In December 1940 he issued his famous Barbarossa directive: the German army had to be ready for the invasion of the Soviet Union by May 15, 1941. The communist Soviet Union was to be defeated in five months. As it turned out, there were some matters that had to be taken care of, and the actual date was postponed a little over a month. Hitler well remembered the First World War. England had to be weakened to such an extent that no immediate danger of a two-front war would threaten Germany. Also, German power had to be solidified in Eastern Europe. The Germans now could count on Finnish friendship; their troops entered Rumania and occupied Greece; and when a popular uprising overthrew the pro-German government in Yugoslavia, the Nazis invaded the country.

The Soviet Union possessed the finest foreign intelligence network: it had agents everywhere, and the best of these people were ready to serve the communist cause for ideological reasons. The first reports concerning the planned invasion had arrived in Moscow already in the fall of 1940. In early 1941, Moscow received detailed information about Barbarossa, and in May its best agent, Richard Sorge, reported from Tokyo on the number of German divisions massed for the attack and gave the date for the outbreak of hostilities. British and American diplomats also warned Stalin. But even without this far-flung, well organized network it is impossible that the Soviet leaders were not aware of the large-scale German troop movements, the ever-increasing overflights of Soviet territory, the delays in German deliveries. There were dozens of German border violations carried out for the purpose of reconnaisance.

How is one to explain the puzzling Soviet behavior? Why was the Red Army not placed on a war footing before the attack came? After all, in September 1939, when circumstances were far less threatening, the army was fully mobilized. Why were there no war plans drawn up when war seemed imminent to foreign observers? Why did Stalin deploy the bulk of his troops so close to the border as to make defense in depth difficult if the need for such a defense quickly arose? The ever-suspicious Stalin, who saw enemies and dangers everywhere, now seemed blind to the impending vast struggle and tragedy. One must look for a psychological explanation for Stalin's extraordinary behavior. The snake looked into the eyes of the mongoose, and the mongoose froze. Stalin had little faith in the ability of his army to stop the Germans. But even if the Germans could be defeated, Stalin could not assume that his regime would survive. Would not the much-abused Soviet people use the opportunity to take revenge on their tormenter? He obviously well remembered the experience of the previous war that had given an opportunity to the revolutionaries to bring down the tsarist regime.

The real Second World War, a struggle on a scale unparalleled, now began. In the following three years, until the invasion of Normandy, Germany was to suffer over 90 percent of its casualties in this theater of the war. At the end of 1942 there were 193 German divisions fighting in the Soviet Union and four in North Africa. Even during the last year of the war, after the invasion of Normandy, the Red Army continued to face two-thirds of the German divisions.

The Germans, as predicted, struck at 4:15 a.m. on June 22. An army of 190 divisions, over four-and-a-half million strong, 5,000 airplanes – these numbers included the armies of Germany's allies – were ready to defeat the Red Army. Although over half of the Soviet army, almost three million men, were deployed near the Western borders, at the critical junctions the invaders had considerable numerical, and above all technical, superiority. The Soviet army suffered dreadful blows: on the very first day of the war, 1,200 of its airplanes were destroyed, the vast majority of them on the ground, never having a chance to engage the enemy in combat. Railroad junctions and munitions depots were bombed. The high command was in disarray. On the evening of the invasion Marshal Timoshenko, commissar of war, issued a nonsensical order to the Soviet armies: take the offensive, take the war into the territory of the enemy. The consequences were predictably disastrous: in these ill-planned actions the soldiers faced superior enemy fire and went to their almost certain deaths. The explanation for this extraordinarily careless step must be that the Soviet leadership feared to fight the war on its own territory, for it distrusted its own people. The war – by all means, at whatever expense – had to be taken to enemy territory.

The clearest sign of disarray was Stalin's momentary loss of control. The dictator who claimed credit for all achievements, now at the hour of the greatest crisis was incapable of addressing his people. Instead, the uninspiring Molotov informed the Soviet people eight hours after the invasion that the country was at war. Stalin retired to his dacha and for days saw no one; according to some reports he attempted to relieve his fear by drinking. But then, eleven days after the invasion, he collected himself and addressed the Soviet people in one of his most effective speeches.

It would be some time before the Soviet armed forces could put up serious and organized resistance. For the time being the German advance seemed unstoppable, and within three weeks all the Soviet conquests of 1939–1941 period were lost. Hitler, always conscious of historical parallels, wanted to avoid Napoleon's mistake of marching with his army on Moscow without protecting his flanks. The German army would attack on three different lines: one group would occupy the Baltic states and take Leningrad; another would face the most powerful Soviet forces in the center and move against Moscow; while a third would take Ukraine, move on to the northern Caucasus, take hold of Russia's most fertile lands, and occupy the oil fields of the Caucasus. On all fronts the Germans moved forward during the summer and fall. Hitler's plan for defeating the Soviet Union within a few months seemed to be succeeding.

The German northern army group under General von Leeb overran the Baltic states quickly, and on September 8 the Germans cut the last land link

between Leningrad and Soviet-held territories. When Hitler decided not to take the city but to force it into submission by starvation, one of the most remarkable episodes of the Second World War commenced. Leningrad, a city of several million, was besieged for two-and-a-half years, an unparalleled event in history. The suffering of the people of this city came to be emblematic of the experiences of the Soviet peoples during the war. The leadership could not be blamed for being unprepared for such a siege, because no one could have foreseen it. At first the food supplies were used liberally – indeed, food was sent out of the city during the summer – but the supplies were soon depleted, and starvation followed. People ate dead crows, dogs, and cats and cooked soup from buttons made out of bone. In November 1941 the bread rations for dependents, office workers, and children under twelve was reduced to 125 grams. Factory workers received twice as much. The combined effect of the cold and starvation was that malnourished people collapsed on the street and froze.

Circumstances slightly improved when Lake Ladoga froze. Through the dangerous ice road, constantly bombarded by the Germans, food could reach the city, and hundreds of thousands of people could be evacuated. By the end of 1942 the population of the city had been reduced to a little over 600,000. In the course of the siege over a million civilians died in the city. Remarkably, here as elsewhere, the hold of the regime remained firm. During the first terrible months Leningrad munition factories continued to supply the Moscow front. One can only wonder why people endured the unendurable and did not revolt, did not overthrow the representatives of Soviet power. It must have been a combination of patriotism, fear instilled by the recent experience of bloody terror, and simple inertia. The party – whose chief, Andrei Zhdanov, continued to receive sausages and peaches delivered by airplane at the time of mass starvation – remained in control.

The German southern army group was also successful. Kiev fell in the middle of September 1941, after dreadful losses for the Red Army. The decisive battles, however, took place in the center. Arguably, the battle for Moscow at the end of 1941 was the decisive battle of the entire war. Mid-October was the most threatening moment: the Red Army was disintegrating, and it was hard to see how the Germans could be prevented from taking Moscow. Government offices and embassies were being moved to Kuibishev, and there was panic and looting in the city. Stalin himself may have left the capital at least for a short time, as contemporary rumors maintained. He was, however, certainly back in Moscow at the time of the decisive battles. On the anniversary of the October revolution, in an underground subway station, he gave a defiant and powerful address to the Soviet peoples. The despair and fear were fully understandable: in the previous two years the German army had enjoyed victory after victory, and no force, neither Western European nor Soviet, had been able to inflict a significant defeat upon it.

And then a miracle happened. The German army ran out of steam; and it had to stop the advance, regroup, and bring up fuel, munitions, and winter clothing through the enormously long and difficult lines of supply. The weather turned first colder and then very cold. In October the ground froze at night, and during the day the inadequate roads became an impassable sea of mud. November and December were desperately cold. It would be wrong, however, to attribute the German defeat only to bad weather and to deny the decisive role of the Soviet soldiers. However inadequate the leadership from the very beginning of the war, the soldiers often fought with desperate courage. Stalin threatened to hold soldiers' families hostage if they deserted or allowed themselves to be captured, but it is unlikely that these draconian and cruel measures (rarely enacted) were decisive. The soldiers were ready to defend the fatherland against an enemy whose barbarism was increasingly evident to all. If we give credit to the German army's superior leadership, discipline, and equipment for the quick advance during the summer and fall, we must then give credit for the great Soviet victory to the heroism and constancy of the soldiers of the Red Army, and to the improved leadership of the Soviet officer corps.

The momentary lull in the fighting enabled the most competent Soviet general, Georgii Zhukov, who had been entrusted with the defense of Moscow, to organize the resistance and bring reinforcements. The crucial reserves came from Siberia, where they had been facing the Japanese. The great Soviet diplomatic coup of 1941, a nonaggression pact with Japan, now bore fruit. Soviet intelligence agents reported that the Japanese were turning their aggressive attentions elsewhere. The Germans recommenced their advance, and at one point reached the outskirts of Moscow, but could go no further. On December 5, the Red Army successfully counterattacked and inflicted a defeat on the enemy. For the first time since Hitler came to power, the German army had suffered a major reverse. The front moved 150–200 miles further west, and the stability of the German front was in doubt.

Hitler might not have won the war, even if he had taken Moscow; but now his defeat was only a question of time. If the Soviet regime could survive the first moments of doubt, it was no longer in danger of disintegrating. Stalin was right when he said on November 6: there will yet be celebration in our streets! The battle for Moscow stopped the *Blitzkrieg*, the type of warfare in which the German army was undoubtedly superior. At the same time, however, the suffering of the Soviet people did not end – indeed, the worst was still ahead. In 1942 the Red Army suffered major defeats, and the great brutality of the occupiers imposed almost unendurable misery on the people. Stalin, in obvious despair at the time of the quick German advance, now fell victim to exaggerated optimism: after the great victory at Moscow, he ordered a counterattack on all fronts at a time when the Red Army had neither the reserves nor the supplies to support such a

vast undertaking. The consequences were predictable. Within a couple of months, after dreadful losses on both sides, the attack petered out without reaching any of its strategic goals.

The weight of the German summer offensive was in the South, and German armies advanced as quickly as they had in the previous summer. On July 24 the Germans took Rostov, and by the middle of August they reached the outskirts of Stalingrad. At the same time they penetrated into the northern Caucasus. It was the steadfastness of the soldiers of the 62nd army under General Chuikov, defending each building in Stalingrad under appallingly difficult conditions, which brought the German advance to a halt. In mid-November the defenders held only isolated outposts on the right bank of the Volga. The resistance of the 62nd army enabled the Soviet command to bring up enough troops to organize a vast encircling movement, ultimately involving three Soviet fronts (as army groups were called in Soviet military parlance). Long after the end of the fighting for Stalingrad, this battle continued to symbolize Soviet heroism and courage. Ultimately the battle involved two million soldiers, about equally divided between the two sides.

The Soviet offensive began on November 19, and four days later the sixth army, commanded by General von Paulus, was encircled. General von Manstein, who was fighting in the northern Caucasus, was summoned to relieve von Paulus but failed. From this point the destruction of the German sixth army, at the outset over 300,000 soldiers, was a certainty. Hitler forbade surrender, and the Germans attempted to supply the army by airdrops, but this was obviously impossible; the besieged suffered torments similar to what the Red Army had suffered so often in the war. The end came on February 2, when von Paulus, recently promoted to field marshal by Hitler, together with twenty-four generals and 90,000 soldiers, were taken prisoner. The Germans were forced to withdraw from the northern Caucasus to avoid being cut off.

What that magnificent victory meant both for the victors and for the defeated cannot be overestimated. Although the Nazi propaganda machine attempted to hide the magnitude of the disaster, the news could not be hidden, and for the first time in the war defeatist sentiment surfaced in Germany. By contrast, in the Soviet Union after the battle of Stalingrad, most people assumed that the ultimate victory was only a matter of time.

Of course, given the scale of the war, temporary setbacks were inevitable. The Soviet command was too optimistic following the great victory, and therefore was surprised at a German counteroffensive that succeeded in reoccupying Kharkov. In March 1943, at least temporarily, the Red Army was again forced onto the defensive. In July 1943 the Germans attempted their last major offensive. This battle, the battle for Kursk, became the largest of the war in terms of the quantity of troops and armament; in fact it was the largest tank battle in history, involving 6,000 tanks. For the first

Soviet troops attacking during World War II

time the Soviet forces had superiority both in numbers and in weaponry. The result of the vast battle was a great Soviet victory. Not only did the Germans fail to achieve their strategic objective, but their armies were shattered, never fully to recover.

From this point on the Soviet advance was continuous. In January 1944 the Red Army finally broke the siege of Leningrad. As a result of the winter and spring campaigns of 1944, the Red Army reached the previous borders of the Soviet Union almost everywhere. Meanwhile the quality of Soviet military leadership greatly improved. Whenever German resistance stiffened, the Red Army initiated offensive actions at different points on the vast front. In August 1944 the Soviet army stood outside Warsaw. The Romanians were compelled to switch sides. By the fall of 1944, in East Prussia, German civilians got a taste of their own medicine: now the war was fought on German soil. In February 1945, Budapest was taken by the Red Army, and the last German soldier left Hungarian soil on April 4. American and Soviet troops met on the Elbe on April 24, and Soviet soldiers raised their flag over the Reichstag on May 1. On May 8 the representatives of Germany signed the document of surrender and the great war, at least in Europe, was over.

Aside from the heroism of the soldiers of the Red Army and their improved leadership, Soviet victory was made possible by the fact that the Soviet side could match the military hardware of the enemy. Although at the outbreak of the war there was no great numerical disproportion between the armaments of the two sides, the quality of the Soviet equipment was inferior. The mass production of the modern weaponry began under extraor-

dinarily difficult circumstances. The Germans had overrun the most industrialized regions of the country. In light of the difficulties, Soviet economic accomplishments were nothing sort of miraculous. It turned out that the command economy, with all its faults, suited wartime conditions. The Soviet Union in a short time managed to mobilize the entire economy for the purpose of the war far more thoroughly than any other belligerent nation. By 1942–1943 Soviet factories were producing more tanks and airplanes than their German counterparts.

The evacuation to central Asia, the Ural Mountains, and western Siberia of hundreds of small and large enterprises from occupied areas was a most impressive achievement. Ultimately, ten million workers were moved eastward; this move was accomplished quickly so that in the reestablished factories the production of war materiel could recommence. It is difficult for us to imagine the conditions in which the newly resettled workers lived: there was a shortage of all necessities including housing.

The economic strategy of the great industrialization drive now bore fruit: the great stress on building heavy industry made it possible to convert the factories to military production. It was remarkable that gross industrial output (largely war materiel, of course) in 1944 surpassed pre-war standards, despite the destruction caused by enemy occupation and bombardment. While during the last year of peace 15 percent of the national income had been devoted to war production, two years later the figure had risen to 55 percent.

There was a price to pay. As male workers were drafted, their places was taken in the factories by women. People worked under appalling conditions. The labor code of 1940 introduced harsh punishments for the violation of discipline. Now military discipline was fully introduced: people could not leave their jobs without permission, and overtime became compulsory. Total mobilization of the economy led to the depletion of the consumer goods sector. Even more painful for the Soviet people was the dreadful damage to agriculture and animal husbandry. In 1942 and 1943 the total grain harvest was only one third of what it had been in pre-war times. The consequences were predictable: food was in short supply, and clothing often unobtainable.

THE SOVIET PEOPLE AND THE WAR

The Second World War was the supreme test of the Soviet system. The economy passed that test: the industrial base, partially created during the great drive of the 1930s, was large enough ultimately to produce weapons in sufficient quantity and quality to match the German war materiel. It is more difficult to draw conclusions concerning the allegiance of the Soviet people to their political system. Although the Soviet Union defeated Nazi Germany, this fact alone did not demonstrate the commitment of the peoples of