had been practiced by the retreating Red Army in 1941 and they had become a German tactic in the first Soviet counterattack in winter 1941–2. Again, we have the typical warnings over a lack of discipline, arbitrary plunder and pilfering, and the “by now customary burn-offs.”<sup>167</sup> But practice pointed in the opposite direction, the ever more comprehensive and encompassing use of scorched earth tactics that aimed at utter spoliation and desertification of the country left behind. The forced evacuation – in September 1943 of 900,000 in the area of Army Group Center – and destruction left behind a territory that was made uninhabitable, populated by the weak and unproductive, who were pushed toward the enemy and were lucky if they were not used as human shields. In 1943, radical partisan warfare and scorched earth retreat combined in a conduct of war that only knew survivors and vanquished.

The year 1943 is the culmination point of a war that was started as the ideological fantasy of colonial conquest and ended in the extreme violence of a deliberately chosen life-and-death struggle, a war by all means against an entire territory and its people. It is in this situation that the distinction between brutalization and radicalization of war collapses (much as it collapsed in the Holocaust). Brutality had become an aspect of the grammar of war. There was no escape and little room for decency. It was the German conquerors and their collaborators against the rest of the population and against the Soviet regime – and it was the German side that set out to eradicate sustainable life on their retreat. This war was won by the Soviet regime – and not simply in a metaphorical sense. When finally on 22 June 1944 (Operation Bagration), three years after the war began with the German conquest, Soviet forces smashed through Army Group Center in the greatest victory of Soviet forces, the ground was prepared by Soviet partisans who effectively destroyed the communications and transportation infrastructure, blinding the enemy, and thus liberated Soviet territory from the German yoke. There was still a long way to Berlin, but now the definition of the exception lay in Soviet hands. The question, therefore, was whether there would be survival for the defeated Germans – life which the Germans had denied to their enemy first in a bout of ideological overkill and subsequently in a pragmatic radicalization of war into a life-and-death-struggle, which the Nazi leadership firmly believed could only end in the complete destruction of one or the other and, hence, prepared for self-destruction.<sup>168</sup>

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 856.

<sup>167</sup> Bernd Wegner, “Die Aporie des Krieges,” in *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*. Vol. 8, *Die Ostfront 1943/44*, ed. Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt (Munich: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 2007), 211–76, here 259.

<sup>168</sup> Bessel, *Nazism and War*, 170–981; Michael Geyer, “Endkampf 1918 and 1945: German Nationalism, Annihilation, and Self-Destruction,” in *No Man’s Land of Violence: Extreme Wars in the 20th Century*, eds. Alf Lüdtke and Bernd Weisbrod (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2006), 35–68.

## PASSIONS OF WAR

We noted above that the Soviet leadership immediately radicalized the war into an all-out war of defense, that the propaganda apparatus as well as hardcore cadres were ready for this kind of a war and enacted it. However, this does not explain yet how the majority of the population was made to fight – the regime’s approach was one thing; compliance and cooperation of the majority of Soviet citizens in this project another one altogether. The cadres of totalitarian violence, after all, formed only the inner core of a destructive movement that still had to draw in less radical layers of society – including many victims of Stalinism. Propaganda, even good propaganda, does not simply work because it is there. It needs to be appealing and those addressed by it need to react to its message. Most did, in the end, respond to the call; most did fight, and fought hard and brutally, breaking the Wehrmacht’s back. Why? One explanation focuses on political religion.<sup>169</sup> “Today it is fashionable,” wrote the former paratrooper Grigorii Naumovich Chukhrai in 2001, “to remember that when we went to fight we yelled ‘For the Motherland, for Stalin!’ . . . I went through the whole war and just cannot remember that cry. I remember curses [*mat*]. But the main point is not what we yelled when we attacked – many of us really were Stalinists.”<sup>170</sup> This son of a communist, a party member himself, who fought in an elite unit took his own experience *pars pro toto* for Soviet soldiers in general. At the same time, however, his recollections – full of deserters,<sup>171</sup> people who wound themselves to escape fighting,<sup>172</sup> and people who try to get away from heroic frontline service by getting into a “Red Army song and paratrooper dance ensemble”<sup>173</sup> – undermine these claims at universality. He meets a heavily wounded soldier, son of a *kulak*, who spent much of his life under false identity, hated the collective farms, and thought that Stalin was a demon or, quite possibly, the antichrist himself (“instead of toes he has grown hoofs”).<sup>174</sup> In this episode clashed two cultures – the urban Bolsheviks and the rural civilization they abhorred. It illustrates the huge diversity of the Soviet fighting forces, who were “divided by everything from generation to class, ethnicity, and even politics.”<sup>175</sup> Young fought next to old, victims of

<sup>169</sup> Robert W. Thurston, “Cauldrons of Loyalty and Betrayal: Soviet Soldiers’ Behavior, 1941 and 1945,” in *The People’s War: Responses to World War II in the Soviet Union*, eds. Robert W. Thurston and Bernd Bonwetsch (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 235–57; and Weiner, “Saving Private Ivan;” more nuanced: id., “Something to Die For.”

<sup>170</sup> Grigorii Chukhrai, *Moia voina* (Moscow: Algoritm, 2001), 281. For similar recollections by other veterans see also Merridale, “Culture, Ideology and Combat,” 317.

<sup>171</sup> Chukhrai, *Moia voina*, 170–2.

<sup>172</sup> For the “small minority” of *samostrel’tsy* see Chukhrai, *Moia voina*, 284.

<sup>173</sup> For the intriguing *ansambl’ krasnoarmeiskoi pesni i pliaski vozdušno-desantskikh voisk*, see Chukhrai, *Moia voina*, 228–9.

<sup>174</sup> Chukhrai, *Moia voina*, 194–6.

<sup>175</sup> Merridale, *Ivan’s War*, 211; also: id., “Culture, Ideology and Combat,” 307; Glantz, *Colossus Reborn*, 620; and Mark von Hagen, “Soviet Soldiers and Officers on the Eve of the German Invasion: Toward a Description of Social Psychology and Political Attitudes,” in *The People’s War*, 186–210.

Stalinism next to its beneficiaries, women next to men, barely literate peasants next to literati, anti-Semites next to Jews, Kazakhs next to Russians. The list of differences could go on and include differentiation according to rank, front, and arms that typically stratify combat experience and type of motivation in any modern army. How might Soviet soldiers of such immense diversity have shared a single motivation? How could we ever think of them in the collective singular?<sup>176</sup>

First we need to take a step back from the assumption that “the Soviet soldier” fought in the first place. In a combat situation fighting is only one of many options, and not the most likely one, given the trauma of killing and the danger to life and limb this choice entails. Indeed, the other main choices – flight, submission – were real problems of the Soviet fighting forces.<sup>177</sup> At the beginning of the war, millions opted for submission. The tally of Soviet soldiers taken prisoner by the Germans was, indeed, staggering. “Never in modern European military history had an army in the field lost such a high proportion of its men with so little resistance.”<sup>178</sup> Whether one interprets this phenomenon as motivated by the hopeless military situation or as a result of anti-Stalinism, or as a combination of the two – the fact itself is plain enough.<sup>179</sup> As the war went on, the likelihood of submission decreased. The majority of Soviets who became POWs did so during the catastrophic year of 1941. After the victories at Stalingrad and Kursk in 1943, only a small minority (4 percent of the total) surrendered. Nevertheless, we still speak of a mass phenomenon – 181,000 soldiers during the years 1944 and 1945.<sup>180</sup>

Those who argue for a thoroughly “Bolshevik Ivan” should find at least this number – over 400 per day in 1944 – hard to explain. That disgruntlement

<sup>176</sup> On the many lines of division among those who fought on the Soviet side see Seniavskaja, *Frontovoe pokolenie*, 76–77; 93–125; Glantz, *Colossus Reborn*, chapter 13, esp. 588; Mark Edele, “Soviet Veterans as an Entitlement Group, 1945–1955,” *Slavic Review* 65, no. 1 (2006): 111–37, esp. 113–21; *ibid.*, also larger bibliographical footnotes on literature on women soldiers (fn. 27, 29). The standard work on the latter is still Svetlana Aleksievich, *U voiny – ne zhenskoe litso* (Moscow: Sov. Pisatel’, 1987; reprint 1988, 1998), translated as Svetlana Alexiyevich, *War’s Unwomanly Face* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1988). On the recruiting base of Guards and mechanized formations, see John Erickson, “Red Army Battlefield Performance, 1941–1945: The System and the Soldier,” in *Time to Kill: The Soldier’s Experience of War in the West, 1939–1945*, eds. Paul Addison and Angus Calder (London: Pimlico, 1997), 234.

<sup>177</sup> Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995), 5–16.

<sup>178</sup> Martin Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917–1991* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 284.

<sup>179</sup> See Thurston, “Cauldrons of Loyalty and Betrayal,” 239 (“the argument that surrendering troops acted out of disloyalty is unacceptable”). For a more nuanced discussion see Shneer, *Plen*, 93–172.

<sup>180</sup> Calculated from Alexander Dallin, *German Rule in Russia: 1941–1945: A Study of Occupation Policies* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1957), 427, fn. 2. There is a range of data circulating in the literature, but the differences are minor and do not change the assessment presented here. See, e.g., Streit, *Keine Kameraden*, 83, 244. The most recent account uses Dallin’s data: Shneer, *Plen*, 96.

with the regime might have played a role is suggested by individual examples of soldiers who repeatedly refused to fight and who were also on record as disconcerted about the Soviet order. Consider the POW who explained that the “motherland was no longer mine from the first days of the October Revolution.”<sup>181</sup> Or take the peasant from Vynnitsia region in the Ukraine who disliked the collective farm, grumbled about the hard service in the Red Army, the poor food, and the bad uniforms (he liked the German equivalents better). He also thought it would be best to let the political leaders fight it out among themselves and leave “the people” out of it – it made no difference to him whether Stalin or Hitler ruled the state. He surrendered to the enemy in September 1941 and became a POW, only to run away from camp, return home, and live until 1944 on occupied territory. In April 1944 he was drafted back into the Red Army, deserted in October of the same year, was caught and put into a penal unit, where he served until a wound took him out of action in January 1945.<sup>182</sup>

At the very least, the large numbers of prisoners imply a lack of combat incentive on a mass level, as Martin Malia has pointed out – “they could not have been taken prisoner in such numbers had they had any strong motivation to fight.”<sup>183</sup> It might be misleading, however, to stress motivational and, hence, ideological factors when trying to explain existential choices on the battlefield. “Combat and soldiering,” Merridale notes, “do not depend on a single emotional impulse.”<sup>184</sup> There were many factors “pushing” Soviet soldiers to surrender in 1941 – including, for some, the lack of attraction of the Soviet system. All were affected by the hopeless battle situations, many mistrusted the propaganda of their own side about German brutality, and all were faced with the apparent military and technological superiority of the Germans. Most Soviet citizens had learned to arrange themselves somehow with the Soviet system – a system which allowed only few to “belong” in any uncomplicated way.<sup>185</sup> Why not assume that one would find an arrangement with another dictatorship as well? Such reasoning was well known to the regime and its propagandists – and they had a straightforward answer.<sup>186</sup> “I don’t say it will be pleasant under the Nazis,” states one potential collaborator in the 1943 movie *She Defends the Motherland*, “but *we’re accustomed to that*. . . . Don’t try to scare us. . . . Did you see them hang *everyone*? . . . Oh, sure, maybe the Communists and the Jews. . . . Enough of this rotten Red paradise!” The movie’s heroine shoots the traitor point blank: “While we live, we fight.”<sup>187</sup>

<sup>181</sup> Quoted by Thurston, “Cauldrons of Loyalty and Betrayal,” 242.

<sup>182</sup> Revision file on anti-Soviet agitation, GARF f. A-461, op. 1, d. 1820, l. 11.

<sup>183</sup> Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, 283–4.

<sup>184</sup> Merridale, “Culture, Ideology and Combat,” 312.

<sup>185</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin’s Peasants*; id., *Everyday Stalinism*; Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind*.

<sup>186</sup> Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*, 117.

<sup>187</sup> Quoted from Denise J. Youngblood, *Russian War Films: On the Cinema Front, 1914–2005* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 63–4.



Surrender became less frequent already by late 1941 and even more so after the victories at Stalingrad and Kursk in 1943. One reason were the threats from the own side. Another was the recovery of the Red Army. But giving up also became a poor option because the German mistreatment of POWs soon became known to the troops through one of these peculiar processes of mass communication where rumor and the reports of escapees went hand in hand with official propaganda.<sup>188</sup> By “ill-treating and starving our prisoners to death,” noted one commander in 1942, “the Germans are *helping us*.”<sup>189</sup>

The Soviets added their own incentives. In 1941, the military press reported extensively on what Soviet soldiers could expect when becoming POWs, often based on the reports of those who had escaped from this hell.<sup>190</sup> More forcefully, commanders used “friendly fire” against “deserters” and “traitors” as a matter of course from the very start of the war.<sup>191</sup> Order No. 270 of 16 August 1941 further increased the pressure. Commanders and political workers who “gave themselves over to the enemy” were considered deserters, “whose families are liable to arrest as families of deserters, who have broken the [military] oath and betrayed their country.” If recovered, these “traitors” were to be shot on the spot. All other soldiers were told to fight no matter what in encirclement and to demand the same from their commanders, if necessary by force of arms. The families of soldiers who “gave themselves over” were to be denied state aid and welfare payments.<sup>192</sup> Further legislation ruled that grown-up members of the families of those POWs who were sentenced to death should be deported for five years.<sup>193</sup>

Flight was another option used frequently. Soviet soldiers retreating through their home regions in the Don area took this opportunity to slip away and return to their villages or to major cities such as Khar’kov, Bogodukhov, or Belgorod.<sup>194</sup> Whenever a region was liberated by the Red Army, the NKVD got busy finding these people. In 1943, the agency temporarily arrested 582,515 soldiers, among them nearly 43,000 who had left the field of battle on their own, 158,585 who had gone AWOL, and 254,922 who did not hold proper

<sup>188</sup> Argyrios K. Pisiotis, “Images of Hate in the Art of War,” in *Culture and Entertainment in Wartime Russia*, ed. Richard Stites (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 141–56; Mark Edele, “Paper Soldiers: The World of the Soldier Hero According to Soviet Wartime Posters,” 89–108; Merridale, “Culture, Ideology and Combat,” 319.

<sup>189</sup> Alexander Werth, *Russia at War, 1941–1945*, 2nd ed. (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2000), 422.

<sup>190</sup> Based on a systematic reading of the coverage in *Red Star (Krasnaia zvezda)* between June and the end of October 1941. This central newspaper, while not read by all soldiers, was often read to small groups by agitators, as Merridale points out in *Ivan’s War*, 109.

<sup>191</sup> Glantz, *Colossus Reborn*, 580.

<sup>192</sup> “Prikaz Stavki Verkhovnogo Glavnogo Komandovaniia Krasnoi Armii No. 270 (16 August 1941),” *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal*, no. 9 (1988), 26–8.

<sup>193</sup> Ivashov and Emelin, “Nravstvennye i pravovye problemy plena v Otechestvennoi istorii,” 47–8.

<sup>194</sup> Report of military correspondent A. Gutman to Agitprop department of Central Committee (undated, sometime in 1943), RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 130, l. 33–6, here: 33.

documents. Another 23,418 were arrested as deserters.<sup>195</sup> During similar operations in the first three months of 1944, the NKVD arrested 8407 deserters,<sup>196</sup> followed by 87823 in July and August.<sup>197</sup> The flood of desertion of the first months of the war might have become a trickle of “a few hundred a month” after Kursk, but they added up to sizable numbers nevertheless.<sup>198</sup>

Many of them had slipped away to German-held territory because their own side had increased the cost for flight backward, behind the own lines, from the first days of the war. In July 1941, the Main Administration of Political Propaganda of the Red Army directed commanders to “explain every day” to their subordinates that “to abandon a position without order” was a “crime.” Officers should consider the use of “drastic measures” to enforce discipline – a reiteration of the rights they had since 1940.<sup>199</sup> Two days later, the Special Sections received the right to shoot deserters on the spot “if necessary.”<sup>200</sup> Not surprisingly, such signals led to physical and verbal abuse and “arbitrary executions.”<sup>201</sup> By October 1941, the NKVD alone had shot 10,201 deserters, 3,321 of them in front of their units.<sup>202</sup> At around the same time, Stalin pulled back, blaming those instituting his directives for “the substitution of repression for educational work.”<sup>203</sup> It soon turned out, however, that “education” had little impact on the tenacity of soldiers confronted with Wehrmacht attacks. A year later, thus, the regime returned to violence as an encouragement. Disorderly retreat without explicit order was now threatened by immediate execution through the so-called blocking detachments, introduced by Stalin’s Order No. 227 of 28 July 1942 (“Panic-mongers and cowards should be exterminated on the spot!”).<sup>204</sup> They were a resurrection of an institution from the Civil War; that might explain why individual commanders had introduced them ad hoc

<sup>195</sup> Report to Stalin, 8 January 1944, Stalin’s special files, GARF f. r-9541, op. 2, d. 64, l. 9–13, here: 9–10.

<sup>196</sup> Report to Stalin, 19 April 1944, Stalin’s special files, GARF f. r-9541, op. 2, d. 64, l. 289–90, here: 289.

<sup>197</sup> Report to Stalin, Fall 1944, Stalin’s special files, GARF f. r-9541, op. 2, d. 67, l. 381–2, here: 382.

<sup>198</sup> Cf. Merridale, “Culture, Ideology and Combat,” 318.

<sup>199</sup> “Direktiva GUPP KA, no. 081,” (15 July 1941), reprinted in *Glavnye politicheskie organy vooruzhennykh sil SSSR*, 42–4, here: 43. See also the GKO resolution no. 169ss, 16 July 1941, signed by Stalin, reprinted in *1941 god. Dokumenty*, vol. 2: 472–3.

<sup>200</sup> GKO resolution no. 187ss, 17 July 1941, signed by Stalin. Reprinted in *1941 god. Dokumenty*, vol. 2, 473–4, here: 474.

<sup>201</sup> Zolotarev, ed., *Glavnye politicheskie organy vooruzhennykh sil SSSR*, 328 n. 28.

<sup>202</sup> Report to Beria, October 1941; reprinted in Khaustov et al, eds., *Lubianka: Stalin i NKVD-NKGB-GUKP “Smersh,”* 317–18.

<sup>203</sup> Stalin’s order No. 248, 4 October 1941. Reprinted in *Glavnye politicheskie organy vooruzhennykh sil SSSR*, 77.

<sup>204</sup> The order is reprinted in Stalin, *O Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine*, 51–4; quotation: 53. It is described in detail in Glantz, *Colossus Reborn*, 571–2; and Erickson, “Red Army Battlefield Performance,” 244. On the blocking units see Merridale, *Ivan’s War*, 55–6; Glantz, *Colossus Reborn*, 570–82, discusses both blocking and penal units in detail. The blocking detachments existed until October 1944 (Mawdsley, *Thunder*, 215).

even before this order – they were part of their military repertoire.<sup>205</sup> However, both the blocking units and the penal battalions introduced by the same order were also, and quite explicitly, modeled on a German invention, which Stalin found worth emulating because it made soldiers “fight better.”<sup>206</sup>

The tactic of relentless counterattack also relied on violence against one’s own. It was not unusual for young, inexperienced commanders overwhelmed by their responsibility to kick subordinates hiding in trenches savagely, trying to abuse them into action.<sup>207</sup> Others used the stronger argument of the handgun: “Right away, our company commander warned us that, if we lay down, he would shoot all of us, and he really did shoot some. After that, we never tried to lie down again.”<sup>208</sup> Stalin and his deputy Lev Mekhlis, on their part, used the threat of violence to encourage the newly instituted commissars on 20 July 1941 charged with enforcing “with an iron fist . . . revolutionary order” against “panic-mongers, cowards, defeatists, deserters.” “Remember that the war commissars and the commanders carry complete responsibility for instances of treason and betrayal in their unit.”<sup>209</sup> A German summary of experience gained “in the East” reported on the results: “The attacking infantry leaves its positions in compact groups . . . shouting ‘Hooray!’ Officers and commissars follow, shooting at those who lag behind.”<sup>210</sup> No wonder that the kill ratio between the opponents was so uneven – it took between two and four dead Soviets to kill one German.<sup>211</sup>

Combat motivation, however, went well beyond sheer coercion. Soviet soldiers fought for a variety of reasons paralleling the wide variety of people who made up the Red Army. These motivations often coexisted and reinforced each other, or soldiers shifted from the one to the other. Some of them are not specifically Soviet. The German army – and, following it later, the U.S. army as well – even made a tactical doctrine out of the knowledge that people kill more

<sup>205</sup> On the civil war origin, see Erickson, “Red Army Battlefield Performance,” 242; A. A. Maslov, “How Were Soviet Blocking Detachments Employed?” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 9, no. 2 (1996): 427–35, here: 427. On their use before Stalin’s order see *ibid.*, 428; Glantz, *Colossus Reborn*, 580–1; and Merridale, “Culture, Ideology and Combat,” 318. The NKVD had used blocking detachments from the beginning of the war, too. See Khaustov et al, eds., *Lubianka: Stalin i NKVD-NKGB-GUKP “Smersh,”* 317.

<sup>206</sup> Stalin, *O Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine*, 53.

<sup>207</sup> Chukhrai, *Moia voina*, 50–1.

<sup>208</sup> Quoted in Glantz, *Colossus Reborn*, 585.

<sup>209</sup> “Direktiva Narkoma oborony SSSR i zam. Narkoma oborony – nachal’nika GLAVPU RKKKA, no. 090,” (20 July 1941), reprinted in *Glavnye politicheskie organy voozrzhennykh sil SSSR*, 48–51, here: 50.

<sup>210</sup> German report, 14 January 1942, reprinted in *Skrytaia pravda voiny*, 226–7.

<sup>211</sup> Compare “Personelle blutige Verluste des Feldheeres [im Osten] vom 22. Juni 1941 bis 20. März 1945,” in “Unternehmen Barbarossa:” *Der deutsche Überfall auf die Sowjetunion 1941: Berichte, Analysen, Dokumente*, eds. Gerd R Ueberschär and Wolfram Wette (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schönigh, 1984), 402, with G. F. Krivosheev, *Soviet Casualties and Combat Losses in the Twentieth Century*, trans. Christine Barnard (London: Greenhill Books, 1997), 85; and Ellman and Maksudov, “Soviet Deaths in the Great Patriotic War: A Note.”

readily if motivated by a concrete social unit – the famous “primary group.”<sup>212</sup> The Red Army was no exception and the affective bonds to comrades in battle are a staple of memoirs, novels, films, and poetry written for and by *frontoviki*. The Soviet replacement system – at least during the periods and the sections of the army where rotation of forces was implemented – was favorable to the development of such ties, which easily transformed into hate once the object of affection was killed, maimed, or captured.<sup>213</sup>

Losses were horrendous. In 1941 much of the existing army was annihilated on the frontiers – only 8 percent survived this ordeal. After mobilization and horribly costly defense battles, the Red Army went on the offensive in the winter of 1941–2, again producing heavy casualties, which were exacerbated by the renewed defeats in the summer of 1942. A new buildup followed in 1943 which created the army which would destroy – again with much blood – the German Wehrmacht and fight its way to Berlin.<sup>214</sup> The focus on “irrecoverable losses” (killed or missing in action, died of wounds or disease, POWs, noncombat losses), moreover, obscures a much larger fluctuation of personnel in the armed forces. While the years 1941 and 1942 account for nearly 57 percent of the “irrecoverable” category, the vast majority of the “sick and wounded” (70 percent) fell into the years 1943, 1944, and 1945 – making for a rather equal distribution of total losses during all of the full years of war (1942, 1943, 1944).<sup>215</sup> Soviet officers, in particular of rifle and penal units, report “that their regiments routinely suffered about 50 percent casualties in each and every penetration operation they participated in, regardless of the year of the war.”<sup>216</sup>

The extraordinarily high casualty rates did not destroy emotional ties to comrades, but – similarly to the German case – enhanced them. Under the conditions of life-and-death struggle, it did not take long to connect to a comrade in arms, and his or her injury or death was traumatic and provoked anger and grief. “Frontline life makes people close very quickly,” as one soldier put it. The constant destruction of people near and dear to the soldiers transformed

<sup>212</sup> On the German tradition, see Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 30–1; Thomas Kühne, “Der Soldat,” in *Der Mensch des 20. Jahrhunderts*, eds. Ute Frevert and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt (Frankfurt am Main and New York: Campus, 1999), 344–83; Kühne, *Kameradschaft: Die Soldaten des nationalsozialistischen Krieges und das 20. Jahrhundert*. See also Edward A. Shils and Morris Janowitz, “Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (1948): 280–315; Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front 1941–45, German Troops and the Barbarization of Warfare*, 2nd ed. (London: Palgrave, 2001).

<sup>213</sup> Joshua A. Sanborn, “Brothers under Fire: The Development of a Front-Line Culture in the Red Army 1941–1943” (M.A. thesis, The University of Chicago, 1993); and Seniavskaia, *Frontovoe pokolenie*, 85–6. For a skeptical view about the importance of small group bonding see Merridale, *Ivan's War*, 15–16, 78, 134. For movies, see Youngblood, *Russian War Films*. On the replacement system see Erickson, “Red Army Battlefield Performance,” 239.

<sup>214</sup> Erickson, “Red Army Battlefield Performance,” 237; Seniavskaia, *Frontovoe pokolenie*, 77.

<sup>215</sup> Calculated from Krivosheev, *Soviet Casualties and Combat Losses*, 94.

<sup>216</sup> Glantz, *Colossus Reborn*, 621.

the primary group into a more extensive, “imagined” community of warriors—some of them still alive, the majority of them already dead, slaughtered by an inhuman enemy. Moments of intense bonding before battle – waiting for the morning, sharing food and drink, and preparing to fight – resembled quasi-religious experiences of collective effervescence among men and women, many of whom would soon be dead. But even if soldiers were killed, the memory of such hours lived on and gave the survivors a sense of belonging, purpose, and reason to fight, kill, and die. It was within this emotional conjuncture that the symbolic representation of the Homeland (*rodina*) unfolded.<sup>217</sup>

Rage was also a powerful incentive to kill – both on the field of battle and between engagements. Revenge for fallen comrades went hand in hand with vengeance for or on behalf of civilian loved ones. “You have asked me to bump off two Germans for you,” wrote a soldier home. “Please be advised that your request has been fulfilled.” Hate propaganda allowed such sentiments to shift from the concrete to the universal, from friends and loved ones to the country at large. “My soul is full of hatred against the fascist monsters, and I have pledged to take revenge for the atrocities they have committed against our people.”<sup>218</sup> Such rage could lie dormant and break out suddenly when triggered by a confrontation with enemy atrocities. Vladimir Tendriakov relates a disturbing episode that illustrates how the benevolent feelings of soldiers toward a young German captive could suddenly shift to aggression and cruelty when his unit stumbled upon the remains of two of their scouts who had been covered with water and frozen to death. The same soldiers who had shared food and drink with the German the night before – in a scene reminiscent of the bonding between soldiers celebrated in much of wartime literature – now mete out the same punishment to this representative of the foreign “monsters.”<sup>219</sup>

Under the influence of a constant barrage of hate propaganda – which distributed the news of German atrocities against civilians and linked it to the

<sup>217</sup> Rass, *Menschenmaterial: Deutsche Soldaten an Der Ostfront – Innenansichten einer Infanteriedivision 1939–1945*; Sanborn, “Brothers under Fire,” 51–2; Seniavskaia, *Frontovoe pokolenie*, 85; Merridale, “Culture, Ideology and Combat,” 322; id., *Ivan’s War*, 134; Konstantin Simonov, “Dom v Viaz’me” (1943), [www.simonov.co.uk/domvvyazme.htm](http://www.simonov.co.uk/domvvyazme.htm), accessed 7 June 2007; for a translation which manages to keep some of the flavor of the original see [www.simonov.co.uk/vyazma.htm](http://www.simonov.co.uk/vyazma.htm). The poem is quoted and analyzed – from a slightly different perspective than the one chosen here – in Elena Shulman, “‘That Night as We Prepared to Die’: Frontline Journalists and Russian National Identity during WWII,” paper presented at the *National Convention 2006 of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies* (Washington, DC: 2006).

<sup>218</sup> Sabine Rosemarie Arnold, “‘Ich bin bisher noch lebendig und gesund’: Briefe von den Fronten des sowjetischen ‘Grossen Vaterländischen Krieges,’ in *Andere Helme – Andere Menschen? Heimaterfahrung und Frontalltag im Zweiten Weltkrieg, ein internationaler Vergleich*, eds. Detlef Vogel and Wolfram Wette (Essen: Klartext, 1995), 148–9.

<sup>219</sup> Vladimir Tendriakov, “Liudi ili neliudi,” *Druzhbba narodov*, no. 2 (1989): 114–44; Mark Edele, “Totalitarian War and Atrocity Process: Reconsidering Violence at the German-Soviet Front, 1941–1945,” paper presented at the *Biannual Conference of the Australasian Association for European History (AAEH)* (Sydney: University of Sydney, 2007).

barbarous nature of a dehumanized enemy— such experiences of rage and grief for fallen comrades blended over into the impulse to defend the loved ones from the impending danger, which in turn gave way to a more generalized impulse to defend women and children, home and hearth.<sup>220</sup> These highly charged emotions were shared not only with a close circle of frontline friends, but also in organized meetings devoted to grieving atrocity and celebrating revenge.<sup>221</sup> This was not merely or entirely a “cultural” or “imaginary” affair, either, once soldiers could see with their own eyes what had happened on territory they liberated from German occupation. “However much they write in the papers about atrocities,” wrote an officer to his wife, “the reality is much worse.” Interactions with locals were crucial in motivating revenge. “They took a cow and a duck from me, took away my chickens, and cleaned out the trunks in my home. Damned robbers!” complained a sixty-six-year-old woman to the soldiers who had liberated her town and added, “Kill them, boys!”<sup>222</sup>

The result of this multifaceted process of learning about and from the enemy was that Soviet soldiers quickly realized “that we weren’t dealing with human beings but with foul beasts, drunk with blood.”<sup>223</sup> A former information officer remembers this intermingling of propaganda and reality during his own “learning curve.” At first, he naively expected the German working class to rise up against fascism in order to “defend the first Worker- and Peasant-State.” The small number of German deserters and POWs during this early phase came as a huge disappointment, followed by increasing rage in response to reports of German conduct in the occupied territories. Once the Red Army was on the offensive, this foundation of anger was massively reinforced as the real scale of barbarism and destruction became apparent. This officer remembered the deep impact of letters by *Ostarbeiter*, who asked for revenge.<sup>224</sup>

Other letters were read as well. Already in 1941, the relentless counterattacks of the Red Army sometimes led to temporary and small-scale victories,

<sup>220</sup> Argyrios K. Pisiotis, “Images of Hate in the Art of War,” in *Culture and Entertainment in Wartime Russia*, ed. Richard Stites (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 141–56; Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, “‘Our City, Our Hearths, Our Families’: Local Loyalties and Private Life in Soviet World War II Propaganda,” *Slavic Review* 59, no. 4 (2000): 825–47. On evidence for the defense of the own family as a primary motivating factor see Merridale, “Culture, Ideology and Combat,” 312.

<sup>221</sup> “Direktiva GlavPU RKKKA, no. 16,” (30 March 1943), reprinted in *Glavnye politicheskie organy vooruzhennykh sil SSSR*, 211–12.

<sup>222</sup> Seniavskaia, *Frontovoe pokolenie*, 79, 86–7; Merridale, “Culture, Ideology and Combat,” 319; I. Dzhenaev, *Pod Gvardeiskim Znamenem* (Alma-Ata: Kazakhstan, 1970), 51, as quoted by Sanborn, “Brothers under Fire,” 59.

<sup>223</sup> Mikhail Sholokhov, “Hate,” in *We Carry On* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1942), 24, as quoted in Sanborn, “Brothers under Fire,” 16.

<sup>224</sup> Michail Semirjaga, “Die Rote Armee in Deutschland im Jahre 1945,” in *Erobern und Vernichten: Der Krieg gegen die Sowjetunion 1941–1945*, eds. Peter Jahn and Reinhard Rürup (Berlin: Aragon, 1991), 202–4.

which yielded not only enemy corpses, but also their letters and diaries.<sup>225</sup> The propaganda apparatus selected some exemplars which displayed despair or reports about hunger and cold (showing the enemy as weak), or those with descriptions of war crimes and clear expressions of an arrogant, callous, and racist Nazi worldview.<sup>226</sup> This work continued throughout the conflict and was recognized as a major tool to “stir up the hatred of the troops and the population . . . towards the enemy.”<sup>227</sup> It became an important means to fuse the diverse human beings who made up the Red Army into a violent collectivity. Wartime propaganda skillfully linked individual examples of victimized women (with all of their connotations in a patriarchal society) with more generalized images of “Mother Russia” (or, more literally, “Mother Homeland” – *Rodina mat'*) – symbols which resonated with nationalism as well as with religious iconography (the Holy Virgin, like Mother Russia, was traditionally dressed in red).<sup>228</sup> The similarities of this symbolic strategy to German wartime propaganda are striking – both tried to mobilize soldiers to fight with appeals to higher values and beliefs, civilization, and the defense of women and children.<sup>229</sup> Similar reasons might have been at work – the knowledge that the ideological commitment of rank-and-file soldiers to (National) Socialism was uneven and often sketchy. Stalin admitted as much to a Western diplomat: “The population won’t fight for us Communists, but they will fight for Mother Russia.”<sup>230</sup> Despite the massive recruitment effort at the front, the Party never drew the majority of soldiers into its ranks. Only about one-quarter of the personnel were “Communist” – that is, either a Party member or a candidate in 1944 – a share which might have risen to around 30 percent by war’s end. The more specialized the branch of arms and the higher the rank, the higher the incidence of membership. As many as 80 percent of officers were Communists or Komsomol members; artillery, tank troops, engineers, and air force had up to 40 percent Communists in their ranks – with submariners topping the list with 56 percent. By contrast, the vast majority of the footsoldiers – 90 percent as of 1944 – were not in the Party.<sup>231</sup>

<sup>225</sup> On the early interest of the propaganda apparatus in German personal documents see “Direktiva GUPP KA, no. 056” (24 June 1941) and no. 077 (14 July 1941), reprinted in *Glavnye politicheskie organy vooruzhennykh sil SSSR*, 26, 40.

<sup>226</sup> For example: “Dokumenty o krovavozhadnosti fashistskikh merzavtsev,” *Krasnaia zvezda*, 29 October 1941, 3.

<sup>227</sup> “Direktiva GlavPU RKKKA, no. 107” (12 July 1942), reprinted in *Glavnye politicheskie organy vooruzhennykh sil SSSR*, 151. On hate propaganda and its organization see also Poliakov, “Istoki narodnogo podviga,” 15–18.

<sup>228</sup> Edele, “Paper Soldiers,” 89–108.

<sup>229</sup> Streit, *Keine Kameraden*, 86–7.

<sup>230</sup> Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, 288. See also Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*.

<sup>231</sup> T. H. Rigby, *Communist Party Membership in the USSR 1917–1967* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), 253–6; M. M. Minasian, ed., *Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union 1941–1945: A General Outline*, trans. David Skvirsky and Vic Schneierson (Moscow: Progress, 1974), 464–5; Erickson, *Stalin’s War with German*, vol. 2. *The Road to Berlin*, 401; G. G. Morekhina, *Partiinoe stroitel’stvo v period Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny Sovetskogo*

Given the substitution of fighting capacity for “political maturity” in admissions during the war, the ideological commitment of many of these “young communists” was in doubt.<sup>232</sup> Even for self-professed ideological warriors in elite units Stalinism meant many things, most of them not connected to the Supreme Commander himself:

The crucial point is that our multi-national motherland was dear to all of us, as were honor and dignity, ours and that of our parents, our girls, our friends, who did not wish to be slaves of the Germans. We knew how many sacrifices industrialization had cost our parents, and it hurt us when all of this was destroyed.<sup>233</sup>

But clear ideological commitment was secondary. After the initial confusion of 1941, fear and hate, anger and revenge, entangled as they were with a confused but potent mix of leader cult, socialism, nationalism, religion, and love for those near and dear, drew larger and larger sectors of Soviet society into the killing process. The cadres of totalitarian violence who had been ready for this war all along were no longer alone. During “deep war” (Ilya Ehrenburg), when – after the battle of Stalingrad – peace “had been put out of mind . . . and was . . . unimaginable,” these emotions became widely shared.<sup>234</sup> Once Soviet forces entered enemy territory they became overwhelming. Attempts by the military leadership to channel the aggression away from civilians and onto the battlefield (largely in order to maintain discipline and operational order) were bound to fail. “To tell the truth,” as one staff officer wrote, “many of our soldiers understand only with difficulty such a line, . . . especially those whose families had suffered from the Nazis during occupation.” The determined resistance of the Wehrmacht only made things worse. Meetings with titles like “How I will take revenge on the German invaders” or “An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth” did their part to psyche up the troops further. In the resulting rampage, the resistance of a few could not stop the cruelty of the many.<sup>235</sup> And while Stalin played down and justified Soviet cruelty, it was clear enough to more far-sighted Soviet observers that these passions of war could only undermine the politics of victory.<sup>236</sup>

*Soiuz 1941–1945* (Moscow: Izd-vo polit. lit-ry, 1986), 372–3; Katrin Boeckh, *Stalinismus in der Ukraine: Die Rekonstruktion des sowjetischen Systems nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2007), 130, 179.

<sup>232</sup> “Direktiva GLavPU RKKK, no. 010,” (7 September 1943), reprinted in *Glavnye politicheskie organy Vooruzhennykh sil SSSR*, 233–6, here: 234.

<sup>233</sup> Chukhrai, *Moia voina*, 281–2.

<sup>234</sup> Ilya Ehrenburg, *The War: 1941–1945* (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1964), 107, as quoted in Sanborn, “Brothers under Fire,” 5.

<sup>235</sup> Seniavskaia, *Frontovoe pokolenie*, 197 (quotations) and 196–215; Zubov, “Pobeda, kotoruiu my poteriali,” 388; Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, 69–140; Manfred Zeidler, *Kriegsende im Osten: Die rote Armee und die Besetzung Deutschlands östlich von Oder und Neisse 1944/45* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1996), 135–54; Antony Beevor, *The Fall of Berlin 1945*; Merridale, *Ivan’s War*, 299–335; Mawdsley, *Thunder*, 215–17. On the futility of individual resistance see Kopelev, *No Jail for Thought*, 15–58.

<sup>236</sup> Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945–1949*.



## STATES OF EXCEPTION

One has to understand the soldier. The Red Army is not ideal. The important thing is that it fights Germans – and it is fighting them well, while the rest doesn't matter.<sup>237</sup>

The rest did matter, notwithstanding Stalin, because what Stalin leaves out tells us what kind of war the Wehrmacht and the Red Army were fighting. Hatred and revenge, a sense of invincibility and superiority, the dehumanization of the enemy – these emotions are common in war. But it is the exception that these passions of war take over – not a battle, but an entire war; not units of an army or even an army, but entire nations – and become the very reason for war. Explaining this exception became the main issue, and the main argument was that in both armies and in both regimes the exception was not some excess, but a state or a condition.

Throughout the essay, we were struggling with this very basic observation. We were grappling with the best way of describing and making sense of the phenomenon, because it seemed to us a more productive way to approach the conduct of war than the thick description of the “ideology” or, alternatively, the practice of war that prevails in historiography. In this context, we made a special effort to explore the different social roles and places of the passions of war. No doubt, more detail in describing these emotions and their respective vocabularies would have been useful. But it seemed to us more important to demonstrate that the passions of war made up very different military societies. Again a rather simple observation seems apt. The striking thing about the Red Army was the extraordinary energy of mobilizing ever new soldiers into ever new armies (and the propagandistic effort invested in generating this mobilization) – and the fervent, overbearing, death-defying appeals and the sheer relentlessness and recklessness and, not to forget, the terror that went into this effort. There was no lack of propaganda, no lack of indoctrination, no lack of terror on the German side. All this is well documented. But if the *Ostarmee* was driven by passions, it was the passion of “sticking together through thick and thin” as the proverb goes in victory and defeat. Also, their passion remained highly disciplined, “cold” if you wish, notwithstanding recurrent panics and acts of mindless hot-headed and sadistic cruelty. This discipline was one of the main reasons that German soldiers and the security apparatus were so extraordinarily lethal, and that they had a much greater chance of survival than their Soviet counterparts, and that, even in retreat and even in defeat (until they faced, or rather could not bear facing, their women at home), they thought they had an edge, were superior. What stands out is the sense of a “community of fate” that formed in victory in the face of a strange land and a society the soldiers had learned, and propaganda had taught them, to suspect, if not hate, and coalesced in retreat and defeat. The compact nature of the

<sup>237</sup> Milovan Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, trans. Michael B. Petrovich (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1962), 110–11.

German military community and its self-centered emotional makeup stands in stunning contrast to the quicksand nature of Soviet mobilization and the ideological overdrive of its propagandists.

Both regimes had violent prehistories; both saw extralegal brutality as the normal state of affairs in a world of class war or the survival of the racially fittest, respectively; both were shaped by and shaped themselves in the projection of deadly enmities; both dictatorships, too, could not count on the cooperation of all of their subjects, who were neither completely Nazified nor thoroughly Bolshevized. War was the “space of experience” that radicalized soldiers. The unfettering of violence, however, was the prerequisite of this process and it was intimately tied to the understanding of war as a civil or, if you wish, societal war.<sup>238</sup> We see in this war what happens when legal and moral constraints are removed and, indeed, when unrestraint becomes the order of the day. Unrestraint liberates brutality, and in turn the rumor of cruelty, even if it is random rather than systematic, spreads like wildfire, setting in motion a spiral of violence that, once unleashed, is only stopped in utter defeat. Unrestraint, we discover, is a learning process – both in the sense that it is responsive to purported or real (but always mediated and rumored) actions of the enemy and that ways and means of unrestrained conduct themselves are worked up, picked up, and taught. Cruelty can be learned and, sadly, it can be improved on. And, yet again, the ways of mediation and the learning processes differ in the two regimes.

This way of approaching “barbarization” seems to us so productive because the process of mediation, the moments of innovation, and the ways of consolidating unrestraint into conduct differed between the Wehrmacht and the Red Army, possibly even from one army or front to another, and certainly between the military and security forces. It is common to all that unrestraint breaks the mold of experience and tradition – even in “traditionally” violent societies or political movements. What we see in the Nazi-Soviet war is a liberation of violence and, thus, a savage dynamic of cruelty – that even soldiers, observing themselves, noted with a great deal of astonishment.<sup>239</sup> But then we must account for the differences as well. The question is how to get at it. Is it good or bad intentions, deterioration of conditions, habitualization of hatred? The question of difference turns us back to the issue of the radicalization of war one last time.

The one element that channels this dynamic is the horizon of expectations – and here we disagree with all those who think that dictatorships or, as it were, totalitarianisms are all the same because they all are extremely violent. We

<sup>238</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, “‘Erfahrungsraum’ und ‘Erwartungshorizont’ – Zwei historische Begriffe,” in *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten*, ed. Reinhart Koselleck (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1987), 349–75.

<sup>239</sup> For two particularly impressive memoirs in this respect see Willy Peter Reese, *Mir selber seltsam fremd: Die Unmenschlichkeit des Krieges: Russland 1941–44*, 1st ed. (Berlin: List, 2004); and Paul Feyerabend: *Killing Time: The Autobiography of Paul Feyerabend* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

also part ways with those historians who think of genocide as a matter of military or war culture. In a state of exception the question is “who decides” – and what this decision might entail. In war this question amounts to asking what kind of peace the combatants thought feasible. The long and the short of it is that National Socialism never contemplated peace with and for its enemies, certainly not for Bolsheviks or Jews, but neither for Russians or Poles. The National Socialist regime pursued their subjection or extermination, quite literally radicalizing, returning to the roots, of war as life-and-death struggle. The alternative of extermination or self-destruction was there all along as a fatal worldpicture, but it became the key to the German war plan. This is why we think of the Holocaust as an integral part of the war the Third Reich fought and why we think it must not be artificially separated from the eradication of the social institutions of Stalinism and the spoliation of the Soviet Union or, for that matter, of destruction of the social fabric of Polish society. Holocaust and destructive war were not identical, but they fall into the same spectrum of radical violence. The Soviet Union also did not make peace with fascists before and after the war, although it was caught in odd compromises. But it was surely ready to make peace with Germany and the Germans. What Stalin and so many communists could not figure out – and this was the animus of much of their war making and surely the conundrum of their peacemaking – is why the Germans of all peoples were so resistant to (their) revolution. After all, it had been their idea in the first place.