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Soviet Intelligence on the Eve of War, 1939-1941

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Soviet Intelligence on the Eve of War, 1939-1941

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis, relying on primary source documents and several secondary sources, addresses an important gap in the field of intelligence history. It is often thought that Soviet intelligence on German preparations to attack the USSR in June 1941 was excellent and pointed unambiguously toward the truth. In fact, this thesis demonstrates that while Soviet intelligence organizations before 22 June 1941 collected numerous signals of an impending German attack, the collective intelligence picture was muddled, conflicting, and often easy to discount. It analyzes the structures and processes of the Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) of the Red Army, the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD), and, from February 1941, the People’s Commissariat for State Security (NKGB) as independent entities that separately struggled to alert Soviet leadership of Operation Barbarossa. A plethora of reporting from the sources of all three organizations shows that the confusion evaporated by the beginning of June 1941. While intelligence from the GRU, NKVD and NKGB demonstrated that Germany was on the verge of invading, they failed to convince Stalin of its veracity. Even if they had done so, the warning was likely too late to react without Germany’s knowledge. By that point in the final weeks of peace, the Soviet Union was in the unfortunate position of being a victim of strategic surprise.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Finally, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the love and support of my family. To my parents, words cannot express my gratitude for your constant preaching, “The sky is the limit.” I have taken those words to heart. To Mari, I offer an apology to a Southern belle for moving us so far north and warmest appreciation for your adoration, encouragement, but most of all, your friendship.
For Opa,
whose shoes I hope to fill
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The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the United States Air Force, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.
“The animals would still assemble on Sunday mornings to salute the flag, sing *Beasts of England*, and receive their orders for the week; but there would be no more debate.”

- George Orwell, *Animal Farm*
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In the waning hours of 21 June 1941, Alfred Liskow, a German sergeant major stationed in the General Government of occupied Poland, deserted his post and fled across the Soviet border. According to the memoirs of Marshal Georgii Zhukov, upon being met by the Soviet Border Troops the soldier exclaimed, “German troops are moving to jumping-off areas and the attack will begin in the morning.”¹ It was the last piece of information on a mountain of warnings collected by Soviet intelligence organizations over the preceding two years. Just as the German defector reported, hours later the Wehrmacht launched Operation Barbarossa, the largest military invasion in history. More than three million German and Axis troops poured into the Soviet Union. The duty of informing the Soviet people fell to Stalin’s close confidant, the People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs Vyacheslav Molotov. In a radio broadcast that afternoon, Molotov declared, “Today at four in the morning, without any claims having been presented to the Soviet Union, without a declaration of war, German troops attacked our country...”²

While the invasion may have been without legal pretext, it most certainly was not a complete surprise. From the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in August 1939, the Soviet Union relied upon its three primary intelligence agencies, the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Red Army (GRU), the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) and from February 1941, the newly-created People’s Commissariat for

State Security (NKGB), to monitor the activities, capabilities and intentions of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. By the end of the 1930s, the Soviet government had come to view these two states as its gravest threats, with Germany seen as more likely to attack the USSR. While the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact supposedly guaranteed peace between Berlin and Moscow for at least a decade, Soviet leaders widely saw it only as a means to delay an inevitable war by a few years. It fell to the GRU, NKVD and NKGB to warn the Soviet government and Red Army leadership of when that inevitability would become a reality.

Surprisingly little has been written in English about Soviet intelligence before World War II. For five decades following the war, a lack of primary source material was the greatest limiting factor. For example, the best study of that era into the intelligence failure of June 1941, Barton Whaley’s “Codeword Barbarossa,” published in 1973, relies on secondary source material regarding Soviet intelligence to demonstrate the success of the German deception campaign. While deception indeed was a key factor, it was not the single most important or even dominant reason for the Soviet failure, as Whaley asserts.3 A key work by a leading western authority of that period, John’s Erickson’s “The Soviet High Command” of 1962 successfully described the long Soviet road to war, though on the subject of intelligence inaccurately concluded, “Not until the very final hours of a peace becoming more and more insecure with every minute of its passing did the Red Army command make up its mind that an attack was pending.”4 As this thesis demonstrates, the Red Army and its intelligence service came to such a conclusion not hours before war, but weeks. Given the period in which they wrote, Erickson and

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Whaley were constrained by a dearth of Russian material. It was not until the dissolution of the Soviet Union that Russia, still in the nascent stages of democratization, opened many of its government, military and intelligence archives. Fortunately, a number of Russian historians capitalized on the temporary openness and copied a plethora of documents, publishing them in a number of compendia. The few thousand intelligence reports reproduced in these tomes are now the only window into Soviet intelligence between 1939 and 1941, as Russia has since closed the archives to all but a select few government-sponsored researchers. This thesis relies on three such volumes for the bulk of the primary source material – “Voennaia razvedka informiruet, ianvar’ 1939 – iiun’ 1941” (translated as “Military intelligence informs, January 1939 – June 1941) edited by V.A. Gavrilov, “Organy gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti SSSR v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine” (translated as “State security organizations of USSR in the Great Patriotic War”) edited by V.P. Eroshin et. al., and “1941 god v 2- x knigakh” (translated as “Year 1941 in two books”) edited by V.P. Naumov. Gavrilov’s work is composed exclusively of GRU intelligence and Eroshin’s exclusively of NKVD and NKGB material. Naumov’s work includes GRU, NKVD and NKGB material, but also hundreds of additional government and military documents that provide greater context to the reporting of all three organizations.

Given the linguistic barriers, more has been written in the Russian language on Soviet intelligence before and during the Great Patriotic War, as World War II is known in the former USSR, than in English. In 1995, a group of Russian historians, led by V.K. Vinogradov, published “Sektrety Gitlera na stole u Stalina” (translated as “Hitler’s secrets on Stalin’s desk”). The work consisted primarily of individual intelligence
reports from the NKVD and NKGB, with limited commentary. While not a monograph, Vinogradov’s research was pioneering in that it offered documentary evidence for the widely held claim that Soviet intelligence organizations collected numerous warnings signs before the German invasion but, for still debatable reasons, Stalin chose to ignore them. For all of its successes, the work has a number of shortcomings. Firstly, it only observes NKVD and NKGB intelligence. In order to understand Soviet intelligence as a whole one cannot ignore the role of the GRU, especially as it collected more strategic intelligence on German intentions than either the NKVD or NKGB. Secondly, Vinogradov’s timeframe was limited to the spring of 1941, far too short a period to grasp the larger contextual factors that influenced how leaders in Moscow interpreted the intelligence they received. A number of similar works followed Vinogradov’s model of providing some primary source material from a particular intelligence organization without providing much analysis. In 2005, Vladimir Lota published “Sekrety Front: General’nogo shtaba” (translated as “Secret Front: General Staff”), which observed only GRU intelligence. In 2011, L. F. Sotskov published “Agressiia: Rassekrechennye dokumenty sluzhby vneshnei razvedki Rossiiskoi Federatsii, 1939-1941” (translated as “Aggression: Declassified documents of the Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation, 1939-1941”), which discussed only NKVD and NKGB material gathered abroad. Not only do these three works, and others like them, offer little analysis, they invoke one of the most common pitfalls of intelligence history – the Bloomsbury syndrome. As John Ferris explained, such a fallacy assumes “that because secret intelligence was available to a decision-maker, it must have affected his decisions, and in a significant and simple way; or that intelligence was the key to policy and hence its
records must transform our understanding of events.”

The Soviet intelligence picture was much more confusing than any of these works suggest.

Despite their shortcomings, none are as egregious or outlandish as the works of Viktor Suvorov, the penname of Vladimir Rezun. Suvorov, a GRU intelligence officer during the Cold War, defected to the United Kingdom in 1978. In the mid-1980s, he wrote several articles, in both English and Russian, claiming that Stalin was planning to attack Germany in July 1941, but upon learning this information, Hitler preemptively launched his own invasion on 22 June. In 1990, he published a book entitled “Ledokol: Kto nachal Vtoruiu mirovuui voinu?” (translated as “Icebreaker: Who started the Second World War?”), thus the “Icebreaker controversy” as it is often referred to today. Suvorov’s argument is weak and evidence dubious, but the combination of sensationalism and a desire for post-Soviet revisionist history made the book much more popular in the Russian language than any of the more scholarly works that followed in the 1990s. Overall, since 1995, works in the Russian language have provided an unprecedented amount of new evidence about Soviet intelligence and the outbreak of war in 1941, but have not analyzed it with sophistication. Works in the English language have presented much, but not all, of this new detail and analyzed it to greater effect, but major gaps remain.

In 1998, David Glantz, a Soviet military historian, provided one of the first summaries in English of the declassified Soviet intelligence reports. In his work “Stumbling Colossus,” written partly as a rebuttal to Suvorov’s claims of a Soviet offensive in July 1941, Glantz demonstrates in precise military terms how and why the Red Army was unprepared to attack Germany that fateful summer. Since it was not the

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focus of his research, he devotes only one good but brief chapter to prewar intelligence. Unlike most of the Russian works, Glantz covers both GRU and NKVD/NGKB intelligence; however, he too discusses intelligence only in the final months of peace. Glantz’s conclusion that Soviet prewar intelligence was “efficient” and “provided an adequate picture of [German] preparations” was accurate, but simplistic; it too failed to explain the conflicting picture of Soviet intelligence in the spring of 1941. In 1999, Gabriel Gorodetsky published “Grand Delusion: Stalin and the German Invasion of Russia,” another scholarly criticism of Suvorov’s claims, which focused more on relations between the Soviet Union and Germany and Great Britain, and how Stalin reacted therein. It does not address Soviet prewar intelligence systematically, though does reflect the new evidence. Gorodetsky argued that Stalin understood German intentions fairly well, but clung, against reality, to the prospects of a diplomatic solution.

In 2005, David Murphy, a retired Soviet analyst for the CIA, published the first substantial book in English specifically dedicated to Soviet intelligence before World War II. Exploiting the newly released material, Murphy presents a powerful argument about the clear signs of Operation Barbarossa, and sufficient evidence to demonstrate Stalin’s gullibility to German deception. His work begins in late 1939 with the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the Winter War with Finland. While the greater timeframe provides more context than Vinogradov or Glantz, it still misses key Soviet preconceptions that were many more years in the making. More so, Murphy analyzes distinct aspects of the Soviet intelligence apparatus in piecemeal fashion. While the strict

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7 Gabriel Gorodetsky, *Grand Delusion: Stalin and the German Invasion of Russia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 323.
compartmentalization of Soviet intelligence does warrant his separation of GRU and NKVD/NKGB material, Murphy further divides his chapters by subject, geographic area and the type of intelligence collected. For example, there are three chapters on GRU human intelligence – one each for Western Europe, Eastern Europe and the Far East. Although this approach provides great detail, it creates a sense of determinism that ignores the conditions of doubt and uncertainty that are characteristic of intelligence, especially on strategic intentions and surprise. Murphy’s argument that Soviet intelligence services were “highly alert to the threat” and “impressive by any standard,” is misleading. He fails to demonstrate the complexity of Soviet intelligence in 1941, and largely avoids the conflicting reportage that plagued the GRU and NKVD/NKGB until only weeks before the invasion. Finally, as his title suggests, Murphy focuses primarily on how Stalin personally interpreted intelligence. Considering Stalin’s unconstrained powers and penchant for intelligence, this approach is sensible, but it does not completely explain Stalin’s views and actions, and overlooks other important issues. This thesis will focus less on those matters and more on the intelligence organizations themselves, including their sources, methods and leaders.

Initially, this work sought to circumvent the role of Stalin entirely and to focus exclusively on the tasking, collection and analysis of information by Soviet intelligence organizations. However, one cannot completely remove Stalin from the highly compartmentalized and overly bureaucratic system he managed. Firstly, given the temporal proximity to the Great Purges, Soviet intelligence officers between 1939 and 1941 lived in fear of providing information that was too unorthodox, of being too

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prematurely anti-fascist. Having one’s information labeled “defeatist” or “imperialist” could easily translate into a death sentence, thus officers had to write their reports in such a manner that conveyed the most accurate intelligence while also protecting themselves. This was a particularly acute concern for the leadership of the GRU, NKVD and NKGB. Of the three organizations, only the Chief of the GRU, General Filipp Golikov, risked the wrath of Stalin by warning him explicitly that Germany was on the verge of invading in June 1941, and even then he had to word his alarms cautiously. Given Stalin’s influence on the way that the intelligence services presented their reports, he cannot be written out of any analysis of these assessments.

Secondly, Stalin shaped the structure of Soviet intelligence reporting and its impact on policy. He was one of just a few individuals privy to both GRU and NKVD/NKGB intelligence, and the only one whose opinion mattered. While the chiefs of the respective organizations had access to material gathered by their own sources, they very rarely knew of the information gathered by the others. For intelligence to be of value, it must be shared laterally and vertically. While some compartmentalization is necessary to protect sources and methods, too many stovepipes degrade the utility and efficiency of the entire system. In theory, intelligence sharing existed in the prewar Soviet system, but it was wanting in practicality. Above all, intelligence below Stalin moved into two almost watertight compartments – the GRU and the Red Army, and the NKVD/NKGB. What little information that the NKVD/NKGB and GRU shared remained in the upper echelons of either organization. Every report from one organization to other was written either by a colonel or general officer and addressed to an officer of the same rank. In most cases, it was direct correspondence between the
chiefs, suggesting that there was no formal intelligence sharing mechanism. The second shortfall was that none of the organizations apparently passed sensitive information to any others. The GRU passed on only basic intelligence from Red Army units stationed near the border. This was almost always the same information gathered by the NKVD Border Troops in the same locations. The GRU never shared its much more valuable human intelligence. The NKVD and NKGB were only slightly more open with their intelligence. Although they passed some human intelligence to the GRU, it was not much. For example, two of the NKVD/NKGB’s most important human sources were Harro Schulz-Boysen, a Lieutenant working on the German General Air Staff, codenamed \textit{Starshina}, and Arvid Harnack, a German economist and anti-Hitlerite in the Ministry of Economics who operated under the name \textit{Corsican}. The two sources passed dozens of reports throughout the spring of 1941 warning of Germany’s hostile intentions. However, the records indicate that the NKVD/NKGB forwarded only one report to the Red Army containing intelligence from \textit{Starshina} and \textit{Corsican}, and even then redacted their names and aliases.\footnote{“Soobshchenie NKGB SSSR narkomu obrony SSSR Timoshenku s proprovozhdaniem agenturnykh soobshheniiiz Berlina, 4 April 1941,” in V.P. Naumov (ed.), \textit{1941 god v 2-kh knigakh. Kniga vtoraiya} (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond “Demokratiia,” 1998), 25-27.} Since the GRU and NKVD/NKGB did not pass their most sensitive intelligence, the intelligence that they did share only confirmed what basic information both parties already knew. Perhaps this made it harder for them to escape the weight of their preconceptions, and particularly slowed their recognition that war was looming. In particular, greater access to NKVD/NKGB reports might well have hastened Golikov’s appreciation of the real nature of the danger, and also that of senior military officers who received his reports.
Based on the available records, Stalin and Molotov were the only two individuals able to view all reporting from the GRU, NKVD and NKGB. And they were poor consumers of it. Historians have criticized both men for failing to heed the alarms raised by the Soviet intelligence organizations, and rightly so. They believed, on the basis of strongly held preconceptions, that Hitler must respect Soviet capabilities and would not turn against the Soviet Union until he subdued Great Britain. Following this line of reasoning, any intelligence suggesting that Germany was on the verge of invading had to be British propaganda, and any source reporting such views was either a fool or a traitor. To make matters even more confusing, Churchill passed legitimate warnings derived from British signals intelligence to Stalin, but in part precisely with the purpose of drawing the USSR into war against Germany.\textsuperscript{10} Thus, while Stalin correctly assessed British intentions, he failed to appreciate the validity of their intelligence. Furthermore, Stalin also feared provoking Germany into war, thus the orders to not fire upon Luftwaffe aircraft in Soviet airspace and an unwillingness to man forward defensive positions until the last hours of peace. Stalin and Molotov’s preconceptions were so strong that neither allowed for the ideas that perhaps Hitler despised Soviet power or would prioritize an attack of the Soviet Union over Great Britain, or start a two-front war. This failure to accept alternative hypotheses is one of the most common pitfalls of intelligence analysis.

However, despite the obvious flaws of Stalin and Molotov as consumers of intelligence, the Soviet intelligence picture in 1941 was much more opaque and complex than historians generally have been willing to concede. All of the literature on Soviet intelligence and Barbarossa share certain assumptions – Soviet intelligence was excellent;

it pointed consistently toward the truth; it was ignored only because of Stalin. In fact, Soviet intelligence services were good, but their reportage often was factually wrong and their reports were rarely unanimous or prescient. A primary aim of this thesis is to dispel the notion that the Soviet Union received unmistakable evidence of German intentions many months in advance of Barbarossa. Within GRU reporting, the signs of the danger did not begin to coalesce until the latter half of May, approximately four to five weeks before the start of Barbarossa. The GRU’s performance was only slightly inferior to British intelligence, which came to believe that the Soviet Union would be Germany’s next target in mid-May.\textsuperscript{11} Within NKVD and NKGB reporting, a clear picture did not emerge until the beginning of June. Either stream of intelligence provided more than a sufficient number of indicators and time to at least place the Red Army on a heightened defensive posture. Collectively, they left little doubt of the impending calamity. The failure to allow even basic tactical preparations, like manning “firepoints” on the border and dispersing the Red Air Force, until only hours before the attack rests solely with Stalin. However, it would be inappropriate to believe that he was completely negligent. Stalin simply was a poor consumer of intelligence, unable to grapple with uncertainty and unwilling to forgo certain preconceptions. He fell victim to strategic surprise to an unusual degree, but his failure was of degree, not kind.

The next chapter traces the development of Soviet threat perceptions throughout the 1930s. The few works on Soviet prewar intelligence all begin sometime after the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. However, in order to understand why the Soviet Union signed the non-aggression pact with Germany in the first place, one must appreciate how Moscow came to fear Berlin. At the beginning of the decade, Germany

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid, 468-469.
was but one of many vague “capitalist, imperialist” threats. Even when Hitler came to
power, the Soviet government was not immediately concerned. Indeed, in the middle
half of the decade, Moscow viewed Imperial Japan as a more likely and dangerous threat.
However, as Germany rearmed, attacked Communism rhetorically abroad and
institutionally at home, the USSR took notice. The Soviet government accepted that war
with Germany was inevitable; it was only a question of when. Stalin sent his foreign
ministers to Great Britain and France with the aim of concluding collective security
agreements to constrain Hitler’s ambitions. Paradoxically, the capitalist states were
unwilling to deal with the Communists, rather than vice versa. Taking a cue from
Bismarck, the Soviet Union temporarily set aside all ideological considerations and
engaged in its own German-inspired *realpolitik*. If Moscow could not get London and
Paris to cooperate on containing Germany, why not reach an understanding with Berlin
directly? Thus, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact came to fruition, providing the Soviet
Union theoretically not only with years of peace as war raged in Europe, but also with
new territory to provide an even greater buffer against Germany when the inevitable war
came. One month later, Moscow signed a peace treaty with Japan following a bloody but
victorious five-month battle in Eastern Mongolia. In realizing defeat, Tokyo began to
accept that its strategic interests lie elsewhere. Thus, at the decade’s end, the USSR
seemed to have temporarily sidelined its two greatest threats.

Chapter 3 analyzes GRU intelligence between the fall of 1939 and June 1941.
While the Main Intelligence Directorate employed different methods of collection, the
records indicate that its most common one by far was human intelligence. The GRU
maintained a global network of agents, with particular successes in Germany, Japan, and
Romania. Throughout 1940, there were very few reports on German ill intentions against the Soviet Union. Following the fall of France, there was consensus in the reporting that Great Britain would be Hitler’s next target. However, by early 1941, GRU sources began to report that the Soviet Union had superseded Britain in priority. For the first three months of the year, GRU leaders discounted the few warnings as false information, but after Germany’s rapid conquest of the Balkans they became increasingly concerned that the alarms could be true, despite the internal confliction. By the middle of May, intelligence reports from numerous independent sources throughout Europe and in Japan began to form a clear picture of looming war and the leadership took notice. The only lingering point of contention was the question of exactly when would Germany invade.

Chapter 4 discusses intelligence gathered by the NKVD and, from February 1941, the NKGB. Whereas the GRU gathered information almost exclusively abroad, the NKVD and NKGB worked actively both inside and outside of the Soviet Union. Given the organizations’ numerous responsibilities, the NKVD and NKGB collected a greater variety of signals than the GRU. In addition to their own human intelligence operatives, the NKVD and NKGB also collected signals intelligence, conducted extensive counterintelligence operations, interrogated hundreds of suspected German agents, and reported frequently on German activities in the General Government and on hundreds of Luftwaffe incursions of Soviet airspace. The diversity of collection means does not avail itself to as neat an intelligence picture as presented by the GRU. Nevertheless, by early June, the disparate sources all indicated an impending attack. Just like the GRU, the only point of contention in the reporting was the precise date on when the Wehrmacht would
launch its offensive. Unlike the GRU, the NKVD and NKGB did not draw these dangers to Stalin’s attention.

Finally, Chapter 5 places Soviet prewar intelligence within the context of strategic surprise. Stalin and other Soviet leaders were not ignorant to the prospects of conflict with Germany and Japan. They fully expected to be dragged into a war in Europe, and possibly in the Far East. Intelligence collected by the GRU, and to a lesser extent the NKVD, influenced their decision to “creep up” to war by slowly and covertly mobilizing the Red Army along the German border. It also provided insight on Japanese strategic intentions against Southeast Asia rather than the USSR, allowing the Red Army to relocate a number of divisions in the Far East to Ukraine and Belorussia. Viktor Suvorov emphasized these clandestine deployments in his argument that the Soviet Union was planning to attack Germany in the summer of 1941. While historians have discounted Suvorov’s claims about the timeline, there is increasing evidence that the Soviet Union was preparing to fight an offensive war with Germany at some point, just not in the summer of 1941. Thus, while Stalin read the trend of intelligence correctly, he failed to recognize its pace, particularly the warning signs in the last weeks of peace. Therein lies the challenge of detecting strategic surprise.

Roberta Wohlstetter laid the foundations of intelligence history in general, and strategic surprise specifically, in her 1962 work “Pearl Harbor, Warning and Decision.” Using the Japanese attack on 7 December as a case study, she argued the nature of intelligence is to uncover meaningful “signals” from worthless “noise.” In strategic surprise, signals are often present, but they are overpowered by noise. 12 The only

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shortcoming in Wohlstetter’s analysis was that her theory did not allow for the role of denial and deception, undoubtedly a key factor for Japanese success in Hawaii and German success in Eastern Europe in 1941. Since Wohlstetter’s work, other scholars have added greater depth to the concept of strategic surprise. Whaley’s classic argument about the significance of deception to strategic surprise treated Barbarossa as a case study. Michael Handel and Richard Betts explained that for all the advances in military technology, strategic surprise is still difficult to detect, as it rests primarily on human analysis and the associated limitations of “human psychology and politics, perception and misperception of reality, conflicting interests, [and] organizational biases.”

Therefore, for all the signals and noise, shrouded in denial, deception and uncertainty, the attacker almost always has the advantage of being one step ahead. Even as the victim collects intelligence of the enemy’s intentions, and in many cases begins the mobilization process, as indeed the Red Army did in early 1941, the attacker retains supremacy over when the attack will occur. As Ferris explained, in this heightened state of awareness, the victim’s intelligence organizations can scrutinize new information with greater sensitivity, but this “increases the number of false alarms, [which] in turn dulls [the victim] to warning and heightens the risk of surprise.” The predicament leads to a situation in which strategic surprise is almost unavoidable, and it is exactly the situation the Soviet Union faced in 1941. For all the successes of the GRU, NKVD and NKGB in providing substantial evidence that Germany was about to invade, none could provide an unambiguous answer as to when the offensive would begin. By early June, the proposed dates were closer

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14 John Ferris and Michael Handel, Intelligence, Power and Strategy: On Instrumental Intelligence (In Press, 2014), 264.
together and the timeframes more narrow than ever before reported, but given the score
of supposed invasion dates that passed peacefully, why was the government to start
believing the alarms now? This in no way allays Stalin’s failure to heed the warnings,
but it does cast Soviet prewar intelligence as much more complicated and abstruse than
many historians have been willing to concede. Of course, that abstruseness is simply the
nature of intelligence.

Relying on primary sources, principally declassified Soviet intelligence reports,
this thesis demonstrates in greater detail than before the strengths, weaknesses, successes
and limitations of the Soviet intelligence apparatus between the fall of 1939 and spring of
1941. The GRU, NKVD and NKGB performed reasonably well, but they did not present
an unambiguous intelligence picture many months in advance, as Murphy, Glantz and
numerous works in the Russian language imply. One cannot, as these previous authors
did, avoid the internal complexity and confliction of reporting. Such perplexity is not
only characteristic of Soviet intelligence before World War II; it is fundamental to the
field of intelligence history itself. Ultimately, however, this thesis reaches the same
conclusion as other scholars regarding the culpability of the Soviet failure. As with
Whaley, Glantz and Vinogradov, it argues that responsibility rests solely on the shoulders
of Joseph Stalin. His inability, or unwillingness, to recognize the combination of
intelligence and military realities along the western Soviet border ensured the success of
a German strategic surprise on 22 June 1941. The causes of this error remain
controversial.
CHAPTER 2
SOVIET THREAT PERCEPTIONS IN THE 1930s

World War I revolutionized the field of intelligence. Collection methods diversified, the number of intelligence agents grew exponentially and states bureaucratized the intelligence process, though in unique modes. Across Europe and North America, governments recognized the value of intelligence both in peace and in war. Russia, despite its early exit from the Great War, learned a similar lesson. Tsarist Russia already was a pioneering state in the field. In 1881, following the assassination of Alexander II, Russia established the Department for Protecting the Public Security and Order, or Okhrana, as a small government agency tasked with combatting terrorism and revolutionary activities. Though composed only of a few dozen men, the organization laid the foundation for modern internal security services. Their modus operandi was to monitor Russian radicals and dissidents around the world and their contacts within Russia, in hopes of disrupting revolutionary or terrorist activities before they could be undertaken.\(^\text{15}\) While Okhrana was more an internal security or police organization than an intelligence service, its methods of collection and analysis were typical of modern human intelligence (HUMINT).

After the October Revolution of 1917, in order for the Bolsheviks to secure their gains, the functions of internal security had to be intensified. The techniques of Okhrana shaped the development of the state’s new internal security organization, the Cheka, or Extraordinary Commission. Over the next two decades, Cheka transformed into the GPU, OGPU and eventually the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs, or NKVD. From February 1941, the People’s Commissariat for State Security, or NKGB, took over.

some responsibilities of the NKVD. Despite the frequent organizational shuffles, each of these bodies was similarly tasked with internal espionage and policing and external intelligence to some degree or another, especially against hostile Russian political factions based abroad. The other principal state agency for foreign intelligence was the Main Intelligence Directorate, or GRU, of the Red Army. By the end of the 1930s, GRU ran more robust global operations than the NKVD/NKGB and, unlike it, collated and analyzed intelligence from multiple sources. Together, the GRU and the NKVD held primary responsibility for Soviet intelligence, particularly during the critical two-year period upon which this thesis focuses.

The Soviet government also collected overseas intelligence through a third means. The International Liaison Department (OMS) of the Comintern played a critical role in gathering intelligence, as well as undertaking acts of sabotage and coercion in cooperation with communist parties around the world. 16 This thesis will not consider intelligence operations by OMS for two important reasons. Firstly, by the late 1930s, the Comintern and OMS were less active than in previous years as Stalin’s purges heavily targeted individuals with overseas experience or connections, which often killed the case officers who ran networks. 17 Secondly, while the Russian government has released hundreds of thousands of Comintern documents, unsurprisingly they have not released any OMS material. Much remains unclear about its structure and its relationships with the NKVD and GRU. Nevertheless, and of importance to this work, the NKVD/NKGB and GRU eventually came to run many of OMS’s sources. For example, OMS recruited Richard Sorge in the 1920s, with the GRU eventually taking over responsibility

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17 Ibid, 121-122.
sometime in the early to mid-1930s. Those OMS sources like Sorge who survived the purges capitalized on long-standing relations and deep cover to provide some of the highest quality intelligence on German and Japanese intentions before Operation Barbarossa.

One of the conditions, as distinguished from problems, of intelligence is the struggle to balance limited resources against an infinite possibility of targets for collection and analysis. The NKVD and GRU experienced such pressure, especially considering the endemic Soviet fear of imperialist encirclement. Logically, prioritization of likely threats should produce a similar hierarchy of collection precedence. By the end of the 1930s, a pragmatic Soviet Union recognized Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan as its greatest military threats, thus two of the most important targets for intelligence collection. While not always, or even often, of critical importance, intelligence throughout the decade helped to confirm Soviet suspicions of foreign powers and to shape foreign policy. It influenced the shift from a purely ideological lens of threat perceptions toward a more balanced (Stalinist) realism. Despite deep mistrust between all concerned, the Soviet Union worked to form a tripartite alliance with Britain and France, the great bourgeois powers, as an insurance policy against Germany and Italy. The gravity of the fascist threat caused a temporary Soviet willingness to tame the global communist movement and to work with capitalist states. Soviet pragmatism, however, could not overcome British and French ideological barriers. Therefore, in realist and paradoxical form, the USSR turned instead to its greatest threat for security.

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This chapter reviews the development of Soviet threat perceptions from 1930 until the fall of 1939, with the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and a ceasefire agreement with Japan following the Battle of Khalkhin Gol. It demonstrates the decline of pure ideology and the rise of realist pragmatism in these estimates. In Soviet threat assessment and strategy, realism did not completely subsume ideology, but a greater balance emerged between them. Most importantly, this chapter explains why the Soviet Union came to view Germany and Japan as its most likely threats, and thus the targets for robust intelligence collection. Understanding the intelligence efforts of the GRU and NKVD against both states throughout the 1930s, especially as regards Soviet diplomacy in 1939, is essential to comprehend the two years of uneasy peace that followed. Heightened threat perceptions led to heightened intelligence collection throughout the late 1930s and early 1940s, which nonetheless could not prevent failure in June 1941.

Ideological Foundations

In order to understand Soviet threat perceptions, one must recognize the ideological fervor that underlay the Soviet Union’s approach to international relations since its inception. Despite the differences in Marxist, Leninist, Trotskyist and Stalinist versions of communism, all shared a common belief that the movement must spread globally. Only once the working class had overthrown its capitalist, imperialist governments would class and state barriers be eliminated, thus achieving the ultimate goal of communism.19 As the vanguard of the communist movement, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union had a special duty in spreading the ideology. This position concomitantly made the USSR the obvious political target of capitalist states whose

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governments rightfully saw communism as out to destroy them, and would try to smash the USSR first. This antagonism fueled a Soviet fear of encirclement by foreign powers.

The history of Russia is a saga of invasion and insecurity, thus Soviet fears of encirclement were not without reason. In a speech in February 1931, Joseph Stalin reminded Soviet industrial leaders of their state’s troubled past and the imperative for rapid industrialization. Mongols, Turks, Poles, Swedes, Lithuanians, British, French and Japanese forces had “all beat [Old Russia] because of her backwardness: because of her military backwardness, cultural backwardness, political backwardness, industrial backwardness, agricultural backwardness. They beat her because it was profitable and could be done with impunity.” Economic and military development was not of trivial importance; it was necessary for the survival of the Soviet Union itself. Underscoring the importance of his Five Year Plan and economic reforms, he continued, “We are fifty to one hundred years behind the advanced countries. We must make good this distance in ten years. Either we do it, or they crush us.”

Stalin’s speech as the leader of the communist movement was prescient, demonstrating not only the precarious position of the Soviet Union, but also the expectation that a major conflict was imminent. His prediction of war within a decade was off by only four months.

With the exception of the War Scare of 1927 vis-à-vis Great Britain, the external threat environment for the Soviet Union was relatively calm in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Aside from the standard rhetoric about imperialist and capitalist powers, the USSR did not face a military threat. Even fears of British intentions in 1927 were blown

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out of proportion.\textsuperscript{21} However, as Stalin’s speech demonstrates, there were no doubts about conflict in the future. After the dissolution of the USSR, the Russian government released an important Soviet analysis on the character of future wars. Written in 1930 by N. Snitko and submitted to the chairmen of Gosplan, the organization tasked with economic planning, the memo outlined three potential scenarios for war. In the first, the “imperialists” would collaborate to attack the Soviet Union because communism could not peacefully coexist with capitalism. Second, the “imperialists” could start another war among themselves in which the Soviet Union would become an ally of one particular block or, more likely, hostile to both coalitions. Finally, and most ambitiously, the communist international movement would mature such that the Soviet Union would use its military aggressively to secure new gains.\textsuperscript{22} The report combined communist ideology with realistic geopolitics. It did not suggest which scenario for war was most likely nor did it identify specific states as threats. However, just like Stalin’s speech, it believed that every capitalist state wistful to weaken or attack the USSR would do so if they thought it possible, thus it expected war of some sort with capitalist powers at some point in the near future. The Soviet government held firm in this idea and as the decade unfolded, the vagueness of the threat began to distill.

\textit{The Rise of Nazi Germany}

After more than a decade agitating German politics, Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party seized power in early 1933. The rise of fascism represented a setback for the Soviet-led, global communist movement. At the time, the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) was the largest in Western Europe and one of the most successful, often placing

third or fourth in federal and presidential elections throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s.\textsuperscript{23} The Comintern, ironically, may have aided the Nazi’s rise to power. In the late 1920s, the Comintern, heavily influenced by Stalin, came to view non-communist, leftist parties as an existential threat. During the Sixth World Congress of the Comintern in 1928, Stalin labeled such parties, including Germany’s more popular Social Democratic Party (SPD), as “right deviationists.”\textsuperscript{24} Over the next five years, German communists lambasted the social democrats with more fervor than they did center or right-wing parties. While a united SPD-KPD ticket would not have gained more votes than the Nazis in the Reichstag elections of July 1932, it would have done so in November 1932, which marked the last free elections in Germany before World War II.\textsuperscript{25} It is counterfactual to argue that such cooperation would have prevented Hitler’s rise only a few months later. However, the Comintern’s decision underlines the almost purely ideological nature of Soviet foreign policy in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

Hitler’s Germany did not pose a significant threat to the Soviet Union when the Nazis first gained power. Soviet leaders no doubt knew of Hitler’s virulent anti-communist stance and plans for Lebensraum, or a “living space” in Eastern Europe. Referring to the fertile lands of Ukraine and western Russia, he wrote in “Mein Kampf” that the National Socialist goal would be realized “by the industrious labor of the German plow which needs only to be given land by the sword.”\textsuperscript{26} Nevertheless, financially battered and hamstrung by the Treaty of Versailles, Germany lacked the means to wage a large-scale conflict. The Soviet government initially viewed Germany as an ideological

\textsuperscript{23} Archie Brown, The Rise and Fall of Communism (London: Vintage, 2010), 85.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{26} Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf: Complete and Unabridged, Fully Annotated (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1939), 952-953.
battleground, not as a military threat. In his thorough and comprehensive work on Soviet military planning in the early 1930s, Oleg Ken notes that only Leon Trotsky, long exiled from the Soviet Union, “sounded the alarm” about Nazi Germany in 1933. Writing in the “Opposition Bulletin” in May 1933, Trotsky warned, “You cannot sow wheat and plant cabbage with your back to the West, where for the first time since 1918, the greatest threat of a thunderstorm, which can turn into a mortal danger, is forming if not promptly paralyzed.”

Even Trotsky, however, acknowledged that Germany was not a present danger. In 1933, the Red Army, the largest military in the world, was still postured to face a vague “coalition of imperialist powers,” rather than the menace posed by one of them.

It took two years for the Soviet government to recognize the truth of Trotsky’s forewarning. Soviet military planning documents in 1935 began to place greater precedence on the threat of Germany, particularly as it began the process of rearmament and continued its rhetorical attacks against the USSR. Over the next four years, Germany would rise from being a *more likely* threat to the *most likely* threat in Europe. This growing apprehension of German aggression was associated with concern about the role of other Central and Eastern European states that might ally with Berlin. By the middle of the decade, the Soviet Union understood that it could not bring Poland into its “sphere of influence.”

In an “us or them” approach, the Kremlin could not accept that Poland sought positive and equitable relations with both Germany and the Soviet Union. Thus,

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28 Ibid, 461.
29 Ibid.
Soviet intelligence undertook significant efforts of collection against Poland in order to understand Warsaw’s relationships with its western neighbor. Furthermore, the NKVD and GRU reported substantially on German relations with Romania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Finland, all potential allies of Berlin, thus potential threats to Moscow.

As Hitler’s rhetoric and belligerency intensified, and questions swirled about the allegiances of less powerful European states, the Soviet Union became increasingly willing and eager to form defense agreements with capitalist powers that only years prior supposedly had been “imperialist” threats. It was the first step of many to temporarily shelve long-term ideological objectives for the sake of near-term security. Following years of sour diplomatic relations with most European states in the late 1920s, the security environment of the 1930s necessitated a Soviet rapprochement with Western Europe. By 1932, France undertook efforts to improve relations with the Soviet Union with the proposal and eventual signature of a non-aggression pact.\textsuperscript{31} That same year, Poland also agreed to a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union for the duration of three years, which in May 1934 was extended an additional decade.\textsuperscript{32} In May 1935, after years of improving diplomatic and economic ties, France and the Soviet Union deepened their security cooperation with the signature of a mutual assistance pact.\textsuperscript{33} In August of the same year, Soviet diplomats reached a similar mutual assistance agreement with Czechoslovakia.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{31} Michael Carley, “Behind Stalin’s moustache: Pragmatism in early Soviet foreign policy, 1917-41,” Diplomacy and Statecraft 12, no. 3 (2001), 166.
\textsuperscript{32} Cienciala 2011, 115.
\textsuperscript{33} Carley 2001, 166-167.
\textsuperscript{34} Hill 2009, 13.
Despite these successes, all of which began to falter shortly after being concluded, the Soviet Union failed to reach accords with the most politically powerful state, Great Britain. In March 1935, Anthony Eden, then Lord Privy Seal, visited Moscow to meet with Stalin and Soviet Foreign Minister Maxim Litvinov. During their discussions, Eden received “strong signs of interest in closer relations.”\textsuperscript{35} Specifically, Stalin stated that the threat environment was “fundamentally worse than in 1913 because of two threats: Germany and Japan,” thus he seemed amicable to deeper Anglo-Soviet cooperation.\textsuperscript{36} However, when Eden became British Foreign Minster nine months later, he rejected any idea of cooperation with the Soviet Union given its repulsive ideals. He and many others in Whitehall could not stomach the idea of cooperating with a state whose ideological objectives called for the destruction of British political and economic principles.\textsuperscript{37} Furthermore, both parties had significant disagreements as to how to operate within a bilateral security arrangement. As one historian noted, “The two nations were not only ideologically poles apart, but also widely separated in their appreciation of how to maintain the status quo.”\textsuperscript{38}

\textit{Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact}

Why, after the fall of communism, Russia released certain Soviet documents but not others, and opened some sections of a few governmental archives while retaining the lock on others, is still an enigma. All states protect sensitive material for long periods. However, the Russian declassification process is more confusing and sporadic than that of Western states. In particular, there are incredible gaps in the records of the mid-1930s.

\textsuperscript{35} Carley 2001, 167.
\textsuperscript{37} Carley 2001, 167.
\textsuperscript{38} Neilson 2006, 142.
In part, this may be attributed to the brutal Stalinist purges of which the intelligence services, particularly the NKVD, were not immune. Fortunately, the record of intelligence reporting becomes less opaque around 1939, an important year for the Soviet Union. These documents are incomplete but they demonstrate how Soviet intelligence, particularly the GRU, helped to confirm long-held suspicions about many states and their decision-makers, including Britain, Germany and Japan. While intelligence provided greater clarity about these matters in the months leading up to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the ceasefire with Japan, the available evidence does not indicate that it played a leading role. As Ferris has elucidated, intelligence rarely is of primary importance to events and is instead usually of either high or low secondary importance.\footnote{Ferris 2014, 38.} For the Soviet Union in 1939, intelligence very much fit this latter categorization of low secondary importance.

The Munich Crisis in the fall of 1938 and the Nazi establishment of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia in the spring of 1939 intensified Soviet suspicions about German intentions in Eastern Europe. Germany was becoming more aggressive and powerful, and a rising threat to the USSR. The events demonstrated the unwillingness of Britain and France to challenge Hitler’s aggression, furthering Soviet distrust of their aims.\footnote{Carley 2011, 168.} Regardless, as crisis enveloped relations between these states, especially after the Anglo-French guarantee to Poland, the Soviet Union again attempted to establish collective security arrangements with Britain and France, though this time though a tripartite alliance. Foreign Minister Litvinov led the efforts. He progressed relatively well with his French counterparts, but the British were intransigent.
Fundamentally, London did not share the Moscow’s fear that war was imminent. The British were at most willing to assent to a loose agreement, rather than the deep military alliance sought by the Soviets.

Despite a difference in positions, the Soviets worked intensely to conclude a meaningful treaty with Britain. One of the most revealing signs was the fact that during negotiations with France and Britain in the summer of 1939 the Kremlin responded to British proposals and counter-proposals within a few days or even hours. London, on the other hand, often took weeks to reply to Soviet correspondence.41 Many in Moscow assumed that Britain was stalling, which was not an unrealistic assumption. In a telegram to US Secretary of State Cordell Hull, the chargé d'affaires of the American Embassy in London wrote, “The Foreign Office sees no hope for a speedy end to the Anglo-Franco-Russian talks on a political agreement, and the military mission, which has gone to Moscow, was instructed to make every effort to extend negotiations until October 1.”42 The Soviet ambassador in London, Ivan Maisky, relayed similar messages to the Kremlin. On 8 June he wrote that the British Foreign Minister, Lord Halifax, expressed his government’s desire to “conclude an agreement between the three powers very soon” but proposed an in-person roundtable as opposed to the exchange of notes, which “inevitably causes a loss of time.”43 Halifax failed to acknowledge that the delay in exchanging notes was wholly the responsibility of the British. Furthermore, one need not be experienced in foreign policy to understand that the time necessary to establish dates

41 Hill 2009, 18.
for a roundtable, for diplomats to travel from London and Paris to Moscow, to review an agreement “point by point,” and finally to receive ultimate approval from their heads of government does not equate to expediency. In mid-July, Maisky had breakfast with the former Prime Minister and still sitting Member of Parliament, Lloyd George. The latter explained that the current Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, could not resign himself to the idea of a pact with the Soviet Union, even one directed against Germany. The upcoming recess in Parliament would provide the Prime Minister even more leeway to “disrupt” or “freeze” negotiations, though Lloyd George stated that Chamberlain had not yet likely made that decision.44

While Chamberlain did not stop negotiations, he continued to stall. Britain was unwilling to work too closely with a communist state, failing to recognize that the USSR had set aside its ideological dogma and instead adopted a pragmatic approach. In a letter to his sister, Chamberlain wrote, “I confess I very much agree with [Beck] for I regard Russia as a very unreliable friend with very little capacity for active assistance but with an enormous irritative power on others.”45 Britain simply was a dead end for the collective security ambitions of the Soviet Union.

These experiences caused an important shift in Soviet policy, and among its makers. In early May 1939, Stalin dismissed Litvinov and appointed his close confidant Vyacheslav Molotov as the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs. The move signaled an even greater concern for foreign policy within the highest levels of Soviet government and willingness to pursue alternative avenues to collective security.

45 Michael Jabara Carley, 1939: The alliance that never was and the coming of World War II (Chicago: Ivan Dee, 1999), 126.
Negotiations with France and Britain continued but irreconcilable differences could not be overcome. As the tripartite talks stalled, Germany began its own negotiations with the Soviet Union. On May 20, the German Ambassador in Moscow, Friedrich Schulenburg, met Molotov for the first time. In his report to the Foreign Ministry in Berlin, the ambassador stated that the Soviet Union seemed open to greater economic cooperation with Germany.\footnote{\textit{Memorandum by the German Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Schulenburg), May 20, 1939," in Raymond James Sontag and James Stuart Beddie, eds., Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941: Documents from the Archives of The German Foreign Office (Washington: Department of State, 1948), 5-7.} } Molotov’s notes on the meeting relay essentially the same conversation, though emphasizing his remarks that a political framework must be built before such economic matters could be discussed. Molotov also quoted Schulenburg as stating, “…the political atmosphere between Germany and the Soviet Union has improved significantly over the last year and Germany has no desire to attack the Soviet Union.”\footnote{\textit{Zapis’ besedy Narodnogo inostrannykh del SSSR V.M. Molotova s poslom Germanii v SSSR F. Shulenburgom, 20 May 1939" in A.P. Bondarenko et. al., eds., God Krizisa:1938-1939, Tom 1 (Moscow: Ministerstvo inostrannykh del SSSR, 1990), 482-483.} } Schulenburg’s choice of words is interesting considering German aggression in Central Europe over the preceding year. Nevertheless, both parties were open to further discussions. Ten days later, Schulenburg received a “Most Urgent” telegram from Berlin directing a change in German policy towards the Soviet Union, ordering him to pursue increased political and economic collaboration.\footnote{\textit{The State Secretary in the German Foreign Office (Weizsäcker) to the German Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Schulenburg), May 30, 1939," in Sontag 1948, 15-17.} }

Negotiations began in early June and continued throughout the summer amongst top Soviet and German diplomats in both capitals. What began as discussions primarily about economic issues quickly turned towards questions on the geopolitical space of
Eastern Europe and the potential of a non-aggression pact.\textsuperscript{49} Within only two and a half months, both parties reached an agreement. On this matter, published German documents describe the negotiations process in detail. Unfortunately, Soviet records are stale about the process, especially about the role of intelligence in it, with only two exceptions. First, halfway through the discussions, the Soviet embassy in Berlin received a strange, anonymous letter on 4 July that essentially outlined German aspirations for what would become the notorious “secret protocols” of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. The embassy forwarded that letter to GRU headquarters, whereupon General Ivan Proskurov, the chief of the GRU, sent it to General Kliment Voroshilov, the defense minister. Whether Stalin saw the letter is unclear; however, given his penchant for reading intelligence, the nature of Soviet decision-making and the uniqueness of the document, he probably did view it. Citing its loss of territory after WWI, the letter stated that the German government “would welcome Soviet suggestions on an agreement between both governments regarding the future of Poland and Lithuania.” More importantly, it asserted that no third party could dispute a German-Soviet “line of demarcation” in Eastern Europe. Perhaps alluding to the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia and Anschluss with Austria, the letter concluded that resistance by other states, likely a reference to Britain and France, would be “useless.”\textsuperscript{50} The influence of this strange letter is almost impossible to determine, though the next day marked the initial discussion of a non-aggression pact. Possibly this letter was a subtle sign from the

\textsuperscript{49}“The German Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Schulenburg) to the German Foreign Office, 3 July 1939,” in Sontag 1948, 28-30.

\textsuperscript{50}“Zapiska nachal’nika piatogo upravleniia RKKA Narkomu oborony s prepovozhdeniem perevoda anonimnogo pis’ma, napravlennoy v polpredstvo SSSR v Germanii, o perspektivakh soglasheniia mezhdju SSSR i Germaniei kasatel’no Pol’shi i Litvy, 3 July 1939” in V.A. Gavrilov (ed.), Voennaia razvedka informiruet: Dokumenty Razvedupravleniia Krasnoi Armii, ianvar’ 1939-iiun’ 1941 god (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond “Demokratiia,” 2008), 119.
Germans that they were willing and ready for a substantial agreement, and perhaps the Soviets so interpreted it; but one cannot be sure of either point.

The only other piece of declassified Soviet intelligence about negotiations with Germany is a GRU report to Stalin and others senior government officials on 15 August, just one week before the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. This information was acquired through signals intelligence (SIGINT). Signals intelligence blossomed during the First World War, becoming arguably the single most valuable form of intelligence collection. Soviet intelligence probably bugged the offices, ransacked the files and tapped the communications of foreign states in the USSR, providing it with leverage in diplomatic endeavors, though such an assertion is difficult to prove given the sensitivities surrounding communications intelligence and the unwillingness of the Russian government to fully open its archives. Nevertheless, it is highly unlikely that Soviet intelligence intercepted only one telegram from the German embassy in 1939. Instead, for some inexplicable reason, there is only one declassified piece of SIGINT in the records regarding Soviet-German negotiations. Regrettably, the report is worthless in itself. It contained a translated telegram from Ambassador Schulenburg to Berlin dated 29 June, of almost no significance on 15 August given the rapid pace of discussions. The delay suggests, however, that Soviet intelligence did not have “live” SIGINT during the summer of 1939; otherwise, the message would have been available earlier. This limit could have arisen from insufficient personnel needed to translate a massive intake of diplomatic traffic collected by SIGINT, or because the Soviets had not yet cracked German diplomatic ciphers when the message was collected. Without further

51 Andrew 1999, 53.
documentary evidence, it is impossible to know the true cause of the six-week delay between interception and reporting.

The literature on Soviet intelligence holds that it significantly influenced policy during this period, but offers few specifics. The presently available evidence shows only that it informed Soviet leadership of German intentions and plans against Poland. From the early months of 1939, the GRU produced lengthy reports on German military movements in Czechoslovakia as well as its relations with Poland. On 23 March, the acting chief of the GRU, General Alexander Orlov, submitted a report entitled “About Events in Eastern Europe” to the Red Army leadership. This report is noteworthy as being one of the few GRU intelligence summaries that collated information from numerous sources and employed predictive analysis. During this period, most GRU reports either were direct transmissions of raw intelligence collected abroad or summaries of such information. Very few predicted the anticipated courses of action of foreign states. Orlov’s analysis was distinctly well-informed and realistic, rather than ideological. Firstly, following the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia, Orlov expected Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and possibly Poland to ask for German political and military protection, essentially becoming satellites of Berlin. Such a scenario would represent a massive eastward expansion of German influence, eradicate the current geographic buffer between Germany and the Soviet Union, and pose a direct threat to Soviet survival. Secondly, Orlov predicted, that should Great Britain, France and the USSR conclude a tripartite alliance, Poland almost certainly would “remain on the side of Germany”, thus again leading to an eastward extension of German power. This sentence

52 “Deistviia Germanii protiv Chekhoslovakii i sviazannyaia s nimi otsenka Germano-Pol’skikh otnoshenii: iz sbornika perevodov agenturnykh materialov po voenno-politicheskim voprosam razvedupravleniia RKKA, no earlier than 18 March 1939,” in Gavrilov 2008, 60-64.
of the report was underlined multiple times in order to draw attention to its significance.\textsuperscript{53} No matter what happened, Orlov predicted Germany would become steadily more powerful in Central Europe and would find a Polish ally if the USSR cooperated with Britain and France. If so, the Soviet Union would have been in even greater peril than without an alliance, especially if Britain and France failed to offer its help. This prescient prognosis illustrates the complexity and severity of the problem confronting the USSR.

Reports on German intentions in Poland continued throughout the summer with increasing specificity. On 9 July, the new GRU chief, General Proskurov, who replaced Orlov following the latter’s defection, warned Stalin that Germany would attack Poland in August or September.\textsuperscript{54} On 12 August, the Soviet air attaché in London notified the Red Army General Staff that all German military preparations would be complete within three days. Eight army corps would attack in the east, while purely defensive measures were in place in the west.\textsuperscript{55} More alarming, on 22 August, just one day before the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, \textit{Arbina}, the codename for a cell of GRU sources in the German Embassy in Warsaw, notified its handlers that all staff, save five high-ranking officials, had been ordered to evacuate Poland within three days.\textsuperscript{56} (This cell, which included GRU illegals like \textit{Alta} and \textit{Arietz}, continued to provide invaluable intelligence from their new posts throughout Europe during the critical twenty-one months between September 1939 and June 1941.) This news, combined with British intransigence in negotiations, paranoia about perfidy from London and a deep desire to avoid war with


\textsuperscript{54} “Germanskie plany v otnoshenii Pol’shi: zapiska nachal’nika piatogo upravleniia RKKA Narkomu oborony s preprovozhdeniem agenturnogo donesenia, 9 July 1939,” in Gavrilov 2008, 112.


\textsuperscript{56} “Agenturnoe soobshchenie ‘Arbina’ iz Varshavy o situatsii v Varshave i peremeshchenii agentov, 22 August 1939,” in Gavrilov 2008, 123.
Germany in 1939, gave Stalin and Molotov good reason to conclude an agreement with Hitler. These intelligence reports may have fueled the desire for haste, though probably not, given the rapid pace of negotiations. Instead, intelligence essentially affirmed to Soviet leaders that they were undertaking the most prudent course of action, after they decided what that was. If Germany was about to attack Poland, better to have a non-aggression pact in place and enjoy the spoils of the secret protocols dividing up Eastern Europe, than to continue fruitless efforts with the British and French. Negotiations with London, Paris and Warsaw would have yielded at best a weak military alliance and an almost certain war in 1939. Alternatively, if the Soviet Union remained neutral, Poland may have become a German ally, or be overrun quickly by the Wehrmacht, thereby placing German forces on the Soviet border without any British or French guarantees. Thus, an agreement with Germany offered the best prospects to delay entry into the inevitable war. The intelligence record offers some justification for Soviet decisions.

The notorious Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed in Moscow in the late hours of 23 August. Following the signature, the participants toasted the leadership and citizens of both countries in celebration of their achievement. The Under State Secretary in the German Foreign Office, Andor Hencke, reported that both Molotov and Stalin “drank repeatedly to the non-aggression pact [and] the new era of German-Russian relations.” As the German delegation left the Kremlin, Stalin shook Ribbentrop’s hand and said something to the effect that the “Soviet Union will not betray its partner.”

Perhaps at that moment, Stalin truly believed that his country was safe from a major war on its western front for at least the ten-year duration of the treaty. If so, his naivety did

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57 “Memorandum of a Conversation Held on the Night of August 23d to 24th, Between the Reich Foreign Minister, on the One Hand, and Herr Stalin and the Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars Molotov, on the Other Hand,” in Sontag 1948, 72-76.
not last long. Many decades later, in a series of conversations with his biographer Felix Chuev, Molotov explained that both he and Stalin saw the pact as a means to buy time, which in no way averted war. “On the whole everyone expected the war would come and it would be difficult, impossible for us to avoid. We delayed it for a year, for a year and a half.”

Nikita Khrushchev, then the party boss in Ukraine, a member of the Politburo and perchance in Moscow at the time of the signature, expressed a similar view. He added that at dinner the following night “Stalin was in high spirits. He was glad the treaty had been signed. He said, ‘Well, we deceived Hitler for the time being,’ or something like that, showing he understood the inevitability of war and that while the treaty postponed the war, it only gave us some time.”

General Zhukov, in the final stages of defeating Japanese forces at Khalkhin Gol, later expressed essentially the same opinion in his memoirs. Indeed, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact should be seen simply as a means to delay an inevitable war with the Third Reich. Soviet leaders understood Germany’s intentions and knew that every additional month of peace equated to another month of preparation for the Red Army. Furthermore, the secret protocols greatly expanded the buffer zone between Germany and the key Soviet cities of Kiev, Leningrad and Moscow. Having failed to achieve a tripartite alliance with the capitalist states of Britain and France, such an agreement with fascist Germany was rational for the USSR. It was the ultimate recognition that Stalinist realism and pragmatism trumped pure communist ideology in the short-term.

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60 Zhukov 1971, 225.
**Concerns about Imperial Japan**

In March 1936, Stalin granted an interview with American journalist Roy Howard in Moscow. The lengthy conversation covered a variety of topics, domestic and international. One of Howard’s critical questions was where the next war would break out, particularly considering the USSR seemed to be expecting one soon. While shirking the latter point, Stalin provided a direct and unequivocal answer:

In my opinion there are two seats of war danger. The first is in the Far East, in the zone of Japan. I have in mind the numerous statements made by Japanese military men containing threats against other powers. The second seat is in the zone of Germany. It is hard to say which is most menacing, but both exist and are active...At present, the Far Eastern seat of danger reveals the greater activity. However, the center of this danger may shift to Europe. This is indicated, for example, by the interview Herr Hitler recently gave to a French newspaper. In this interview Hitler seems to have tried to say peaceful things, but he sprinkled his “peacefulness” so plentifully with threats against both France and the Soviet Union that nothing remained of his “peacefulness.” You see, even when Herr Hitler wants to speak of peace he cannot avoid uttering threats.

Stalin’s response is illuminating for two reasons. First, it demonstrates that in a period of three years, Nazi Germany arose from the vague menace of “imperialist powers” to become the leading European threat. Secondly, it highlights Stalin’s concern with Japan, one of acute importance since its invasion of Manchuria in 1931. Silvio Pons cited the same conversation in his work on how Stalin handled European crises before the inevitable war; however, he devotes significantly more attention to the German rather than the Japanese threat. Such a focus is understandable given Pons’s overall argument, yet concerns in East Asia were fundamental to Soviet threat perceptions prior to the war. Throughout the mid-1930s, Japan was the more immediate threat, if no other reason than it was a hostile regime conducting vast military operations just south of the Soviet border.

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62 Pons 2002, 1.
Germany was still rebuilding its military during this period. In the same interview, Stalin issued direct warnings to Japan about its actions in the Far East vis-à-vis the USSR. Any Japanese military action against the Soviet Union or the communist state in Mongolia would be met with “positive action.”63

Only a few months later, the precarious nature of Soviet-Japanese relations became even more fragile as Tokyo joined Berlin in signing the Anti-Comintern Pact.64 While technically directed against an ideology and not any particular state, Moscow understood its intentions. Not only was the pact an outright assault on the communist movement, it brought the Soviet Union’s two most likely military threats into closer political harmony. One year later, the inclusion of Italy further threatened the Soviet Union, given that state’s competing interests in the Balkans.65 Yet despite the diplomatic antagonism, the prospects of a major war were still slim.

After seven years of monitoring Japanese activities in China, some often very close to the Soviet territory, border disputes eventually led to armed hostilities in July 1938 at the Battle of Lake Khasan. The two-week conflict produced a Japanese victory, hundreds of deaths on either side but no appreciable change in the status quo.66 The more significant military engagement occurred months later. The Battle of Khalkhin Gol often is a footnote of the history of the 1930s. However, the five-month engagement from May to September 1939 represented the Red Army’s largest operation of the decade up to that point. More importantly, the battle shaped Soviet threat perceptions of Japan in

63 Stalin 1978, 133.
65 Neilson 2006, 226.
anticipation of the forthcoming world war, and vice versa. Firstly, the approximately 9,000 Soviet casualties and 20,000 Japanese casualties highlighted with acuteness not only Japanese military capabilities but also its similar callousness regarding the human toll.67 Secondly, and more importantly, it demonstrated to the Soviet Union the limits of Japanese ambition regarding its territory. A Soviet victory at Khalkhin Gol, a ceasefire agreement in mid-September, and the realization that Japan’s strategic interests lie in South Asia meant that while Tokyo would remain a threat worthy of monitoring, indeed the USSR’s most significant threat to the east, it was not as likely nor as dangerous as the threat of Nazi Germany. 68

Despite the obvious significance of Khalkhin Gol on Soviet-Japanese relations, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact may have had greater influence. Hostilities in the east were in their waning days as Ribbentrop met with Molotov and Stalin in Moscow. News of the agreement immediately caused angst among Germany’s supposed allies in Tokyo. Both the GRU and NKVD soon reported on Japanese displeasure. It was clear that Tokyo felt disappointed, if not outright betrayed, by Germany’s unilateral action vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. In this instance, intelligence helped highlight the fragility of the supposed German-Japanese alliance, a Soviet recognition that would yield particular importance in the spring of 1941, and again in the summer of that year.

The first sign of Japanese irritation came from Richard Sorge, an important GRU source in Tokyo known by his codename Ramsay. On 24 August, just one day after the signature of the pact, Ramsay wrote a dispatch to Moscow stating news of the agreement had cause “a huge sensation and opposition against Germany” among Japanese officials.

67 Ibid, 915, 918.
68 Ibid, 1078. Also see David Glantz and Jonathan House, When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler (Lawrence, University of Kansas Press, 1995), 14.
The initial emotional response was so strong that many members of the Japanese government believed that Tokyo should immediately terminate the Anti-Comintern Pact. On 30 August, the NKVD intercepted a telegram from the Japanese consul general in Vienna to the Japanese ambassador in Moscow, a message that also had been sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tokyo. While fully cognizant of the hostile relations and fearful that the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact would spell greater Soviet aggression, the consul general nonetheless suggested that a Japanese-Soviet non-aggression pact would serve its interests by preventing further Soviet incursion and influence in East Asia. (As an aside, this is one of the only declassified pieces of Soviet SIGINT collected in 1939. As with the sole piece regarding German-Soviet negotiations, there is no ready explanation as to why this SIGINT was declassified while what likely constitutes a plethora of collection against Japan remains classified). Two days later, Ramsay reported on Japanese fears that the Soviet Union would relocate a significant portion of the Red Army in order to attack Japanese units in China. Such a fear was not unwarranted as Japan was unaware of the secret protocols and impending German-Soviet invasion of Poland. Finally, from late September 1939, Ramsay began reporting on Japanese intentions to avoid further hostilities with the USSR and to instead to focus on China and Southeast Asia. While it would take another year and a half for the Soviet

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70 "Iz telegrammy general’nogo konsula Iaponii v Vene lamadži laponskonom poslu v Moskve o pozitsii Iaponii v otoshenii Sovetskogo Soiuza, 30 August 1939" in Eroshin, V.P., I.N. Stepanov, S.B. Shurgin and V.P. Iampol’skii, eds. Organy gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti SSSR v Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voine: Sbornik dokumentov. Tom 1: Nakanune, Kniga pervaia (noiabr’1938 g. – dekabr’1940 g.) (Moscow: A/0 “Kniga i biznes,” 1995), 64-64.

71 "Agenturnoe soobshchenie ‘Ramzaia’ iz Tokio o popolnenii Kvantunskoi armii, 1 September 1939" in Gavrilov 2008, 165.

government to recognize such intentions, it nonetheless highlights the impact of events in Europe, particularly that of Germany, and the Soviet victory on Khalkhin Gol on the Japanese calculus.

*Preparing for the inevitable*

In the early 1930s, the Soviet Union characterized its threats in vague, ideological terms; however, as the decade unfolded, it became clear that despite the persistent threat of “capitalist, imperialist” powers, Nazi Germany represented a clear and present danger. Hitler backed his rhetoric up with decisive measures and haste. By 1935, as Germany began to rearm in defiance of the Treaty of Versailles, the Soviet government came to view it as the most likely European threat. Events over the next few years, particularly the Munich Crisis, only confirmed those suspicions. Having failed in numerous attempts to reach a collective security arrangement with Great Britain and France, Stalin allied with Germany in hopes of buying time before being forced into war. While the historiography on the antecedents to war tends to focus heavily on these events in the Europe, as they rightly should, one cannot exclude Soviet threat perceptions of the Japanese. Given geographic and demographic realities, Japan posed less of a *vital* threat to the Soviet Union, even when they were engaged in active hostilities in 1938 and 1939. The Soviet Union could theoretically lose a thousand miles of territory in the east with much fewer consequences than such losses would spell in the west. Against Japan, it would be a setback. Against Germany, it would mean the dismemberment of the Soviet state. Nevertheless, Imperial Japan still represented a military threat. As with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the ceasefire agreement after the Battle of Khalkhin Gol provided a reprieve. More important than the cessation of hostilities, however, was the
Soviet government’s recognition, as confirmed by intelligence sources, of the fragile and shallow nature of German-Japanese relations. Tokyo’s frustration with Berlin would be influential in the spring of 1941 when the Japanese and Soviets agreed to a non-aggression pact, allowing the Red Army to advance preparations in the more likely locale of war – its western borders.

By the fall of 1939, the Soviet Union believed it had avoided becoming the first victim of the imminent global conflagration. Stalin, Molotov, Khrushchev, Voroshilov, Zhukov, and other Soviet leaders were not ignorant of their eventual involvement in the war; however, they knew they had breathing room. They also knew that as one of the last entrants into the inevitable global war, they would retain many more options than other states. Indeed, Stalin had many times publicly emphasized the value of that status. As the government looked inward to ensure its military preparedness and the Red Army expanded its buffer zone in Poland and dithered in similar attempts in Finland, the USSR relied on its intelligence organizations to look outward for warning signs of a German and/or Japanese attack.
From the time of the signature of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact until the start of Operation Barbarossa, the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Red Army worked aggressively to collect intelligence on German capabilities and intentions. Based on the available evidence, human intelligence reigned supreme among its sources. Military intelligence officers, undercover agents, and local anti-German and communist sympathizers formed a highly secretive, complex but effective information-gathering network. When Adolf Hitler signed Führer Directive 21 in late December 1940 instructing the Wehrmacht to prepare for an invasion of the Soviet Union, GRU sources took less than two weeks to notify Moscow of it. However, the report was but one in a string of ominous dispatches. Plenty of skepticism surrounded the supposed war plans and even more doubt loomed over a supposed invasion date in mid-March. Warnings from agents stationed abroad increased in March and April 1941, but the leadership of the GRU continued to express serious suspicions given the internal confliction of the intelligence. Invasion dates ranged from “in the next few days” to “at no point in the foreseeable future.” Many in the GRU assumed the information to be British propaganda with the aim of dragging the USSR into war with Germany. However, by the middle of May, a plethora of reporting from numerous locations and sources began to coalesce around the notion of an impending invasion. The concurrent German redeployment of forces following its Balkan campaign forced the GRU chief to issue a direct, uncharacteristic, potentially suicidal and ultimately unheeded warning to Stalin in early June. As a whole, the GRU effectively collected, analyzed and reported on credible intelligence throughout this period, especially considering the active German deception.
campaign. From late May onwards, it gathered a more than sufficient number of indications and warnings that the Wehrmacht was on the verge of invading. Yet, those successes could not overcome Stalin’s unyielding position that Germany would not declare war on the USSR before subjugating Great Britain. Soviet military intelligence succeeded in its task; the Soviet government failed in its own.

*Intelligence under Stalin*

In order to understand the significance of individual intelligence reports within the larger structure of Soviet political-military decision-making, one cannot escape the idiosyncrasies of Stalin’s leadership. In most modern states, intelligence organizations collect, collate and analyze information from numerous sources and methods and only then provide decision-makers with a broad overview of the current situation and assessments regarding future courses of action. In such a system, raw intelligence rarely rises to the highest levels of government, as the potential for misinterpretation is high. Theoretically, analysts should be able to distill vast quantities of information and struggle with the ambiguities endemic to the intelligence process while remaining shielded from political pressure. Practically, this never occurs. As Michael Handel explained, “This ‘purely rational decision-making model’ and belief in the viability of a ‘strictly professional intelligence process’ is nothing but an idealized normative fiction.” In Stalin’s Soviet Union, any semblance of analytical freedom was completely absent. Stalin, instead, immersed himself directly into the intelligence process. His predilection for raw intelligence was unmatched by any contemporary head of state, and perhaps any leader since.

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73 Handel 1984, 235.
In addition to receiving nearly every report from Soviet intelligence officers and their sources stationed abroad, Stalin also received intelligence summaries from GRU and NKVD headquarters in Moscow. Stalin’s personal obsession for intelligence and inflated sense of analytical ability, combined by the temporal proximity to the Great Purges meant that intelligence analysts struggled to balance their professional duty to provide candid intelligence products and their primordial drive of self-preservation. While GRU intelligence summaries represented a form of finalized intelligence, they were almost always devoid of predictive analysis or explicit warnings. One only had to look to the top to understand the fate of intelligence officers attempting to convey the unvarnished truth to Stalin. Orlov, chief of the GRU between October 1938 and April 1939, defected to the United States, fearing that he would be arrested and killed. General Ivan Proskurov, chief between April 1939 and July 1940, was extremely outspoken about the shortcomings of the Red Army, particularly during the Winter War. As often occurred during the Great Purges, he was temporarily sidelined to a different position and then eventually arrested and summarily shot. In “What Stalin Knew,” David Murphy suggests that had Proskurov not been removed from the GRU in mid-1940, perhaps the organization would have been less willing to accede to Stalin’s preconceptions of “England first” and more vocal about the ominous signs in the spring of 1941.

Stalin’s unwillingness to accept information that differed from his own conclusions increased throughout the 1930s and reached new heights by the end of the purges. General Fillip Golikov, Proskurov’s replacement, had to tread lightly in how he presented intelligence to Stalin. He was not afforded the luxury of a close working

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74 Andrew 1999, 73.
relationship with Stalin, as was his counterpart at the NKVD, Lavrentii Beria, and especially not like Beria’s predecessor, Nikolai Yezhov, who headed the Soviet internal security between 1936 and 1938. The latter oversaw the Great Purges, submitting detailed detention and execution lists to Stalin for approval, who in turn added or removed a few names based on his own interpretation of the evidence. The relationship inflated Stalin’s beliefs in the quality of his own intelligence analysis, a fallacy that would be gravely consequential in the spring of 1941. Stalin met with Yezhov more often than any other member of government, with the exception of Molotov. He afforded Yezhov great latitude in rooting out “provocateurs,” “saboteurs,” “Trotskyites” and other anti-communist, counter-revolutionary persons within the Soviet Union before having Yezhov arrested and executed himself. As historians J. Arch Getty and Oleg Naumov described, this freedom allowed Yezhov “to influence The Boss and to pursue agendas that were not necessarily identical to Stalin’s.” When Stalin appointed Beria, a close ally from Georgia, to head the NKVD, he allowed a certain degree of freedom, though not as much as afforded to Yezhov. Stalin told Beria that while he needed to reconstruct the NKVD, he would be carefully watched. Golikov was in a completely different situation, in that he did not know Stalin well and was responsible for foreign intelligence, not internal security. Stalin knew there were enemies at home, thus the predominantly domestic intelligence of the NKVD about enemies within the USSR was uncontroversial and only confirmed his suspicions. For Golikov, attempting to break Stalin’s preconceptions about the international threat environment was not only more difficult, but more dangerous.

Overview of GRU HUMINT Network

The GRU operated an impressive network of agents across Europe and East Asia between the fall of 1939 and summer of 1941. Like nearly every other state, the Soviet Union used its embassies in foreign capitals as sites not only for diplomacy but also for both overt and clandestine intelligence operations. In intelligence terms, the embassy often was referred to as the residency, or rezidentura. As the GRU was a military intelligence organization, most Red Army attachés serving abroad also doubled as intelligence officers charged with recruiting and managing local sources. Since these military officers were serving in an official diplomatic capacity, they were known as legal resident spies, or legal rezidents in Russian parlance. The NKVD, and later the NKGB, also ran legal rezidents from Soviet embassies, but often under the cover of diplomatic positions. There is no evidence to suggest GRU and NKVD/NKGB rezidents cooperated to gather intelligence. Given the strict compartmentalization of the Soviet intelligence system, they likely were not even aware of each other’s secret responsibilities. The GRU and NKVD/NKGB also employed a number of illegal rezidents who were not members of the Red Army or Soviet internal security organizations, nor were they provided any sort of diplomatic immunity. Should the host country discover that they were conducting espionage, the Soviet Union would deny any knowledge of their activities, especially any connection to the GRU or NKVD/NKGB. Both legal and illegal rezidents were responsible for gathering intelligence through a network of sources that they exclusively controlled. Most often these sources were located in the low to middle levels of the host country’s government and/or military. This meant that while overall GRU access in Europe was good, it was restricted by the quality and quantity of information that flowed
down from the highest levels. In some instances when a source was extremely sensitive, a rezident would run a source that in turn was running another source. The best example is Rudolph von Scheliha, codename Arietz, who served in the German embassy in Warsaw until August 1939 and then as Head of the Information Department of the Foreign Ministry in Berlin until being caught by the Gestapo in September 1942.\textsuperscript{78} Arietz had no contact with GRU rezidents and instead used Ilse Stöbe, codename Alta, as an intermediary.\textsuperscript{79} This system of sources running sources was not uncommon in other European rezidenturas. Finally, rezidents, whether legal or illegal, retained sole responsibility for transmitting information to and receiving instructions from GRU headquarters. Individual sources did not have direct contact with the Center, which would have undermined rezidents and their local knowledge, overloaded Moscow and placed sources at a greater risk of being uncovered.

Unlike the NKVD, nearly all GRU rezidents and their sources operated abroad. The only exception was a German diplomat named Gerhard Kegel, codenames X and KhVTs.\textsuperscript{80} Kegel was ideologically sympathetic to the Soviet Union and loathed National Socialism. While the details on how he began to work for the GRU are murky, it is clear that by 1934 he followed GRU instructions to join the Nazi party and seek a diplomatic position in Eastern Europe. From 1935 to 1939, he worked on economic policy in the trade department of the German Embassy in Warsaw and was a member of the Arbina intelligence group, which also included Alta and Arietz. After being evacuated from

\textsuperscript{78} "Shelia (Shelia) Pudol’f Fon,” in Gavrilov 2008, 791.
\textsuperscript{79} The codename Alta refers both to Ilse Stöbe and the intelligence group for which she was responsible.
\textsuperscript{80} There are a number of instances when the GRU used multiple codenames for an individual source, as well as the same codename for different persons. For example, the codename Arnold was used by a Red Army officer serving as the Uzbek military attaché and legal rezident in Berlin in 1941, a source of the GRU in Tokyo in 1939 and a source of the Belorussian Front in 1941.
Warsaw, the Foreign Ministry temporarily recalled Kegel to Berlin and within months promoted him to Deputy Head of the Economics Department of the German embassy in Moscow. Given the extremely compartmentalized nature of Soviet intelligence, the GRU retained Kegel as its own source when he moved to Moscow as opposed to transferring him to the NKVD. While Kegel’s original, full reports are not available in the records, Russian researchers with access to them published small portions of nearly twenty warnings he forwarded to the GRU between February and June 1941.

Of all the rezidenturas, Berlin, Bucharest, Sofia and Tokyo stood out as the most robust and active. Each had at least ten rezidents and sources that can be identified by codename and legal name. As seats of power, Berlin and Tokyo were obviously prime collection targets. Berlin was as a softer target given the large number of communist sympathizers and anti-Hitlerites in the German government who were willing to pass information to the Soviet Union. Tokyo was a more difficult target given the historically closed nature of Japanese society, the general suspicions of outsiders, and the deep cultural and linguistic differences that made it much harder for Soviet agents to penetrate Japanese organizations. For example, of the dozens of GRU reports in the records from 1939 to 1941 from Japan, all but two came from the illegal rezident Richard Sorge. While Sorge collected intelligence on both German and Japanese capabilities and intentions, the fact that his largest source by far was the German embassy in Tokyo speaks to the difficulty of collecting intelligence directly against the Japanese.

Bucharest and Sofia rose to prominence throughout 1940 and early 1941 as the Soviet Union became increasingly concerned about the nature of their relations with Germany. With Czechoslovakia dismembered, the Baltics occupied, Finland squarely in

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the German camp, and Poland split between the Germans and Soviets. Romania and Bulgaria were the last Eastern European states which the Soviet Union could possibly leverage to its advantage. Additionally, increased German activity in both capitals and the invasion of neighboring Yugoslavia in the spring of 1941 meant that GRU rezidents and sources in Romania and Bulgaria were presented with an array of collection opportunities against the Wehrmacht.

In addition to these four capitals, the GRU collected intelligence from embassies or consuls in Shanghai, Beijing, Helsinki, Tallinn, Warsaw, Prague, Belgrade, Geneva, Stockholm, Brussels, Paris and Vichy. Absent from the records are any reports from the GRU rezidenturas in Rome, London or Washington, all of which would have been significant targets. Similar to the dearth of declassified signals intelligence reports, the Russian government made a conscious decision to withhold all GRU human intelligence reports collected against these three powers.

*Orders from “the Center”*

No matter the intelligence service or state, collection targets will always outweigh the available resources. Every agency could always use more officers and recruit more sources to collect more information. While there is a point of diminishing returns on investments, it is not a point that any intelligence organization will admit they have reached. The GRU before World War II was no different. Despite its substantial network in Europe and the Far East, it still needed to establish priorities for its rezidents and their sources. Therefore, some of the most important documents are not the reports from abroad, but instead the instructions from headquarters, known in reporting as “the Center,” to its agents. These orders represent the concerns of GRU leadership and a
conscious decision on their part to direct limited human resources against certain intelligence questions as opposed to others.

The GRU issued instructions of both a tactical and strategic nature. Tactical orders were very common and included follow-up questions for sources, cross-referencing information collected from different rezidenturas, and simple tasks for rezidents. In many ways, these functions represent the inner workings of any intelligence organization on a daily basis. Analysts collate, verify and assess new information and then request additional information to aid their investigative process. The numerous examples of such tactical orders demonstrate a GRU headquarters that was intimately involved in the collection efforts of each one of its rezidenturas. Furthermore, they reveal a healthy skepticism. Both GRU chiefs during this time, General Proskurov and General Golikov, were keen on asking tough questions, particularly when an intelligence report was either too vague, too specific or presented radically new material.

While there are a plethora of tactical orders in the available records, there are only four GRU orders for collection on strategic questions before the start of Operation Barbarossa. The first and most explicit order came from General Proskurov in April 1939 to Alexander Rado (codename Dora), an illegal rezident in Switzerland. After lambasting Dora for his lack of leadership and a failure “to produce anything of value” in the previous two months, Proskurov ordered that all available means be used to gather intelligence on “military activities in Italy and Germany [for action] against France” and to “determine where, how and for what purposes” said forces would be employed against the French. Such instructions demonstrate that the GRU fully expected German
military action against France more than a year before the invasion. Furthermore, it highlights an interest by the GRU to learn more about the Wehrmacht’s capabilities, still yet unproven by the time of these instructions.

The next two sets of strategic orders came from General Golikov in December 1939. In both cases, the chief addressed the instructions to Colonel Maksim Purkaev, codename *Marble*, and Captain Nikolai Zaitsev, codename *Bina*, both GRU legal *rezidents* at the Soviet embassy in Berlin. Colonel Purkaev served as the Soviet military attaché for a very brief period between August 1939 and January 1940 before being reassigned as Chief of Staff of the Belorussian Front in February 1940.  

83 Captain Zaitsev had more experience in the intelligence field, specifically in Germany where he had served years earlier. Between September 1939 and June 1941, Zaitsev worked under the cover of Deputy Trade Representative and was intimately involved in running the *Alta* intelligence group.  

84 On 13 December, Golikov instructed the two *rezidents* to task *Alta* with establishing “the true [German] political and military relationship with the Italians,” verifying rumors of German intent to “shift the focus of its military and political efforts to the Balkans” and finally to “write a summary” of German deployments in Eastern Europe.  

85 Two weeks later, Golikov requested additional information, including German military activity in Finland and “an organization chart of the central military apparatus of the German armed forces, including the General Staff.”

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84 “Zaitsev N.M.,” in Gavrilov 2008, 768.
86 “Pis’mo nachal’nika piatogo upravleniia RKKA ‘Bine’ s postanovkoizadach i ukazaniami po organizatsii razvedpraboty, 27 December 1939,” in Gavrilov 2008, 214.
The final set of strategic orders before Barbarossa came from Golikov in October 1940 to Henry Robinson, codename Gary, who was an illegal rezident in Paris. The short set of instructions called for Robinson to “establish the extent to which Germany uses France, its industry, raw materials and human resources to their advantage” and to “develop and recruit new sources.”

It is clear from these four directives that the GRU, under both Golikov and Proskurov, was concerned about Germany’s fighting capacity. Well aware that war was inevitable, they sought to understand more about the size, location and disposition of the Wehrmacht and its future plans, as well as the degree to which it leveraged the resources of both allies and conquered territories. Similarly, the GRU was interested in German foreign relations regarding how political arrangements would manifest into military action against the USSR. This was of particular importance in the spring of 1941 as sources began to report on German relations with Hungary, Romania Bulgaria, and Finland. Finally, in seeking to balance resources with priorities, it is undeniable that the GRU continued to view Nazi Germany as the Soviet Union’s gravest threat, even after signature of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

*Initial Reports of Hostile Intention*

Between September 1939 and December 1940, GRU rezidents and their sources focused primarily on three areas: 1) German-Italian-Japanese diplomatic negotiations leading to the conclusion of Tripartite Pact in September 1940, 2) internal Japanese discussions regarding relations with the Soviet Union, and 3) long-term German plans regarding the USSR. Each of these issues had potentially grave consequences for

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Collectively, they provided a framework to help answer a single crucial question – what were German and Japanese intentions against the Soviet Union? Concurrently, the GRU reported on the German invasions of Norway, the Low Countries, and France, as well as the Wehrmacht’s order of battle in Eastern Europe. These intelligence summaries were detailed but rarely contained any analysis, particularly predictive assessment. However, those few instances when the GRU did offer suggestions of German intentions are insightful, as they demonstrate a rising concern within the organization of a Nazi invasion and a potential divergence from Stalin’s intransigent position that Germany had to first neutralize Great Britain before turning eastward. By analyzing reports from abroad and summaries from GRU leadership in Moscow chronologically, one is presented with a complex intelligence picture in 1940. There was incredible doubt and confliction as to the intentions of both Germany and Japan.

The *Alta* intelligence group in Berlin and *Ramsay* in Tokyo were unsurprisingly the largest providers of useful intelligence during this period. The *rezidenturas* in Bulgaria, Romania and Yugoslavia provided additional material, though in much lesser quantity and quality. In February 1940, *Ramsay* sent his first reports of the year to Moscow. In a discussion with the German ambassador to Japan, Eugen Ott, he learned that Berlin had ordered the embassy to work on improving relations between the Japanese and Soviets in order to stifle any détente between Japan and England.88 Ambassador Ott must already have been working toward such an aim as two days later *Ramsay* reported that the Japanese General Staff was inclined to stronger relations with Germany and the

USSR, but needed to wait for a change of government at home. However, despite the
general inclination for cooperation with the USSR, some officers desired to avenge the
loss at Khalkhin Gol, particularly given the Red Army’s poor performance in Finland.89

One additional report from Ramsay in March 1940 furthered the idea of deeper
cooperation between Berlin and Moscow and again highlighted Hitler’s priority of
subjugating the British. Specifically, the report described Germany’s plans for “a
decisive offensive” against Belgium, the Netherlands and France as a springboard to
attack Great Britain. As such, Germany hoped to avoid any antagonism with the Soviet
Union and instead sought to become cooperative, economic powerhouses.90 These three
messages are important as they were the first reports from GRU sources to establish the
notion of “Britain first,” the possibility of stronger relations between the Soviet Union,
Germany and Japan, and the indecision in Tokyo regarding relations with the USSR, all
of which could potentially be advantageous to Moscow and none of which suggested an
immediate threat.

The first ominous report of German hostility arrived on 6 June 1940 from the
rezidentura in Sofia, midway through the fall of France. Colonel Dergachev, the Soviet
military attaché to Bulgaria and legal rezident, reported that Germany was soon to
conclude a peace treaty with France. By itself, this would not have been surprising.
However, his source also stated that within one or two months, the Wehrmacht would
turn eastward and launch an invasion against the Soviet Union, in cooperation with the

89 “Agentumoe soobshchenie ‘Ranzaia’ iz Tokio o politike Japonskogo genshtaba, 19 February 1940” in
90 “Agentumoe soobshchenie ‘Ranzaia’ iz Tokio ot 7 Marta 1940 goda o vneshnepoliticheskih planakh
Italians and Japanese, in order to “destroy communism and establish a fascist regime.”

Upon receipt of the message, GRU headquarters forwarded it to Stalin, Molotov and Defense Minister General Semyon Timoshenko. While there are no records of their response to the memo, it is unlikely any of the men took it seriously. However, the report is noteworthy as being the first GRU message about a German attack that contained any specificity. It was distinct from the numerous vague reports on the “inevitability” of war between Germany and the Soviet Union. More importantly, it was the first in a string of inaccurate reports about a German invasion that would confound GRU headquarters for the next year. Though Dergachev’s source made a good guess about German intentions, Hitler had not yet made such a decision.

Only a week after Dergachev sent his message, the Wehrmacht seized Paris. Following the rapid fall of Western Europe, Hitler expected Britain to recognize German continental supremacy, an anathema to British foreign policy since the eighteenth century. For Hitler, the subjugation of Britain not only meant hegemony in Europe but also dominance over the British Empire, thus a boon for Germany’s global power.

Only one month into his tenure as British Prime Minister, however, Winston Churchill delivered an unequivocal rejection of such plans. On 4 June, in a speech to the House of Commons, Churchill affirmed that Britain “shall never surrender” despite the “odious apparatus of Nazi rule” across much of Europe. Incensed at such intransigence, Hitler formally ordered the German armed forces on 16 July to prepare for an invasion of Great Britain.

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92 For example, three weeks later, Yuri, a legal rezident in Tokyo, reported on “secretive” discussions within German business circles about the inevitability of war. See “Soobshchenie ‘Iuriia’ iz Tokio o snakhakh o neizbezhnosti voyny SSSR s Germaniei, 26 June 1940,” in Gavrilov 2008, 439-440.
Britain, known as Operation Sealion.\(^95\) (Unbeknownst to the GRU, within a matter of weeks, Hitler realized the potentially fatal consequences of an invasion of Britain and instead decided to turn his attention toward the Soviet Union. His decision remained at the highest levels of the German military.)\(^96\) The GRU soon began reporting on the plans and preparations for Sealion, as well as on the redeployment of German forces throughout Central and Eastern Europe. By the end of summer, the GRU saw Great Britain as Germany’s next target but was worried about the growing number of troops along its border. The former held greater weight, but the latter was still of acute concern.

On 13 June, one month before the start of the Battle of Britain, General Proskurov submitted an intelligence summary to Soviet leadership regarding the political-military situation throughout Europe. Before beginning his country-by-country overview, he noted that the Luftwaffe attacks against Britain, for which the Germans had allocated no less than 2,000 aircraft, were impending.\(^97\) Two weeks later, he wrote again about the looming German attacks against Britain. In both cases, Proskurov was wrong to state that the bombardments were to begin within a few days, which indicates an expectation within the GRU that a major German assault on England was imminent. Also included in the second summary was information from the legal rezidents in Berlin indicating that the German Ministry of Railways had received orders to “develop a plan...of military transport from the West to the East” by no later than the end of 1940.\(^98\) The deadline directly contradicted Colonel Dergachev’s report of an attack within a month or two.

\(^97\) “Iz svodki 5 upravleniia RKKA po sobytiiam na zapade, 13 June 1940,” in Gavrilov 2008, 434-437.
\(^98\) “Iz svodki 5 upravleniia RKKA po sobytiiam na zapade, 26 June 1940,” in Gavrilov 2008, 439.
Furthermore, while the summary suggested German hostility towards the USSR, it prioritized Great Britain as Germany’s immediate target.

Once the Battle of Britain began, GRU headquarters reported almost daily to Soviet leadership on British and German losses. In one of his first intelligence summaries as the new GRU chief, General Golikov described the Luftwaffe action as “particularly intense” and was likely due to “British rejections of peace negotiations based on German terms.”

Despite the actions over Britain and a belief that an amphibious assault was likely in a matter of weeks, the GRU was increasingly concerned about the purpose of German forces in Eastern Europe. Between July and December, it received almost two dozen reports on Wehrmacht deployments eastward, including into the still nonaligned states of Romania and Bulgaria. While the summaries were episodic, no more than two weeks ever passed between updates. Initially, they concluded with benign statements such as, “Concentration [of German troops] is not of a serious scale.”

On 9 July, Colonel Nikolai Skorniukov, an assistant air attaché and legal rezident at the embassy in Berlin, codename Meteor, wrote that the redeployment of forces eastward was “not directed against the USSR.” In a summary to Stalin, Molotov, Timoshenko, Beria and others, General Golikov explained on 20 July that the growing number of German divisions in Eastern Europe, particularly in Poland, simply was a redistribution of forces following the fall of France.

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The first indication that the redeployed German forces might be directed against the Soviet Union came from Yuri in Japan on 25 July. The legal rezident at the Soviet embassy in Tokyo explained that, according to his sources, Germany was concerned primarily with Great Britain, but should the Soviet Union “move against the Balkans,” Germany would have no choice but to attack the USSR. While Stalin most likely read this report, nothing indicates that either he or the GRU believed the redeployments had any offensive purpose at that time. Throughout the summer, the GRU summaries continued to conclude with benign statements. Additional reports from rezidents abroad relayed the same message. On 17 August, Ramsay explained, that according to Ambassador Ott, the troop transfers had no relation to the Soviet Union. Concurrent with the updates on the Wehrmacht’s movements throughout Europe, Ramsay sent several reports on German-Italian-Japanese alliance negotiations, and the prospects that they might include the Soviet Union. As late as 21 September, Ramsay continued to pass messages about Germany’s desire eventually to bring the USSR into the Tripartite Pact, which then was in the final days of negotiations. He also wrote, “In the pact, there will not be a single point directed against the Soviet Union.” However, once Germany, Japan and Italy signed the Tripartite Pact on 27 September 1940, Ramsay’s began to emphasize the potential danger of the arrangement. On 8 October, he explained that, according to new information, the Pact technically was directed against

the United States but could be redirected against the Soviet Union should it “pursue policies undesirable from the standpoint of Germany.”\footnote{106}{“Agenturnoe soobshchenie Ramzaia’ iz Tokio o napravlennosti trekhstoronnego pakta, 8 October 1940,” in Gavrilov 2008, 477.}

Around this time, in the fall of 1940, the GRU began to indicate apprehension about the large number of German divisions in Eastern Europe. As these numbers continued to grow, the GRU stopped concluding its intelligence summaries with statements suggesting that these forces “were not of a serious scale.” Indeed, to the GRU, the situation was becoming quite serious. On 14 October, General Golikov explained that while Great Britain still remained Germany’s top priority, the weather conditions in northwest Europe were not conducive to amphibious assault until at least the spring of 1941. In the meantime, Germany was likely to threaten British interests in the Middle East, the Balkans or elsewhere.\footnote{107}{“Vozmozhnost’ vtorzheniia Germanii v Angliiu i chislennost’ Angliiskoi armii: iz svodki razvedyvatel’nogo upravlenia general’nogo shtaba Krasnoi Armii po sobytiiam na zapade, 14 October 1940,” in Gavrilov 2008, 481-482.} Implicit in Golikov’s argument was the idea that German troops not directed specifically against Britain could be directed elsewhere. Two weeks later, the GRU chief provided another summary of the German order of battle in Eastern Europe. He described the simultaneous movement of troops eastward into East Prussia (bordering Lithuania), the General Government (bordering the Belorussian and Ukrainian republics) and southeastward toward Yugoslavia and into Romania. He concluded with a subtle warning, “The transfer of German troops eastwards requires scrutiny.”\footnote{108}{“Spetssoobshchenie razvedyvatel’nogo upravleniia general’nogo shtaba Krasnoi Armii ‘O perevozkakh i sosredotochenii Germanskikh voisk na Balkanakh, 30 October 1940,” in Gavrilov 2008, 485-487.} While seemingly innocuous, this statement was notable in the post-purges Stalinist system of intelligence as one of the few occasions when the
GRU, NKVD or NKGB chief concluded with more than a generic statement of facts regarding the actions or intentions of foreign states.

Golikov’s divergence from that standard protocol continued in November and December with two more reports that concluded with predictive analysis. On 5 November, he proposed that Germany was on the verge of invading Greece to help the Italians break the resistance and to use “it was a springboard for further action against Turkey and the British colonies.” On 10 December, he reported on further German deployments into Romania and concluded, “Apparently, Germany intends to resolve the Balkan problem before the beginning of spring.” Even though these analyses were logical (and largely accurate) conclusions, and standard practice in other intelligence services, such predictive analysis was extremely rare in the Soviet system. In the final GRU intelligence summary of 1940, Golikov penned what would be the most uncharacteristic report for some time. The combination of warning and analysis would not be repeated until the late spring of 1941. Entitled “Germany: Changes in the Strategic Deployment,” Golikov correctly analyzed German strategic intentions in Europe -

Unsuccessful attempts to prepare a decisive amphibious operation against England and increased activity of the British air force has forced the German command to delay an invasion of the island for an indefinite time and to look for new areas of deployment against the British Empire, [including] restricting action against the islands to only air war and a blockade. According to reports, Germany together with Italy decided to attack England by capturing her Middle Eastern colonies (Iraq, Egypt). In this regard the center of military action, presumably, will move to the Mediterranean basin. This is attested by current events including the

110 “Spetssoobschhenie razvedupravleniia gentshtaba Krasnoi Armii o novyh peregruppirovakh nemetskikh voisk na Balkanakh, 10 December 1940,” in Gavrîlov 2008, 496-497.
rearrangement of German and Italian troops towards the Balkans, German troops entering Romania, German infiltration in Bulgaria, as well as the ongoing Italian military action against Greece...

In addition, it has been established that there has been an increase of German troops against our western borders. This demands our serious attention, as the total German force in the East is much stronger than necessary to protect their borders. (Original emphasis).111

Compared to the relative bounty of declassified material regarding Germany, there is a dearth of evidence on Soviet intelligence against Japan during this time. Japan is almost never mentioned in GRU intelligence summaries and only one source, Ramsay, provided any raw intelligence on the matter. On 6 August, Sorge wrote that Japan’s two primary tasks were to destroy Chiang Kai-shek and expand its sphere of influence in the South Pacific.112 This information furthered a line of GRU reporting dating back to the conclusion of the Battle of Khalkhin Gol, that Japan was likely to turn southward rather than against the USSR. On 27 December, Ramsay relayed a conversation between the German naval attaché in Tokyo and the Japanese Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, in which the latter expressed dismay over the Soviet position in negotiations of a Soviet-Japanese non-aggression pact. The Soviet Union was “too demanding,” particularly regarding territorial concessions in Manchuria.113 While not necessarily advantageous to the Soviet Union, Ramsay’s report in late December added further credence to the notion that while Japan was a threat, it was also unlikely to fight the Soviet Union again unless circumstances changed significantly.

111 “Iz razvedyvatel’noi svodki No. 8 (po zapadu) 1940 g. razvedupravleniia GSH RKKA, December 1940,” in Gavrilov 2008, 500-509.
From the conclusion of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact until the end of 1940, the GRU presented Germany and Japan as powers still uncertain of how to handle the Soviet Union. *Rezidents* and their sources reported on the inevitability of war and prospects for peace. There were reports of war in a matter of months. Others suggested a deep alliance with Soviet inclusion in the Tripartite Pact. Great Britain was seen as the immediate priority for Hitler; so too was the Soviet Union. The Wehrmacht’s movements in Eastern Europe were nefarious; they were also benign. Unbeknownst to the GRU at the time, both Germany and Japan already had decided their respective position vis-à-vis the Soviet Union; the former chose war, the latter peace.

*Confliction in early 1941*

As Golikov accurately predicted, Germany’s inability to conquer Great Britain meant Hitler began looking east towards the Soviet Union and south towards the Balkans and Middle East. However, while Golikov reached this conclusion in December 1940, Hitler actually had made the decision five months prior. The Fürher and his generals understood that an amphibious invasion of Great Britain was hopeless. British dominance of the seas meant that crossing the English Channel would have been suicidal. The German Navy was only 15% the size of the Royal Navy; British qualitative superiority only amplified the quantitative disparity.\(^{114}\) British victory in the Battle of Britain showed that airpower offered Germany no easy means for victory either. However, by attacking the Soviet Union, which nearly all agreed to be an easy target, Germany could eradicate two threats in one offensive. As Hitler explained, “If Russia is smashed, then Britain’s last hope is extinguished. The mast of Europe and the Balkans with then be Germany....The sooner we smash Russia the better.” Given the brutality of

\(^{114}\) Ansel 1960, 187.
Russian winters, he decided that the invasion should begin in May 1941.\textsuperscript{115} The strategic aim was to be “the ‘liquidation of Russia’s manpower’ and the conquest of the Ukraine, Baltic States and Belorussia.”\textsuperscript{116}

Throughout the summer and fall, initial planning began within the highest levels of the Wehrmacht. Almost immediately, the army forecasted and ordered for the necessary increases in manpower and equipment.\textsuperscript{117} Geographically, the General Staff decided in August that occupation of the entire Soviet Union was impossible, but by rapidly seizing the most populous western territories, Germany could swiftly wreck the Soviet war economy and thus the state itself. Economically, the occupation of these rich agricultural and industrial regions would be a boon for Germany’s own war economy.\textsuperscript{118} While the GRU had good access in the middle levels of the German government and military, it could not reach these highest echelons, thus were unaware of such preparations throughout the summer and autumn of 1940. It was not until late December 1940, when Hitler formalized the strategic concept for an invasion of the Soviet Union known as Förher Directive 21 and information began flowing down the German chain of command, that the GRU detected Hitler’s decision to prioritize the USSR over England. The directive began, “The German Armed Forces must be prepared to crush Soviet Russia in a quick campaign, even before the end of the war against England.” Hitler ordered all arrangements for the offensive be concluded by 15 May 1941.\textsuperscript{119} In order to lull the Soviet Union into a sense of security while it prepared for the invasion, Germany

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid, 188.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid, 28-29.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid, 136-137.
\textsuperscript{119} Office of the United States Chief of Counsel for Prosecution of Axis Criminality 1946, 799.
undertook a deception campaign that continued to emphasize a strike on Great Britain, explained away forces in the General Government as reactions to a build-up of Soviet forces along the border or as necessary to defend them from British airstrikes, spread numerous rumors and disinformation about the true disposition of German forces in Europe, and maintained amicable diplomatic and economic relations with Moscow.\textsuperscript{120} The fact that the GRU continued to report on Great Britain as Germany’s top priority throughout the latter half of 1940, and into early 1941, demonstrates the strength of that mistaken preconception and the imperfection of their collection. Together, these two shortfalls heightened Soviet credulity of German deception. It would take many months and a mountain of evidence for the GRU to forgo these preconceptions and recognize the impending doom; Stalin clung to them until the last hours of peace. Notably, this combination of preconceptions and deception also blinded British strategists and intelligence to German intentions until May 1941, when Ultra and other British SIGINT uncovered the truth.

It took only eleven days for news of Directive 21 to reach the GRU, once the order filtered down to the level of German staff planning. On 29 December, \textit{Meteor} sent a short message to Moscow: \textquote{\textit{Alta} said that \textit{Arietz} has learned from highly informed military circles that Hitler ordered preparations for a war against the USSR. War will be declared in March 1941. I have ordered [\textit{Alta}] to check and refine the information.}\textquote{\textit{Alta} said that \textit{Arietz} has learned from highly informed military circles that Hitler ordered preparations for a war against the USSR. War will be declared in March 1941. I have ordered [\textit{Alta}] to check and refine the information.} Upon receiving the report, General Alexei Panfilov, the deputy GRU chief, wrote at the bottom, \textquote{Who are these highly informed circles? It is necessary to specify.}\textquote{Who are these highly informed circles? It is necessary to specify.} General Golikov added again that more information was necessary and directed \textit{Meteor} to report back within five days. He also ordered GRU staff to send two copies of the report to

\textsuperscript{120} Whaley 1973, 172-177.
Stalin, and one copy to Molotov, Timoshenko and General Kirill Meretskov, then Chief of the General Staff of the Red Army.\footnote{“Soobshchenie `Meteora` iz Berlina o prikaze Gitlera o podgotovke k voine s SSSR i namerennii ob`iavit` ee v marte 1941 goda, 29 December 1940,” in Gavrilov 2008, 498-499.} Clearly Meteor, Panfilov and Golikov were skeptical of the report and did their due diligence in ordering for the collection of additional details. While Arietz’s report was not the first to suggest a German offensive against the Soviet Union, it was the first to specifically note an order from Hitler for such an action. Despite an error in the date, the fact that the GRU received notification of this classified directive only eleven days after its signature is impressive, indicative of its access to high, though not the highest, levels of the German government and military. Here, and in other successes that followed, the GRU demonstrated themselves almost as powerful as Ultra, though in different ways.

As instructed by Golikov, Meteor requested Arietz, through Alta, to pass on any additional details to validate his message. On 4 January 1941, Meteor told Moscow that Arietz had received his information from “his friend who is a military official.” Without naming the officer, Arietz stated his intelligence was “not based on hearsay and, by special order of Hitler, is strictly confidential and known to very few persons.” He explained that Germany had miscalculated British resistance but expected “to bring England to her knees by spring thus freeing their hands in the east.” Once this occurred, Germany expected a rapid victory against the Soviet Union, as the condition of the Red Army was “very low.”\footnote{“Donesenie `Meteora` iz Berlina o voennykh prigotovleniiakh Germanii, 4 January 1941,” in Gavrilov 2008, 527.} While neither Golikov nor Panfilov wrote any notes on top of this intelligence report, the update probably did nothing to ease their suspicions of the validity of the information. One of the cardinal rules of intelligence is that single source...
information often is flawed, inaccurate and, on occasion, purposefully deceptive. While the GRU remained concerned about Germany’s buildup of troops along the Soviet border, Golikov assumed that Hitler’s primary focus in the spring would be Southern Europe, the Middle East and possibly an amphibious invasion of Great Britain. It would take much more than a single report, even from a well-placed source, to sway those preconceptions. Moreover, Arietz was wrong on two key particularities, which inadvertently reinforced the overriding preconceptions of the GRU and Stalin – that Hitler planned to attack the British Empire first, and only after which time he would turn against the Soviet Union. These mistakes reflect the limits to the power of the middle level sources recruited by the GRU.

It took more than a month before other GRU sources began to report on the supposed German invasion plans, though in complex and incongruent ways. In late January and again in early February, Sophocles, a legal rezident in Belgrade, reported that the Balkans were to be Germany’s “decisive center of political events” in the coming months.\(^{123}\) Only afterwards would Hitler turn toward the Soviet Union.\(^{124}\) X, reporting from within the German embassy in Moscow, stated that Great Britain remained Hitler’s primary objective.\(^{125}\) On 21 February, Dora reported from Geneva that, according to Swiss intelligence, Germany already had 150 divisions in Eastern Europe and would commence war against the USSR in late May. Golikov wrote on the report, “This is


\(^{125}\) “Perechen’ donesenii voennoi razvedki o podgotovke Germanii k voine protiv SSSR (ianvar’ - iyun’ 1941 g.), No. 37,” in Gavrilov 2008, 708.
probably misinformation.” One week later, Arnold, a legal rezident in Berlin, provided updates on the German order of battle in Eastern Europe but concluded, “There are no specific signs of impending aggression against us.” Golikov agreed, writing, “This is a helpful report.” The GRU obviously was skeptical of reports of an impending German invasion by the end of February 1941. However, it was not ignorant of the danger and still was concerned with the mass of German troops along the Soviet border. In the final intelligence summary of the month, the GRU noted a decrease of German troops in the General Government, though cautioned that such information “does not necessarily mean the German command has lessened its attention of its eastern border.”

March was an important turning point in intelligence reporting, though not necessarily in the GRU’s assessment of such evidence. Five rezidents from five distinct rezidenturas, none of whom had contact with each other, independently reported on plans of a German offensive against the Soviet Union in no less than a dozen separate accounts. Observed together, however, these reports conflicted so much that a single intelligence picture was inconceivable. Not surprisingly, they were insufficient to sway Golikov’s preconceptions. The first warning came from Alta in early March. She explained that Germany would begin the invasion sometime between May 15 and June 15. As yet another demonstration of the fragile German-Japanese alliance, Alta and Arietz wrote that Berlin would not notify Tokyo before the start of operations, a position that evoked

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negative reactions from many German military officers eager for a second front.\textsuperscript{129} As with their previous warnings, neither source provided more than a vague description of their own sources.

Colonel Nikolai Liakhterov (codename \textit{Mars}), the Soviet military attaché and legal \textit{rezident} in Budapest, sent two reports to the Center in March. First, on 1 March, he wrote that, according to his German sources, an attack against the Soviet Union was “unthinkable” until the defeat of England. He cited conversations with the military attachés of the United States, Turkey and Yugoslavia to advance the case that Wehrmacht deployments to Romania were intended only for operations in the Balkans. However, once Germany achieved success in South Europe and against Great Britain, it indeed would turn against the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{130} On 14 March, \textit{Mars} recounted a meeting with Shandor Uitashi, the head of intelligence for the Hungarian General Staff. According to Uitashi, the reports of German, Romanian and Hungarian plans to attack the Soviet Union were nothing but “English propaganda.” Great Britain was a sufficient challenge for Germany, making a two-front war illogical. Quite the opposite of the “false rumors” of hostilities, Berlin wanted an “economically peaceful” relationship with Moscow.\textsuperscript{131}

The information provided by \textit{Mars} was in direct contradiction to the intelligence provided by \textit{rezidents} in Yugoslavia, Romania and Japan. On 10 March, General Alexander Samokhin (codename \textit{Sophocles}), military attaché and legal \textit{rezident} in Belgrade, reported that the German General Staff had “refused to attack the British Isles”

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{129} “Iz agenturnogo soobshcheniia ‘Al’ty’ iz Berlina, peredannogo v nachale marta 1941 g. o srokakh vystupleniia Germanii protiv SSSR, March 1941,” in Gavrilov 2008, 577.
\item \textsuperscript{130} “Soobshchenie ‘Marsa’ iz Budapeshta o priopritetnosti Germanskogo vystupleniia Anglii, 1 March 1941,” in Gavrilov 2008, 545.
\item \textsuperscript{131} “Soobshchenie Liakhterova iz Budapeshta o lozhnosti slukhov o podgotovke Germanii k voine s SSSR, 14 March 1941,” in Gavrilov 2008, 565.
\end{itemize}
and was focused instead on capturing Ukraine and Baku in April or May. Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria all were coordinating with Germany on the invasion plans. Upon receipt of the message, General Golikov ordered Mars to describe his “attitude” towards his sources. It was an obvious slight against their reliability. Hindsight provides justification for the skepticism. In reality, Germany provided almost no information about Barbarossa to its allies until the invasion actually began. They only exceptions were Romania and Finland, the latter being a difficult target for the GRU. In a meeting with his generals in early December 1940, Hitler explained that since both states were likely to fight alongside Germany, they should be included in the operational plans. Geographically, both provided obvious advantages to the Wehrmacht and both wished to recoup previous losses from the Soviet Union. While Germany expanded its plans to include Romanian and German units attacking from Romania in December 1940, it shared limited information with Bucharest until mid-May 1941. Whatever information they did share was limited to Prime Minister Ion Antonescu and his inner circle. The Wehrmacht informally included Finland in its plans as early as August 1940, but did not began formal joint planning with the Finns until 1 May, just a few weeks before Romania. However, the GRU was unaware of these nuances. All of its reporting on German allies throughout the spring of 1941 assumed them to be intimately involved in the Wehrmacht’s planning process. Therefore, GRU reporting on Romanian and Finnish preparations prior to May 1941 largely was mistaken. Any reporting about Hungarian or Slovakian invasion preparations was completely erroneous, as Germany did not formally

133 Ibid, 400-404.
notify the government of either state of its intentions before 22 June 1941.\textsuperscript{135} Much of the reporting of the GRU on Germany’s allies actually was inaccurate. The Center initially was skeptical of such evidence, but by mid-May, used this still largely inaccurate intelligence as part of its accurate recognition of German intentions against the USSR.

The day after \textit{Sophocles}'s report from Belgrade, \textit{Ramsay} passed on information about a telegram that Ambassador Ott had received from Foreign Minister Ribbentrop, claiming that a Japanese attack against Singapore would “intensify” Tokyo’s role in the Tripartite Pact. However, \textit{Ramsay} noted that other members of the embassy feared such a move meant the Japanese “can not be used for more pressure against the Soviet Union.” The new German military attaché in Tokyo moreover believed that Germany’s next step would be against the Soviet Union, though only after the conclusion of the “current war,” a reference either to the Balkans or Great Britain, or possibly both. Golikov did not write any notes atop this report, though he did order his staff to send copies to Stalin and Molotov.\textsuperscript{136}

The most active \textit{rezident} in March by far was Colonel Grigorii Eremin, the military attaché at the Soviet embassy in Romania. Operating under the codename \textit{Eshchesnko}, he sent seven reports during the month, of which all but the first unequivocally described German aims against the Soviet Union. At the beginning of the month, he recounted a recent trip to Berlin by German diplomat Kurt Velkish, codename \textit{ABC} and a source for the GRU since the late 1930s. In a series of meetings at the Foreign Ministry and Wehrmacht headquarters,Velkish noted an air of uncertainty regarding German strategy. However, many civilian and military leaders were beginning

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{135} \textit{Ibid}, 409.
  \item \textsuperscript{136} “Agenturnoe soobshchenie ‘Ramzaia’ iz Tokio o stremlenii Germanii ispol’zovat’ Iaponiiu dla davleniia na SSSR, 11 March 1941,” in \textit{Gavrilov} 2008, 563-564.
\end{itemize}
to agree that an invasion of Great Britain was too risky. Instead, Germany was likely to focus on Greece, North Africa and possibly Turkey. Regarding the Soviet Union, ABC stated that the Russian department of the German High Command was “working intensely.” Rumors of a war against the USSR, however, were supposedly German propaganda in order to pressure Moscow “to henceforth serve the realization of German military purposes.”

Essentially, Germany was using the prospects of war to extract even more favorable trade terms with the Soviet Union.

The other six reports from the Bucharest rezidentura described Germany in a more troubling light. On 13 March, Eshchenko wrote that according to an SS officer stationed in Romania, Germany now considered England too difficult a target, thus would turn against the Soviet Union while the Red Army was weak. Golikov, unimpressed with the information, not surprisingly questioned the reliability of the source. Two days later, Eshchenko reported Germany would head east for Soviet grain, coal and oil. Romania already was cooperating with the Wehrmacht in developing invasion plans. His sources for this information included a German major living in Bucharest and a Romanian colonel with close ties to Antonescu. Again, Golikov asked about the reliability of the sources. On 24 March, Eshchenko reported that ABC had acquired new intelligence that directly contradicted his information from three weeks prior. In another trip to Berlin, ABC learned that Germany, with Romania in tow, would attack the Soviet Union sometime in May. Germany believed a rapid conquest of the USSR would

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force Britain to realize its hopeless position and submit to German dominance. Wehrmacht officers openly gloated in Berlin, “...the Red Army is so weak that she cannot resist the German army.”

Two days later, Eshchenko conveyed the details of a conversation between a source of ABC and the Romanian State Minister Michael Antonescu, the nephew of Prime Minister Ion Antonescu. According to Michael, his uncle had discussed plans to invade the Soviet Union with Hitler months earlier. The prime minister promised that Romania would assist Germany and would have its own forces prepared by May. Hindsight confirms that these reports were indeed accurate.

Eshchenko sent two final reports at the end of the month regarding Romanian military preparations. Specifically, the Romanian General Staff was finalizing plans for 20 divisions, consisting of 700,000-900,000 men, to operate alongside an additional 300,000-400,000 German troops for an invasion across its border into Ukraine. The assault would begin in two to three months.

Golikov was still unwilling to accept the mounting evidence suggesting a looming attack. On 11 March, he authored an intelligence summary of German forces in Eastern Europe that made no mention of the warnings. On 20 March, he explicitly acknowledged the ominous reports for the first time in a lengthy intelligence summary. However, the GRU chief clearly refused to believe that Germany was only months away

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141 “Soobshchenie ‘Eshchenko’ iz Bukharesta o namerenii Germanii vystupit’ protiv SSSR v Mae i uchastii Rumynii v etoi kampanii, 26 March 1941,” in Gavrilov 2008, 573-574.
143 “Soobshchenie ‘Eshchenko’ iz Bukharesta o podgotovke Germanskogo nastupleniia na Ukrainu, 26 March 1941,” in Gavrilov 2008, 574.
from invading the Soviet Union. The summary began, “The majority of intelligence reporting suggesting a war between the USSR [and Germany] in the spring of 1941 comes from Anglo-American sources, whose task now is, undoubtedly, to worsen relations between the USSR and Germany.” He listed sixteen “noteworthy” examples of such Anglo-American propaganda, of which only three were definitely American or British in origin. Golikov concluded his intelligence summary with statements that may as well have been written by Stalin:

1. …I consider that the most probable time operations will begin against the USSR is after the victory over England or the conclusion of an honorable peace treaty.
2. Rumors and documents to the effect that war against the USSR is inevitable this spring should be regarded as misinformation coming from the English or perhaps even the German intelligence service.145

While Golikov may have been seeking Stalin’s favor, no doubt a wise move for his career and life, even an impartial intelligence organization would have had difficulty synthesizing GRU intelligence at the end of March 1941. There were still multiple reports that Great Britain and the Balkans remained Germany’s priorities. Despite the increase in ominous reporting, only four rezidenturas supported their claims of an impending invasion with specific dates. Alta, Arietz and Meteor in Berlin initially reported that the war would begin in March, and then updated the date to sometime between May 15 and June 15. Sophocles in Belgrade, who sent only one report, suggested April or May. Dora in Geneva, who also submitted only a single report, stated the invasion was set for May. Eshchenko in Bucharest reported May and then “June to July.” One would have expected more consistent reporting from more rezidenturas.

considering the scale of the supposed event. Finally, in addition to reports of an invasion, some others stated such information was propaganda. Whether it was of German or British origin was irrelevant, as neither case meant an attack. It would take another one to two months for GRU intelligence to distill and present a less ambiguous picture.

*German threat rises, Japanese threat falls*

During the second week of April, two important geopolitical events shifted Soviet attention even further towards its western borders. On 6 April, Germany and its allies invaded Yugoslavia and Greece, just as GRU sources had predicted for months. The *rezidenturas* in Belgrade and Berlin even provided final warnings just hours before operations began. The assault provided a partial explanation for the massive buildup of German forces in Eastern Europe, though not entirely, considering the number of divisions that remained stationary in the General Government. For those detractors in the GRU who were yet unwilling to believe the signs of an impending German invasion against the USSR, the Balkan campaign was further proof of Hitler’s “Britain first” strategy, as Greece provided a staging location for attacks into Egypt and Palestine. More important, however, was the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact signed on 13 April. As far back as September 1939, Ramsay had reported an increasing Japanese eagerness to focus its military efforts in Southeast Asia as opposed to fighting the Soviet Union again. As with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the agreement served both party’s strategic interests. Japan could expand its empire southward with little resistance while the Soviet Union could concentrate on the growing German menace to its west. Indeed, within

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147 Cox 1985, 1034.
weeks of signing the pact, Stalin ordered the Red Army to shift a number of divisions from its eastern and interior military districts towards the border with Germany, as he no longer believed them necessary to be staged against the Japanese. This modified “special threatening military period” accelerated the slow “creep up to war” that had begun years prior, though still did not envision full mobilization and readiness until sometime in early 1942. Clearly, Soviet leadership was willing to consider the prospects of a German offensive in the coming nine to twelve months, though considerable doubt remained.

In the first few days of the Balkan campaign, the Center received conflicting reports as to how such operations would affect Germany’s overall strategy, particularly regarding the USSR. Days before the invasion, Sophocles reported that, according to his unnamed German sources in Belgrade, the Wehrmacht was prepared to strike against the Soviet Union in May despite operations in the Balkans. They boasted that Wehrmacht would need only seven days to reach Moscow. X reported that the invasion was delayed until 15 June in order to allow sufficient time for regrouping. However, on 6 and 14 April, Eshchenko presented a different picture. According to his source ABC, both German and Romanian military officers believed the invasions of Yugoslavia and Greece meant an offensive against the USSR was “highly improbable, if not impossible altogether.” The Romanian government was particularly concerned that German operations in Southern Europe left them vulnerable to a Soviet attack. Berlin was cognizant of the anxieties, as it pressured Bucharest to “avoid a collision with the Soviet

149 “Soobshchenie ‘Sofokla’ iz Belgrada o znachenii deistvii Germanii na Balkanakh, 4 April 1941,” in Gavrilov 2008, 578-579.
150 “Perechen’ donesenii voennoi razvedki o podgotovke Germanii k voine protiv SSSR (ianvar’ - iyun’ 1941 g.), No. 39,” in Gavrilov 2008, 709.
Union” until after the conquest of the Balkans.\textsuperscript{151} One additional report in the middle of the month added to the uncertainty. On 17 April, Ramsay reported the German embassy in Tokyo had received a telegram from Minister Ribbentrop stating, “Germany will not declare war on the Soviet Union if it is not provoked by the Soviet Union. But if we are provoked, the war will be short and end in the cruel defeat of the USSR. The German General Staff has completed all the preparations.”\textsuperscript{152} The information portrayed the USSR as the potential aggressor and Germany as the victim. While this claim eventually would become part of Germany’s halfhearted justification for Operation Barbarossa, in mid-April it merely added to the notion that Germany felt temporarily weakened and incapable of launching another massive offensive. Golikov may have bought into such an idea. His intelligence summary on 16 April dispassionately concluded, “Germany continues to move troops, ammunition and fuel towards the Soviet border,” yet there were no warnings, not even hints, about an impending attack.\textsuperscript{153}

As with France in the summer of 1940, the Soviet Union was stunned by the speed of the Wehrmacht’s Balkan campaign. Belgrade fell on 13 April; Athens followed on 23 April.\textsuperscript{154} Reports about “indefinite delays” of an attack or any sense of German-Romanian vulnerability immediately evaporated. By the end of the month, numerous rezidents again were warning about a German attack. Only one week after telling Eshchenko about the improbability of war in the near future, ABC reported on 20 April that the Romanian military once again was “speaking openly and without doubt” of an

\textsuperscript{151} “Soobshchenie ‘Eshchenko’ iz Bukharesta o pozitsii Rumynii i Rossii s Germanskoi tochki zreniia, 14 April 1941,” in Gavrilov 2008, 583-584.
\textsuperscript{152} “Agenturnoe donesenie ‘Ramzaia’ iz Tokio ob izmeneni i putei postavoksyr’ia dlia Germanii, 17 April 1941,” in Gavrilov 2008, 585-586.
\textsuperscript{153} “Spetscoobshchenie razvedupravleniia genshtaba Krasnoi Armii o perebroskah nemetskikh voisk v pogranojolose SSSR, 16 April 1941,” in Gavrilov 2008, 584-585.
\textsuperscript{154} Gorodetsky 1999, 152.
invasion of the USSR by 15 May.\textsuperscript{155} Days later, another source of \textit{Eshchenko} reported that the war would begin in May and end in July.\textsuperscript{156} On 22 April, \textit{Dora} radioed from Geneva that, according to one of his German sources, the invasion date had been set as 15 June. General Golikov apparently shared his predecessor’s disfavor for \textit{Dora}, as he wrote at the bottom of the radiogram, “He is or is he not capable of [acquiring] valuable information? I see nothing from him except the transfer of this information…”\textsuperscript{157} While Golikov did not reproach \textit{Dora} as Proskurov did, he clearly did not believe the illegal \textit{rezident’s} information, at least in the spring of 1941. On 27 April, \textit{Zeus}, the legal \textit{rezident} in Sofia, recounted a conversation between one of his sources and a Wehrmacht general. Without providing a date, the officer stated in no uncertain terms that the USSR would be Germany’s next target.\textsuperscript{158} On the same day, \textit{Savva}, a legal \textit{rezident} in Prague, reported that the invasion was set for 15 May, with an emphasis on rapidly securing Ukraine. Germany had a strong “fifth column” that would rise up against the Soviet government once hostilities commenced.\textsuperscript{159} On 29 April, \textit{Mars} in Budapest informed the Center that the Wehrmacht was redeploying troops from Yugoslavia to Germany and Austria where they would “get a few days off” before being sent to the Soviet border in Poland. He noted public rumors of an impending war, but did not offer an invasion


\textsuperscript{156} “Soobschение ‘Eshchenko’ из Бухареста о намерениях Германии вступить против Украин и Кавказа и дислокации ряда немецких и румынских дивизий, 23 Апрель 1941,” in Gavrilov 2008, 588-589.


\textsuperscript{158} “Soobschение ‘Zevsa’ iz Sofii o podgotovke vnezapnogo napadeniiia Germanii na SSSR, 27 April 1941,” in Gavrilov 2008, 599.

\textsuperscript{159} “Soobschение ‘Savvy’ iz Pragi o date vystuplenia Germanii protiv SSSR, gotoviaschemesia ult’imatumi i dr., 27 April 1941,” in Gavrilov 2008, 599-600.
date. On the same day, X reported from within Moscow that the invasion would commence in six weeks’ time. Thus, within the last ten days of April, six GRU rezidents in six separate locations with independent sources, reported with certainty on a German invasion of the USSR. While the dates they offered conflicted and the quality of their sources sometimes were questionable, the reports marked a definite difference from the uncertainty at the beginning of the month. The rapid conquest of the Balkans meant that Germany could shift its attention elsewhere within only a few weeks of redistributing forces.

In addition to these reports, on 25 April General Golikov received a lengthy and unorthodox letter from Major General Vasilii Tupikov, the Soviet military attaché to Germany. Tupikov began,

In my three and a half months here, I have sent you at least 150 telegrams and dozens of written reports. [They were] of different subjects, of different accuracy and of different value. But, they sought to answer the basic question: What are, not as a general perspective but in concrete terms, the plans of German policy and war strategy against us; what are the possible dates for the beginning of the collision; what will the German side look like?

Tupikov then eruditely summarized his thoughts on German policy and strategy in a global context. He discussed all major points, including the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, German ambitions against England, its invasion of the Balkans, the Soviet-Japanese non-aggression pact, German perceptions of the Red Army and the Wehrmacht’s current preparations along the Soviet border. At the end of the letter, he acknowledged the conflicting intelligence but concluded that, based on his own analysis, “All of this

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information leads me to believe that German plans now view the USSR as its next opponent. The beginning of the collision, if not soon, is certainly within this year.”

Since Golikov’s memoirs do not recount his time as GRU chief, it is difficult to ascertain his thought process in the spring of 1941. Whether it was Tupikov’s letter, the rush of reports from rezidenturas across Central and Eastern Europe, the realization that the Wehrmacht had conquered yet more territory with rapidity or, most likely, the combination thereof, Golikov’s intelligence summary in early May was one of those rare occasions when a GRU chief penned a foreboding predictive assessment. He explained that the Wehrmacht’s rapid Balkan campaign would permit Germany to undertake three independent, though possibly concomitant, courses of action – 1) to strengthen its forces along the Soviet border, from as far south as Romania to as far north as Finland; 2) to further develop operations against Britain in the Middle East; 3) to strengthen its forces in Norway in anticipation of operations against England, Sweden or the USSR. Over the preceding two months, Germany had increased the number of divisions along the Soviet border from 70 to 107; including the Romanian and Hungarian armies, the total rose to 130 divisions. Golikov compared these figures to the 40 German divisions expected for action in the Middle East in order to highlight the disparity. He predicted an even further strengthening of German troops in the General Government, Romania and Finland, from where “in the future they could be used against the USSR.” However, Golikov offered no timelines for these developments, whether for his own safety, as he did not want to enrage Stalin with the idea of a German attack before British subjugation, or because

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162 “Специальное соподчинение разведуправления главного штаба Красной Армии ‘О группировке немецких войск на востоке и юго-востоке на 5 мая 1941 г.,’ 5 мая 1941,” in Gavrilov 2008, 615-617.
while recognizing the signs of a gathering storm, he still believed war to be many months away.

The previous conflict in GRU reporting regarding when Germany would invade intensified in the first half of May, amplified by the questionable reliability of many sources. On the fifth of the month, Eshchenko sent a lengthy dispatch from Bucharest. In a frank admission of the difficulty in attaining precise information, his source ABC stated, “nobody is able to give reliable information about future events in the German-Russian sector.” Eshchenko then provided a long list of reports about an impending war, from sources as well-placed as an advisor to Antonescu to as vague as “local German circles.” Some of Eshchenko’s sources anticipated war by 15 May, while others expected it to begin in the middle of June. All, however, agreed that war was imminent; whether that meant ten days or ten weeks was highly debatable. On the following day, Ramsay reported in confusing fashion that war could occur at any time, but that Hitler would not reach a decision to attack the USSR “until May or after the war with England.” While other rezidents had discussed the potential for German action against British interests in the Middle East, Ramsay resurrected the idea that Germany was planning an amphibious invasion of Great Britain. On 8 May, Mars noted that four of his sources reported on public discussions by numerous German officers, some sober and some inebriated, about the coming war between Germany and the USSR. On the tenth, Alta discussed orders from the War Ministry to its attachés abroad to immediately dispel rumors that Germany

164 “Agenturnoe soobshchenie ‘Ramsia’ iz Tokio o namereniakh Germanii razviazat’ voinu protiv SSSR i predpolagaemykh datakh nachala voennykh deistviy, 6 May 1941,” in Gavrilov 2008, 617-618.
was preparing for military action against the Soviet Union. The attachés were to tell their foreign hosts that the massing of troops in Eastern Europe was “to put pressure on Russia,” though Alta did not try to explain the objectives of such pressure. One could interpret the War Ministry’s orders as an attempt to reduce suspicions within the USSR as Germany made its final preparations for an attack, which was true, or as an attempt to reduce suspicions for the purpose of maintaining fruitful relations with the USSR, which was plausible. Perhaps given the boldness of his previous report or the continued dissonance of reporting from his rezidents, Golikov dryly concluded in his intelligence summary on 15 May, “The increase of German troops on the border with the Soviet Union continues.”

By the middle of May 1941, however, just one month before Barbarossa, General Golikov seemed certain that Germany was preparing for an invasion of the USSR at some point in the near term. He had personally tracked and reported on the number of German divisions in Eastern Europe since the previous summer. The Wehrmacht’s current height of 119 divisions and the seemingly endless additions every week undoubtedly were worthy of his vigilant scrutiny. However, the critical question of when the attack would come was impossible to determine. Some of the intelligence pointed towards an invasion in days. Yet, in observing all of the warnings from GRU rezidents, numerous proposed invasion dates had passed uneventfully. Why believe these warnings now, especially considering the conflict in reporting that still existed? If an invasion was imminent, meaning days away, Golikov’s intelligence picture should have been much less opaque. One would have expected greater harmony in reporting between rezidents. There was

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166 “Spetssoobschchenie pazvedupravlenia genshtaba Krasnoi Armii ‘O raspredelenii voruzhennykh sil po teatram i frontam voennykh deistvii po sostoianniu na 15.05.41 г., 15 May 1941,’” in Gavrilov 2008, 622-623.
also the considerable indecisiveness as to how and when Germany would handle Britain. Therefore, Golikov’s impassive conclusions about continued German troop transfers, without even a hint of warning, arguably were justified, especially in Stalin’s intelligence system. As he reported on those rare occasions, Golikov was more than aware of the potential of a German invasion. However, he needed more proof and less ambiguity before sounding the alarm.

Golikov was not the only senior Red Army officer struggling with the question of when an attack may occur. General Georgii Zhukov, Chief of the General Staff, and General Semyon Timoshenko, the People’s Commissar for Defense, were privy to all GRU intelligence. On 15 May, the two senior generals of the Red Army boldly proposed that the Soviet Union prepare for an offensive attack against Germany before the Wehrmacht could undertake its own. Zhukov wrote,

Bearing in mind that at the current moment Germany holds her army in a fully mobilized state, with fully deployed rear-area services, she has the potential to anticipate our deployment and deliver a surprise blow.

In order to prevent this, I consider it necessary, not under any circumstances, to allow the initiative to be gained by the German High Command, to preempt enemy deployment and to attack the German army at the point at which she is deploying, and prevent her having the time to organize a front and coordinate the different elements of her forces.  

While the plan was addressed to Stalin, there is debate in the historiography as to if he actually saw it. Some suggest that he never saw it, while others suggest it thrust him into a state of cognitive dissonance about the impending doom.  

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167 “Note by the People’s Commissar of Defense of the USSR and head of the General Headquarters of the Red Army to the Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars of the USSR I.V. Stalin with considerations for a plan for the strategic deployment of the armed forces of the Soviet Union in the event of war with Germany and her allies, No earlier than 15 May 1941,” in Hill 2009, 29-34.

Timoshenko’s proposal had shifted Stalin from his firm position that Germany would attack Britain first, the Red Army would have needed at least 60 days to execute the orders. Even then, its condition was so weak that launching a massive offensive would have been impractical. Additionally, German intelligence likely would have detected massive westward deployments and struck sooner. As Glantz noted, “[H]istory itself has negated the importance of this sinister historical ‘What if?’” when Germany attacked one month later. Leaving aside the counterfactual debates, however, Zhukov and Timoshenko’s proposal highlights their acute awareness of Golikov’s intelligence and their interpretation of it. In mid-May, they too knew war was approaching, but believed it to be at least two months away.

“Special Attention”

During the latter half of May 1941, the intelligence provided by GRU rezidents began to coalesce as never before. In the final ten days of the month, the Center received alarming messages from at least seven rezidents in six rezidenturas. There were no longer any reports of “Britain first” and the sources cited generally were more reliable than before and the warnings more specific. Most importantly, the intelligence matched observations of German deployments along the border, suggesting that war could begin at any moment. The only unresolved point among the rezidents was the timeline, though there was much greater agreement than previously reported.

On 19 May, Kosta, an illegal rezident in Bulgaria, relayed that his source within the Union Palace Hotel in Sofia, where most of the German senior officers were staying, collected information that Germany currently had 120 divisions in Eastern Europe, would

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170 Ibid.
have 200 divisions by the end of June, and expected to launch an attack in early July.\textsuperscript{171} The same day, \textit{Dora} reported that the Swiss military attaché in Berlin confirmed from within “the most authentic German circles” that the USSR had supplanted Great Britain as Hitler’s priority. \textit{Dora} referenced his previous message concerning the projected date, implying that it still stood as 15 June.\textsuperscript{172} On 21 May, \textit{Ramsay} reversed course from his previous message regarding “Britain first” and reported that war could be declared as early as late May.\textsuperscript{173} On 23 May, \textit{Mars} reported from Budapest that according to the Slovak ambassador and military attaché, war between Germany and the USSR was unavoidable. An American military attaché told \textit{Mars} that he expected the war to begin no later than 15 June.\textsuperscript{174} These were the same Slovak and American officials who only two months prior bought into the notion that such “rumors” were intentional British propaganda meant to bring the Soviet Union into the war. A few days later, \textit{Mars} reported a new rumor in Budapest that Germany intended to capture Syria and Iraq before turning against the Soviet Union. Uncharacteristically, he wrote, “I personally believe that the Germans are spreading these rumors in order to divert our attention as they prepare to attack us.”\textsuperscript{175} \textit{Mars} indeed was correct in suspecting German deception on these points.

On 27 May, \textit{Combat}, an illegal \textit{rezident} in Sofia with the ability to communicate directly to the Center, reported, “German troops, artillery and ammunition are crossing

\textsuperscript{171} “Agenturnoe soobshchenie ‘Kosty’ iz Cofii o sosredotochenii nemetskikh voisk v Pol’she i podgotovke vystuplenia protiv Ukrainy, 19 May 1941,” in Gavrilov 2008, 626.
\textsuperscript{172} “Agenturnoe soobshchenie ‘Dory’ iz Zhenevy o predpolagaemom vystuplenii nemtsev protiv Ukrainy i namereniakh izgnat’ Angliiskii flot iz Credizemnogo Moria, 19 May 1941,” in Gavrilov 2008, 626.
\textsuperscript{173} “Agenturnoe soobshchenie ‘Ramzaia’ iz Tokio o vozmozhnom nachale voiny s SSSR v kontse maia i strategicheskoi kheme napadeniiia, 21 May 1941,” in Gavrilov 2008, 627.
\textsuperscript{174} “Soobshchenie ‘Marsa’ iz Budapeshta, 23 May 1941,” in Gavrilov 2008, 627-628.
\textsuperscript{175} “Soobshchenie ‘Marsa’ iz Budapeshta o pazmeshchenii nemetskikh divizii, 28 May 1941,” in Gavrilov 2008, 630-631.
continuously from Bulgaria into Romania.” Upon receipt of the message, Golikov wrote on the bottom, “Instruct Eshchenko to position people in areas to monitor and track German columns.” The following day, Eshchenko sent a lengthy dispatch to the Center. As Golikov requested, he confirmed that there indeed was a marked increase of German vehicles through Bucharest heading northbound towards the Romanian-Soviet border. His most valuable source, ABC, reported that military preparations in Berlin “continue like clockwork.” All units were to be in place by the middle of June with the invasion beginning shortly thereafter. As numerous other sources already had done, ABC discussed the German hubris and pervasive confidence that the war would be over quickly. According to senior German officials, “…the war against the Soviet Union in general is not a problem from a military standpoint. In two or three months, German troops will stand in the Urals.” This report on 28 May would be Eshchenko’s final one before the war began. It is fitting that he ended with his own analysis, just as Mars as done days previously. He wrote, “In conclusion, I have to say that the noticeable ‘calm,’ the uncertainty with Hess, the silence of the press on this issue, the increased movement of Germans and the impudent behavior of the Romanian press makes me believe that they are all part of Germany’s ongoing preparations for war against us.” Clearly, he and his fellow rezident in Budapest were so convinced that an attack was imminent that they risked angering the Center, and possibly even Stalin, with their own analysis and explicit warnings. Both accurately recognized German deception. Golikov wrote at the bottom of the report that Eshchenko’s information was similar to a recent report from X, the

177 “Soobshchenie ‘Eshchenko’ iz Bukharesta o veroiatnosti voiny v iuone i posledobatel’nom osushchestvenii meropriatii protiv SSSR, 28 May 1941,” in Gavrilov 2008, 633-635.
GRU’s illegal source within the German embassy in Moscow, and ordered his subordinates to “Examine them together as a project.” Since the GRU did not fully release X’s reporting, it is impossible to determine to which information Golikov was referring. Nonetheless, his note indicates that GRU intelligence as a whole was converging on a common conclusion.

There were three additional warnings from rezidents in the first week of June. On the first of the month, Ramsay reported that Ambassador Ott received confirmation from Berlin that the war would begin in the second half of June.\textsuperscript{178} A few hours later, Ramsay sent a clarification, explaining that Ott actually had received the information from military attachés of the Tokyo embassy who recently had returned from Berlin. The disparity between an official notification from the Foreign Ministry and the unofficial conversations with attachés was not insignificant. Golikov, displeased with the error, wrote on the second report, “[Put this] in this list of questionable and false reporting from Ramsay.”\textsuperscript{179} Nevertheless, the blunder was inconsequential as the information, whether trustworthy or not, matched reports from other rezidents. On 5 June, X reported that the invasion would begin on 20 June.\textsuperscript{180} The next day, Alta wrote that despite concerns that German tanks may not have sufficient fuel to go past Kiev, the attack would begin on 20 June. There was “no doubt” within the military and government circles in Berlin that war was near.\textsuperscript{181}

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\textsuperscript{178} “Agenturnoe donesenie ‘Ramzaia’ iz Tokio o vystuplenii Germanii protiv SSSR vo vtoroi polovine iunia, 1 June 1941,” in Gavrilov 2008, 657-658.
\textsuperscript{179} “Agenturnoe donesenie ‘Ramzaia’ iz Tokio o vozmozhnom nachale voiny okolo 15 iunia i ser’eznoi takticheskoi oshibke SSSR, 1 June 1941,” in Gavrilov 2008, 658.
\textsuperscript{180} “Perechen’ donesenii voennoi razvedki o podgotovke Germanii k voine protiv SSSR (ianvar’ - iun’ 1941 g.), No. 48,” in Gavrilov 2008, 711.
\textsuperscript{181} “Iz agenturnogo soobscheniia ‘Al’ty’ o peremeshchenii Germanskikh voennykh sil na vostoki srokakh nachala kampanii posle 20 iunia, 7 June 1941,” in Gavrilov 2008, 671.
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Not only did the intelligence start to become clearer, the realities of German military posturing amplified the stakes. On 31 May, Golikov wrote that Germany had completed its redistribution of forces following the Balkan campaign. The GRU estimated 122-126 divisions were postured for potential use against Great Britain, 120-122 divisions in Eastern Europe placed for potential use against the USSR and another 44-48 divisions in reserve. Similar to his report from weeks earlier, the GRU chief presented Britain and the USSR as equally vulnerable. However, he was very explicit in explaining that the 122-126 divisions “directed against the British” were dispersed throughout Europe and Africa. There were 78-80 divisions in Western Europe, 17 divisions in Norway, of which six could be used against the USSR, 17 divisions in Africa and Italy and 12 divisions on the island of Crete. Of significant absence, neither Golikov nor any of the rezidents made any mention of preparations for amphibious operations, a paramount requirement for action against the British Isles. There was similarly no mention of increased naval activity suggesting a large-scale transport of troops from Crete to the Middle East. Conversely, the 120-122 divisions directed against the USSR were in a dense concentration from Finland to Romania, along the entirety of the Soviet border. The geographic barriers formed by the Carpathians and Pripet Marshes, while noteworthy, paled in comparison to the English Channel. Golikov ended his summary by repeating that the German redeployment of forces after the Balkan campaign was likely complete, a situation that had led to a significant strengthening of Germany’s right flank in Romania. He underlined this latter point to draw the attention of Stalin, Molotov, Timoshenko, Zhukov and others in the leadership to its significance.
On 5 June, just six days after his previous summary, Golikov provided a special intelligence summary on events in Romania. He explained that since mid-April, Romania had been mobilizing its military and strengthening its border defenses. As of 1 June, Bucharest had mobilized 20 infantry divisions, 11 of which were concentrated in the immediate vicinity of the Soviet border. The government had ordered cities and towns in northeast Romania to build “primitive bomb shelters by 15 June.” Citing one of Eshchenko’s sources, Golikov concluded that the Romanian General Staff was in the final preparations with Germany for an attack on the USSR. The officer expected the war to begin “soon.”

Two days later on 7 June, Golikov submitted his final intelligence summary to Soviet leadership before the start of Operation Barbarossa. He repeated and emphasized that multiple sources confirmed general mobilization in Romania. Northbound railways usually reserved for commercial goods and civilian passengers were drastically reduced and instead were now carrying military equipment and troops. As of three days prior, Germany was moving its final pieces of military equipment into the General Government. These events, compiled on top of a litany of intelligence reports from abroad, all of which were becoming increasingly consistent, drove Golikov to make a rare and explicit warning – “Considering that Romanian mobilization is meant to strengthen the German right flank in Europe, SPECIAL ATTENTION must be paid to the ongoing strengthening of German forces in Poland.” In Stalin’s system of intelligence, Golikov’s statement was bold and potentially dangerous. While he could

arguably have been more explicit in predicting Germany’s next move, the phrase “special attention,” which he intentionally capitalized, was audacious. Golikov was well aware that his predecessor, General Proskurov, was unceremoniously sacked after his candid remarks. Golikov would not have risked the wrath of Stalin if he were not extremely confident that a German attack was looming. However, Golikov’s warning was for naught. While many in the Soviet leadership agreed that Germany was on the verge of attacking, Stalin would not be convinced until only hours before the start of Operation Barbarossa.

Final Warnings

In the days before 22 June, GRU headquarters was inundated with alarming reports from numerous sources. Since no documentary evidence suggests that Golikov wrote any intelligence summaries after 7 June, it is not possible to gauge the GRU’s reaction to these warnings. However, considering the details of the information and earlier suggestions of an attack, Golikov and his staff probably interpreted the intelligence as even stronger evidence of an impending German offensive. Additionally, while it may not have produced summaries, the GRU continued to provide raw intelligence to the leadership of the Red Army. In early June, Generals Zhukov and Timonshenko were so alarmed at these reports that they attempted to convince Stalin to alert troops stationed on the border and deploy them to their defensive positions. On one of these occasions, on 14 June, Zhukov told Stalin that, according to GRU intelligence, the German divisions were “manned and armed on a wartime footing,” able to strike at
anytime. According to Zhukov, Stalin shot back, “You can’t believe everything in intelligence reports.”

On 12 June, Arnold sent a very short message from Berlin citing new material obtained by Arietz from within the German Foreign Ministry. War against the USSR was likely to begin between 15 and 20 June. On 15 June, Mars reported from Hungary that the Wehrmacht’s strategic deployment was complete. An invasion, which German officers openly mentioned on the streets of Budapest, could be expected any day. The next day, Arnold updated his previous message and wrote that the invasion date had been pushed to sometime between 22 and 25 June. Finland and Romania would attack alongside the Germans. On 17 June, Ramsay reported that the war was delayed slightly until the end of June, though did not provide an explanation as to why. The same day, Brand, the deputy rezident in Helsinki, confirmed Finnish mobilization. All military leaves were cancelled and there were “signs of evacuation” in the capital. On the twentieth, Kosta reported that sources within the German embassy in Sofia expected war to begin on either 21 or 22 June.

X sent at least five warnings during the last days of peace. On 19 June, he reported on Romanian and Finnish mobilization, just as other GRU rezidents had done in

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the previous days. Later that day, he reported that wives and children of the embassy staff were ordered to return to Germany. The next day, he relayed that the Foreign Ministry in Berlin ordered the cessation of diplomatic couriers into Moscow, as well as for representatives of German industrial firms within the Soviet Union to leave immediately for Berlin. On 21 June, the day before the start of Operation Barbarossa, X reported that hostilities were to begin within the upcoming 48 hours. At seven o’clock in the evening, he notified the GRU that the embassy staff had been ordered to destroy all classified documents, to pack their personal belongings and report back to the embassy when finished. They were to all sleep on sovereign German territory that night. He ended ominously and correctly, “This is the decision – war.”

Analyzing GRU Intelligence before Barbarossa

Indeed, the decision was war. Over the twenty-one months from the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact until the start of Operation Barbarossa, the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Red Army collected vast quantities of intelligence on German and Japanese intentions. Documentary evidence suggests that HUMINT was the most often utilized means of collection, although it is highly likely that the GRU also collected SIGINT. The absence of data from that source is a major gap in the evidence and represents a check on such an argument.

From the Center in Moscow, the GRU managed dozens of legal and illegal rezidents in at least fifteen states, though likely more. The first reports of a German invasion with any specificity began in the summer of 1940, though they were quickly dismissed. With the rapid conquest of France, Soviet intelligence began to suggest that

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191 “Perechen’ donesenii voennoi razvedki o podgotovke Germanii k voine protiv SSSR (ianvar’ - iyun’ 1941 g.), No. 52-56,” in Gavrilov 2008, 712-713.
war with Germany could occur much sooner than expected, though almost certainly only after it subjugated Great Britain. As the Wehrmacht redeployed forces throughout Europe in the summer and fall of 1940, the GRU meticulously tracked its movement, never allowing more than two weeks to pass without providing any update to Stalin and others in the leadership. While General Golikov suggested that the large number of German divisions on the Soviet border required “careful scrutiny,” he had no intelligence by the end of 1940 to suggest an invasion.

It took the rezidentura in Berlin only eleven days to uncover the details of the highly secretive Führer Directive 21. Hindsight magnifies the success of such access, even if it was not the highest level of the German government. However, no one in the GRU at the time believed the information. When warnings from other rezidents trickled in during the first three months of 1941, Golikov dismissed them as British propaganda attempting to drag the USSR into war against Germany. When Germany invaded Yugoslavia and Greece in April, the GRU had even further reason to doubt any ominous warnings. Numerous rezidents reported on a sense of insecurity in Germany and Romania, with some suggesting that a war against the USSR was unthinkable for an indefinite period. However, as with France, the rapid fall of the Balkans reignited GRU suspicions of the large number of German divisions along its western borders. By the middle of May, GRU intelligence was coalescing as never before. Dozens of reports from numerous rezidenturas flowed to the Center. While there still were conflicting details regarding the invasion date, all of the intelligence suggested that war was imminent and the proposed dates were in a much more narrow window of time. During the first week of June, the combination of Wehrmacht redeployments, Romanian and
Finnish mobilization, and harmonious intelligence from nearly every *rezidentura* pushed Golikov uncharacteristically to warn Stalin that German and Romanian forces on the border required “special attention.” The two most senior generals of the Red Army, Zhukov and Timoshenko, also raised the red flag. While an unbiased consumer could dismiss alarming reports from *rezidents* throughout most of 1940 and early 1941, by the end of May the intelligence picture presented by the GRU was fairly clear. One could still question the reliability of certain sources or the quality of certain *rezidents*; however, as a whole, GRU intelligence conveyed a coherent and alarming message. The organization succeeded in every aspect of its mission except the most important – it could not convince an intransigent decision-maker that its intelligence was accurate and reliable. Its brethren in the NKVD, availed to different types of intelligence, faced the exact same problem.
Oppressive internal security organizations with unchecked powers have become defining features of despotic states. The Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin forged a model that the likes of Mao, Amin, Ceausescu and Hussein later mimicked. Following in the footsteps of Okhrana, the Cheka, the Communists’ first internal security organization, bore the critical task of monitoring and preventing internal dissension, including the instigation of foreign agents. As the Communist Party extended its control into more facets of everyday life and Stalin asserted greater authority, Soviet citizens came to fear the Cheka and its successors, the State Political Directorate (GPU) and the Joint State Political Directorate (OGPU), and for good reason. The latter organization, responsible for internal security from 1923 to 1934, not only rooted out anti-Soviet elements but also enforced Stalin’s Five Year Plans with little mercy. It is estimated that more than three million Soviets died of famine and more than one million were forcibly relocated to Central Asia and Siberia in the early 1930s, as the OGPU monitored collectivization and annihilated the “kulak” class of supposedly bourgeois farmers.\(^{192}\) In July 1934, the government transformed the OGPU into the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD).\(^{193}\) The NKVD executed hundreds of thousands of Soviet peasants, government officials and Red Army leaders during the Great Purges of 1936-1938 before Stalin ordered that the NKVD itself also be purged and many of its leaders executed.\(^{194}\)

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\(^{194}\) Snyder 2010, 107-108.
In late 1938, Lavrentii Beria took over the NKVD, a position he would hold until the end of World War II. While the reign of terror subsided, it did not end. The NKVD’s primary and most notorious responsibility remained law enforcement, particularly political policing. However, Beria also was in charge of other important secondary functions, including the Border Troops, management of the GULAG prison system, counterintelligence, intelligence collection against foreigners both in the Soviet Union and abroad, and even the firefighting services. When Beria assumed the helm of the NKVD, the organization was recovering from the purges. A young, 31-year old named Pavel Fitin assumed command of the NKVD’s Fifth Department of the Chief Directorate for State Security (GUGB), responsible for collecting foreign intelligence, in May 1939. Like many of his fellow thirty-something year old general officers, Fitin owed his rapid rise to the Great Purges. Fitin reported directly to Vsevolod Merkulov, Chief of the GUGB and one of Beria’s closest deputies. In February 1941, the government created the People’s Commissariat of State Security, or NKGB, with Merkulov as its chief. The new agency assumed the NKVD’s previous responsibilities for intelligence and counterintelligence, though it retained the same staff and continued to run the same sources. As part of the organizational shuffle, Fitin became the Chief of the First Department of the NKGB, still responsible for the collection of foreign intelligence.

197 Kokurin 2003, 71.
198 Ibid.
200 Kokurin 2003, 74.
In many regards, Beria, Merkulov, Fitin and Golikov, the GRU Chief, shared similar duties. All were responsible for gathering information on the capabilities and intentions of potential threats to the Soviet Union, whether at home or abroad. However, there are key differences between NKVD/NKGB and GRU intelligence before Operation Barbarossa. Firstly, the available NKVD and NKGB records do not permit as neat a reconstruction of intelligence collection operations, as with the GRU. Whereas the latter has declassified a relative bounty of human intelligence material, the NKVD and NKGB’s modern successors, the Federal Security Service (FSB) and Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), have provided few details on human operatives. Secondly, NKVD and NKGB records indicate a much greater variety in intelligence sources and methods than the GRU. In addition to HUMINT collected both abroad and within the Soviet Union, the NKVD and NKGB also gathered information through SIGINT, border patrols, counterintelligence operations, theft of foreign government documents, and, most notoriously, through brutal interrogations of suspected spies, whether a Soviet citizen or foreigner. Given the variety of these methods, NKVD/NKGB intelligence was fragmentary and often disconnected. Furthermore, much of the intelligence for which evidence exists was tactical in nature, with only some of the HUMINT and SIGINT providing insight on Germany’s strategic intentions.

Thirdly, there are very few documents in the declassified archives of NKVD and NKGB regarding Japan. Those few reports that are available are SIGINT decryptions of the Japanese embassy in Moscow in regards to German activities and intentions. There are no NKVD or NKGB documents on Japanese intentions. Finally, whereas the GRU was cautious in raising alarms, the NKVD and NKGB avoided it altogether. It does not
appear that the leadership of either organization attempted to warn Stalin of the impending doom. If they did, it is not evidenced in the available documents. Their task was to simply funnel raw intelligence to decision-makers, allowing them to interpret the information as they saw fit.

*NKVD/NKGB Intelligence, Fall 1939 - Spring 1941*

The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact not only provided the Soviet Union with more time to prepare for war, but it also expanded its buffer against the Germans by hundreds of miles with the incorporation of Polish, and later Baltic, territory. This geographic benefit came with certain security risks. As the war in Poland came to an end in late September 1939, German agents used the chaos to infiltrate into the Soviet Union through the new and still permeable border. The NKVD was not ignorant to such a possibility. Indeed, it expected nothing less and probably exaggerated the problem. In early November and again in early December, the NKVD headquarters in Ukraine warned Moscow that halfhearted screening measures of Polish, Hungarian and Romanian refugees undoubtedly allowed intelligence operatives of those nationalities to slip into the USSR undetected. Disguised as Polish soldiers, German defectors, Jews, and Communist sympathizers, the NKVD feared the agents would “remain out of sight.”

Just as disconcerting for the NKVD was how these “provocateurs and saboteurs” would interact with disgruntled elements in the Soviet Union, especially in those areas only recently seized. Between late 1939 and the spring of 1941, there were numerous NKVD reports on suspected German agents providing support to Ukrainian and Lithuanian nationalist

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groups. For example, in early September 1940, Beria notified Stalin of no less than seven illegal German organizations operating inside Lithuania. Not only did they spread Nazi propaganda but also provided cover for German intelligence services.\footnote{“Iz ukazania NKVD SSSR No. 3624/B narodnomu komissariatu vnunenikh del Litovskoi SSR o merakh po usileniu protivodeistviia germanskoi razvedke, 10 September 1940,” in Eroshin 1995, \textit{Kniga pervaia}, 250.} Around the same time, the NKVD in Ukraine reported to Moscow that it had apprehended two German agents who had been operating in the USSR alongside the Ukrainian ultranationalist group, OUN, for more the past year. Just as earlier reports had warned, the two men snuck across the border as Germany and the Soviet Union bisected Poland.\footnote{“Dokladnaiia zapiska zamestitelia narkom vnunenikh del SSSR No. 19/9521 v NKVD SSSR o zaderzhaniia na granitse dvukh agentov nemetskoi razvedki, 5 September 1940,” in Eroshin 1995, \textit{Kniga pervaia}, 247-248.} Reports like these do little to provide insight on German capabilities or intentions, at least until the spring of 1941, but the vast quantity of such reports in the records indicates counterintelligence’s distinct importance within the NKVD.

Like the GRU, after the fall of France, the NKVD began to note significant German troops movements eastward. The only notable difference between the two organizations was the NKVD’s acute awareness of fortification and airfield constructions in German-occupied Poland and German espionage along the border. Unlike the GRU and Red Army units in western Belorussia and Ukraine, which, according to the available records, did not regularly report such activities until the fall of 1940, the NKVD consistently provided updates from July 1940 onward. On 12 July, NKVD agents operating inside Poland and Germany relayed to Moscow that a number of German firms had received massive orders for “cement and iron in order to construct fortifications along the border with the USSR.” Deliveries were already underway, with one agent
noting a “significant increase” in the transportation of heavy construction material eastward.\textsuperscript{204} Within days, the Border Troops in Belorussia and Ukraine reported the start of numerous fortification construction projects along the border. The Deputy Chief of the Border Troops identified no less than one dozen border towns near the Ukrainian border where German troops were building trenches, installing barbed wire and repairing highways.\textsuperscript{205} The NKVD in Belorussia reported almost identical activities along their border.\textsuperscript{206} At the end of July, Beria wrote a summary of German activities in Poland, emphasizing not only the movement of divisions eastward but also the heavy infrastructure improvements, including fortifications, antitank obstacles and new east-west highways.\textsuperscript{207} However, none of the reports hinted at any ill intentions. The NKVD assumed that the work was simply defensive in nature and not of any particular alarm.

Around this same time in the summer of 1940, the NKVD began collecting conflicting signals of German intentions in Europe. On 14 July, Beria forwarded a report from the \textit{rezidentura} in Berlin to Stalin and Beria. According to their sources, Germany was in the final preparations for an invasion of Great Britain. The invasion was to begin by the end of the month. Germany expected it would “destroy England in three weeks’ time.” Furthermore, according to a source close to Ribbentrop, Germany was redeploying divisions along the Soviet border only in order to match the strength of the Red Army units in the area. He apparently stated, “If the Russians put up two divisions –

\textsuperscript{204}“Spetssoobschchenie glavnogo transportnogo upravleniia NKVD SSSR No. 16/30141 v NKVD SSSR o voennykh prigotovleniiakh Germanii na okkupirovannoi territorii Pol’shi, 12 July 1940,” in Eroshin 1995, \textit{Kniga pervaia}, 221-223.
\textsuperscript{206}“Iz dokladnoi zapiski zamestitela narkoma vnutrennikh del SSSR v NKVD SSSR o sosredotochenii nemetskikh voisk vblizi Covetskoi granitsy, 14 July 1940,” in Eroshin 1995, \textit{Kniga pervaia}, 228-229.
\textsuperscript{207}“Zapiska NKVD SSSR I.V. Stalinu i V.M. Molotovu o voennykh prigotovleniiakh Germanii, July 1940,” in Naumov 1998, \textit{Kniga pervaia}, 143-144.
we will put up two. If they put up 20 – we will put up the same number.”

The report from the Berlin NKVD rezidentura matched the intelligence gathered by numerous GRU rezidenturas during the same period. Other than sporadic reports from unreliable sources talking about war between Germany and the Soviet Union, which both the GRU and NKVD collected, Soviet intelligence as a whole agreed in the summer of 1940 that Great Britain was Hitler’s first and immediate priority. Rezidents and their sources from both organizations faced the same problem – knowledge of Hitler’s decision to forgo an amphibious invasion of Great Britain and instead begin planning for an offensive against the USSR remained in the highest circles of the German government and military. Such information did not flow to the low and middle levels, where the GRU and NKVD were collecting its human intelligence.

Whereas the GRU became increasingly suspicious of the growing number of German divisions by the fall of 1940, there are not any shifts in NKVD reporting that would suggest any alarm, save perhaps two reports in August. On the 14th, the NKVD rezident in Kaunas received a number of reports from his illegal sources that the “prevailing opinion” in Germany was that war with the Soviet Union was imminent.

However, as with numerous reports on the supposed “sentiment” of civilians, one could easily dismiss such material. On 24 August, Fitin reported that, according to the German ambassador in Belgrade, Berlin planned to place at least 120 divisions along the border. Likely alarmed at such a higher figure, Fitin passed the information to Golikov for further

\[\text{208} \text{ “Zapiska NKVD SSSR I.V. Stalinu i V.M. Molotovu s izlozheniem soobshcheniia rezidenta NKVD SSSR v Berline, 14 July 1940,” in Naumov 1998, Kniga pervaja, 117-118.} \]

assessment.\textsuperscript{210} There are no records to indicate that Golikov responded. Nonetheless, all other NKVD reporting throughout the summer and into the early fall was insipid, providing simple tactical updates on the arrival of new German divisions, new fortifications and continued German espionage. There were no subtle warnings suggesting “careful scrutiny” of German activities, as Golikov wrote in GRU summaries.

Throughout the remainder of 1940, the few NKVD reports on German strategic intentions continued to emphasize the importance of “Britain first.” On 22 October, Beria wrote to Stalin and Molotov that according to sources in Berlin, none of whom he identified, Germany had delayed the invasion of Great Britain to the spring when weather conditions were more favorable. Regarding war with the Soviet Union, Germany had not “abandoned the idea” but believed Britain was the more imperative target.\textsuperscript{211} Beria followed up two days later with information from a source in the German Foreign Ministry. Ribbentrop had finished Germany’s “political plan for foreign policy” days earlier, emphasizing the need to subjugate Britain and keep the Soviet Union neutral.\textsuperscript{212} Then, in the middle of December, the Berlin 	extit{rezidentura} reported that one of its sources, Orestes Berlings (codename 	extit{Lyceum} and an agent controlled by the Germans, unbeknownst to the Soviet) obtained information on Germany’s “foreign policy principles,” which in fact reflected German deception and, to some degree, Ribbentrop’s reluctance to launch Barbarossa. At the top of the list was the need to avoid a two-front war. According to Hitler, “England is the only enemy of our country.” The second

\textsuperscript{210}“Soobshchenie nachal’nika 5 otdela GUGB NKVD SSSR v Razvedupravlenie RKKA o sosredotochenii nemetskikh voisk na sovetsko-germanskoj granitse, 24 August 1940,” in Naumov 1998, 	extit{Kniga pervaiia}, 201.

\textsuperscript{211} “Zapiska NKVD SSSR v TsK VKP(b) – I.V. Stalinu, SNK SSSR – V.M. Molotovu s izlozheniem zapisii besedy, 22 October 1940,” in Naumov 1998, 	extit{Kniga pervaiia}, 323.

\textsuperscript{212} “Zapiska NKVD SSSR v TsK VKP(b) – I.V. Stalinu s preprovozhdeniem agenturnoi svodki, 24 October 1940,” in Naumov 1998, 	extit{Kniga pervaiia}, 323-324.
priority was to strengthen relations with the Soviet Union. The only report that suggested any impending war was a note Beria sent to Defense Commissar Timoshenko in mid-November, informing him that an NKVD source within the Ministry of Economics, most likely Arvid Harnack (codenamed Corsican), had overheard plans for Germany to attack the Soviet Union in early 1941. However, Beria warned that the information was likely inaccurate as the source had problems verifying the rumors. Even without that caveat, Timoshenko likely would have dismissed the report as misinformation, given that the weather conditions in January or February would have made an invasion of the USSR militarily suicidal. Thus, the NKVD ended the year not too concerned with Germany. While the Border Troops continued to report on activities in Poland, there were no credible warnings worthy of attention.

The first NKVD report on German intentions after Hitler’s signature of Directive 21 came from Lauren, a source of the Prague rezidentura. The identity of Lauren is unknown, and this is the only report by her, or him, in the records. On 15 January 1941, Lauren relayed a conversation between the editor of a Berlin newspaper and an official in the Russian Department of the Ministry of Propaganda. Germany was going to attack Great Britain in mid-March, after which time it would turn against the Soviet Union. Lauren indicated that several persons had “cross-checked” the information to verify its authenticity. Just as the GRU dismissed the first warnings from Alta and Arietz, the NKVD likely dismissed Lauren’s reporting. In both cases, the sources referenced their

own unnamed, thus unverified, sources. In neither case did the GRU or NKVD have firsthand knowledge of the information, as in both instances it flowed through at three individuals before reaching a Soviet intelligence officer. Furthermore, there was little additional information to substantiate the single-source reports. Those government officials able to view both GRU and NKVD intelligence, like Stalin and Molotov, undoubtedly would have noticed the disparities between Arietz’s and Lauren’s information, making it even easier to dismiss both sources.

From late January until late March, the NKVD began to detect more signals on German intentions. However, just like GRU intelligence, there was such internal conflict that even an unbiased observer would have had difficulties distilling a coherent intelligence picture. Some sources indicated Great Britain remained Germany’s next target; others stated that it was the Balkans, and still others reported that the Soviet Union would be the next victim. On 23 January, Amaiak Kobulov, a legal NKVD rezident in Berlin operating under the codename Zakhar, wrote to Moscow that the Supreme High Command of the German army was developing plans against the Balkans. Senior German leaders were apparently disgruntled with the political situations in Yugoslavia, Romania and Bulgaria and believed only a German invasion would provide stability and unite the Balkans firmly under Berlin’s control. As for the Soviet Union, the High Command recognized the competing interests in southeastern Europe but believed Moscow would “do nothing but retreat.”

A few weeks later on 12 February, the NKVD obtained a copy of a telegram from Berlin to the German Embassy in Tehran. The message was a circular instructing all German military attachés stationed abroad to

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avoid any discussions regarding the presence of German troops in Romania. If pressed by persistent questions, they were to explain that Germany sent some units to Romania in order to support the Antonescu government against the pressure of British units in Greece.\(^{217}\)

Alongside these signs that Germany was shifting its attention towards the Balkans, the NKVD also collected intelligence that identified the Soviet Union as Hitler’s next target. On 7 February, Teffi, an illegal NKGB source in Greece, reported that the diplomatic corps in Athens was split between those who believed Germany would not attack the Soviet Union until it defeated Britain and those who believed that by attacking the Soviet Union, Germany could suppress Britain by forcing it to realize its impossible position.\(^{218}\) The following day, the NKGB Chief, Merkulov, forwarded a report from Stepanov, another legal rezident in Berlin. According to Corsican, the introduction of German troops into Romania was the first step for an eventual war against the Soviet Union. He also reported that the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces requested mapping data of industries in the USSR. The Command had requested the exact same information in the summer of 1940 as it planned its bombardment campaign of Great Britain, suggesting that the Luftwaffe was now developing plans for the USSR.\(^{219}\)

However, neither Teffi nor Corsican provided any specific timelines as to when Germany would attack.

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\(^{219}\) “Soobshhenie NKGB SSSR Stalinu, Molotovu, Mikoianu, 8 February 1941,” in Naumov 1998, Kniga pervaia, 600-602.
Sometime in early March, Corsican reported to Moscow that the committee responsible for the Four Year Plans was “urgently tasked to calculate the stocks of raw materials and food that German may obtain as a result of the occupation of the European part of the Soviet Union.” According to the initial rough estimates, the committee advised war with the USSR would result in “negative economic effects.” However, a number of Wehrmacht commanders, including the Chief of the General Staff, discounted the negative prognosis, arguing that a “lightning war” against Ukraine and the Baku oil fields would not allow the Soviet Union sufficient time to destroy its stockpiles.\footnote{220}{“Iz soobshheniia Berlinskoi rezidentury NKGB SSSR o planakh Germanii v otnoshenii Sovetskogo Soiuza, no later than 6 March 1941,” in Eroshin 1995, Kniga vtoraiia, 44-45.} Regardless of the internal debate, Corsican was certain that Germany was planning to attack the Soviet Union sometime in the first half of 1941. Upon receipt of the information, Merkulov forwarded it to Stalin, Molotov, Beria and Timoshenko.\footnote{221}{“Soobshchenie NKGB SSSR I.V. Stalinu, V.M. Molotovu, S.K. Timoshenko, L.P. Beria s preprovozhdeniem agenturnogo soobshchenia, 8 March 1941,” in Naumov 1998, Kniga pervaiia, 734-735.} On 14 March, Corsican provided a more specific date. According to one of his own sources who was supposedly close to two German Field Marshals, the war would begin in the spring. Lt. Harro Schulz-Boysen on the German General Air Staff, codenamed Starshina, reported on the same day that a systematic campaign to photograph key targets in western portions of the USSR was already well underway.\footnote{222}{“Soobshchenie NKGB SSSR I.V. Stalinu, V.M. Molotovu, L.P. Beria s preprovozhdeniem agenturnogo soobshchenia, 14 March 1941,” in Naumov 1998, Kniga pervaiia, 769-770.} His information complemented Corsican’s reporting from the previous month regarding the identification and photographing of key Soviet industrial sites. By the end of the month, the two men reported that the German General Staff had begun drawing plans for the bombing
campaign based on the aerial reconnaissance efforts thus far. To both of the sources, it was clear that the invasion date was nearing.\textsuperscript{223}

The debate within NKVD and NKGB intelligence as to which state would be Germany’s next target was clearly resolved in early April with the Wehrmacht’s invasion of Yugoslavia and Greece. Just like the GRU, a number of NKVD and NKGB sources provided warnings just before Germany attacked. However, whereas GRU intelligence was divided as to how the invasion of the Balkans would affect Germany’s plans for the Soviet Union, with some sources even reporting an indefinite delay, no available NKVD or NKGB reports suggest any lessening of the German threat. In fact, during the month of April NKVD human intelligence began to coalesce around the notion that Germany would attack the Soviet Union before the British Isles. On 2 April, Coriscan and Starshina reported that the impending invasion of Yugoslavia and Greece, which Germany expected to take three to four weeks, would delay operations against the Soviet Union, though they did not specify for how long. Regardless, both noted that preparations for an invasion of the USSR continued in earnest. For example, senior military leaders ordered an alteration to the aerial bombardment plans. Given its vast size, the commanders reckoned that it could not economically decapitate the Soviet Union by bombing industrial plants. Instead, the Luftwaffe was to focus on destroying railroads at key intersections to reduce Soviet freedom of movement. It was to also destroy Red Air Force airfields, on which they knew aircraft were parked closed together, in order to allow German air superiority during the invasion.\textsuperscript{224} One week later, on 11

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April, Zakhar relayed a meeting with Starshina and Corsican, which occurred in the latter’s apartment. Starshina acquired new material that showed Germany would deliver an ultimatum to the Soviet Union before the invasion, though he did not have details on what the ultimatum would encompass. (In reality, the idea of an ultimatum was part of the German deception campaign.) Corsican stated that the Ministry of Economics continued to plan for the upcoming “economic expansion.” For the remainder of the month, Starshina and Corsican continued to pass similar information on German intentions. The only detail that changed was the prospect of a German ultimatum. At the end of April, Starshina reported that Hitler had resolved to attack the Soviet Union without notice or formal protest “any day now.” Starshina’s warning about an impending attack was more than six weeks early and likely contributed to Stalin’s crude dismissal of his future warnings.

On 18 April, the counterintelligence branch of the NKGB composed a lengthy summary of foreign intelligence activities in the Soviet Union. The report was unique from a litany of other counterintelligence documents on single instances of foreign espionage. Instead, it provided a holistic account of foreign intelligence operations. While it described the collection efforts of British, Finnish, Romanian, American, Chinese and Japanese agents, by far the most active foreign intelligence services were German. The report never suggested a looming invasion, but began, “[L]ately, foreign intelligence operations against the Soviet Union have intensified. The main focus is on issues of a military nature. German intelligence is particular active, accounting for about

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70% of the activities against the Red Army.” Based on the interrogation of apprehended German operatives, their priorities included locating anti-aircraft batteries around Moscow and determining the size and location of Red Army units in western portions of the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{228}

Not only did the NKVD and NKGB collect intelligence of German intentions against the Germans themselves, throughout April they also gathered an increasing amount of information about German intentions from other foreign governments. Whereas Teffi had reported in early February on a divide in the Athenian diplomatic corps as to Germany’s next move in Europe, by April there was growing consensus among many foreign officials that war between Berlin and Moscow was nearing rapidly. On the seventh, the NKVD intercepted a telegram from the Turkish embassy in Moscow to the Foreign Ministry in Ankara and another in the opposite direction. The Turkish ambassador relayed his conversations with the Yugoslav and British ambassadors, both of whom independently believed the Soviet Union would be Germany’s next target. The British ambassador even shared his view that, according to his source, the invasion would begin in mid-June.\textsuperscript{229} The Foreign Ministry responded that its sources in Britain, Italy and Switzerland recently had passed similar information. A source close to the Swiss General Staff reported that the invasion would begin at the end of May.\textsuperscript{230} On 10 April, Iuna, an illegal source of the Berlin NKGB rezidentura whose identity is unknown, reported that “American circles in Berlin” fully expected Germany to turn against the

\textsuperscript{228} “Iz direktivy tret’ego upravleniia NKO SSSR No. 4/21789 ob aktivizatsii podryvnoi deiatel’nosti inostrannykh razvedok na territorii SSSR i meropriiatiiakh po ee presecheniu, 18 April 1941,” in Eroshin 1995, Kniga vtoria, 103-108.
\textsuperscript{229} “Telegramma turetskogo posol’stv v Moskve Ministerstvu inostrannykh del Turtsii, 7 April 1941,” in Naumov 1998, Kniga vtoria, 49.
Soviet Union soon after securing the Balkans. As a number of other NKGB and GRU sources reported, in doing so, Berlin expected London would recognize its precarious position and conclude a peace treaty with Germany.\textsuperscript{231} One week later, the NKVD intercepted another telegram from the Turkish Foreign Ministry to its embassy in Moscow. Ankara informed the ambassador that newly acquired intelligence from Berlin confirmed that the invasion would begin sometime in May.\textsuperscript{232} Finally, at the end of the month, an NKGB source in Finland reported that his contacts in the British embassy in Helsinki as well as those in a number of Finnish business circles all expected that Germany would attack the Soviet Union as soon as it could transfer troops out of the Balkans. The latter group fully anticipated Finnish participation in the invasion.\textsuperscript{233}

\textit{Differences in GRU and NKVD/NKGB May Reporting}

In the first half of May, Golikov struggled to deal with the conflicts in GRU reporting as to when Germany would strike. He knew the Wehrmacht was preparing for an invasion, but his \textit{rezidents} and their sources passed such a smattering of dates that it was impossible to determine what was accurate. However, during the last two weeks of May, the intelligence finally began to coalesce into a more coherent picture. Even though there was still debate as to when the invasion would begin, the window of proposed dates was much narrower. NKVD and NKGB intelligence differed in that it largely agreed on when the war would start but in such unspecific terms that it was of little value. For example, while GRU sources proposed specific dates or time periods (i.e., “15 June” or

\textsuperscript{231} “Soobshchenie agenta Berlinskoi rezidentury NKGB SSSR ‘Iuna’ o planakh germanskoi agressii protiv SSSR, no later than 10 April 1941,” in Eroshin 1995, \textit{Kniga vtoraiia}, 93-95.
\textsuperscript{233} “Agenturnoe donesenie v I upravlenie NKGB SSSR, 26 April 1941,” in Naumov 1998, \textit{Kniga vtoraiia}, 120-121.
“the latter half of June”), NKVD and NKGB reporting throughout May stated that the war would begin “soon,” “in the near future,” or “in a very short time.”

On 5 May, Merkulov forwarded a report to Stalin, Molotov and Beria from NKGB agents in the General Government. According to their discussions with numerous Wehrmacht officers, war with the Soviet Union was “impending,” although they did note that preparations were still underway. For example, railroads heading eastbound were still very active, transporting troops, “heavy artillery, trucks and aircraft parts.”

Two days later, an NKGB source in Helsinki reported that the Finnish General Staff would “make every effort to involve Finland in war against the Soviet Union.” According to German officers in the capital, May was to be “a critical month in Soviet-German relations.”

On 9 May, Starshina reported that the Luftwaffe was increasing its overflights of Soviet territory as part of its massive photoreconnaissance effort. (About a month later, the Border Troops confirmed a dramatic rise in German aircraft incursions.) As he had done weeks prior, Starshina warned that the war would begin “in the near future.”

The next day, Zakhar wrote to Moscow that the talk among Berliners was of imminent war with the Soviet Union. He also passed on an anonymous, peculiar and poorly worded (or poorly translated) letter dropped at the Soviet embassy. It began, “Comrades Stalin and Molotov. Very quickly. Be alert, Russia, as Hitler will soon attack you. You, Russia, are now the next victim. It will soon be too late as all of Russia sleeps.”

Lastly, on 20 May, an NKGB rezident, likely in Helsinki, reported that

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Finland would fight alongside Germany in an attack on the Soviet Union, which was to begin “in a very short time.”

Considering that the Border Troops continued to pass a number of reports about German activities in Poland, including the arrival of new divisions, the construction of fortifications and continued repair efforts of airfields and major highways, all of which was standard fare for the past year and none of which indicated any major changes, the NKVD/NKGB warnings of an impending attack seemed erroneous. If the Wehrmacht truly was on the verge of invading, the Border Troops should have noted significant changes in activity in the General Government; yet, they did not. Just like the GRU, the NKVD and NKGB continued to face great challenges in determining when Germany would strike. By the end of May, numerous dates proposed in previous reporting had passed uneventfully. If the previous warnings were unwarranted, why now believe the cries about war “soon” or “in the near future?”

To further cast doubt on the overall intelligence picture, Merkulov sent Stalin, Molotov and Beria a transcript of a meeting between Lyceum and an unnamed source in late May. According to the supposedly well-placed Wehrmacht source, Germany had now concentrated 160-200 divisions along the Soviet border. While the initial plan was to invade and turn the USSR into a German colony, Hitler now only wanted to pressure Moscow into “more amenable” economic agreements, particularly regarding oil. The risks of invading the Soviet Union for certain goods were too high when new economic

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agreements would suffice.\textsuperscript{239} The information from \emph{Lyceum} was the only piece of intelligence from any NKGB, NKVD or GRU source that suggested Germany had suddenly decided to forgo an invasion. Every other report continued to warn about an impending attack, but with vague timelines that were easy to dismiss. However, the numerous false warnings regarding the invasion date thus far may have added substantial credence to \emph{Lyceum}'s report. To a biased observer, like Stalin, \emph{Lyceum}'s intelligence provided the perfect justification to wash away the mountain of calamitous reporting from the preceding few months. Unfortunately, it was again part of the German deception effort, which Soviet intelligence delivered to the top of its own decision-making system.

\textit{Final Warnings}

It was not until the first few weeks of June that NKVD/NKGB intelligence finally began to coalesce around a narrower and more specified window of invasion dates. Similar to the GRU, the two organizations began to collect an increasing number of signs about an impending attack, including many that had not previously been reported. Not only did NKVD and NKGB reporting internally harmonize, it also complemented GRU intelligence. All three organizations still struggled to determine when the attack would occur, but their timeframes were very narrow. Collectively, the signals detected by the GRU, NKVD and NKGB clearly pointed towards the imminent calamity. However, unlike the explicit warnings in Golikov's intelligence summaries, there were no warnings from Beria, Merkulov or Fitin. Until the last days of peace, they continued to forward intelligence to Soviet leadership without predictive analysis or blunt assessment.

On 2 June, Beria updated Stalin and others on German activities along the border. In addition to the now standard notes about the arrival of new divisions and construction of fortifications, Beria wrote that all leaves were cancelled among Wehrmacht units in Eastern Europe.\textsuperscript{240} While there are multiple reasons why an army would cancel leaves, in lights of all the evidence gathered thus far, this should have been a major warning. However, Beria offered no explanation as to the leave cancellations. The following day, an NKGB agent close to the Japanese ambassador in Berlin reported on the diplomat’s suspicions that war would begin between 15 and 20 June. He estimated that Germany had amassed 1.5 million men for the invasion, not including the hundreds of thousands of additional Axis troops. Only after the capture of Moscow did the ambassador expect Hitler to attack Great Britain.\textsuperscript{241} On 6 June, the NKGB Chief in Belorussia, Lavrentii Tsanava, sent a lengthy report to headquarters in Moscow. While describing the continued arrival of troops and aircraft, he was concerned with the intense pace of German mobilization. During the end of May, troop trains were arriving in Polish towns near the border every 30 minutes. The Border Troops could still see German troops building fortifications and numerous suspected Gestapo agents conducting surveillance along the border; however, the Germans were becoming much more surreptitious in their activities, now conducting much of their training and surveillance at night. According to Soviet agents who had crossed over the German lines, the “sentiment” of the Polish people was that war was to begin at any time. Mostly likely referring to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, German soldiers had apparently told locals that “the contract with the


\textsuperscript{241} “Iz soobshcheniia agenta 2-go upravleniia HNKG SSSR o podgotovke fashistskoii Germanii k voine s SSSR, 3 June 1941,” in Naumov 1998, \textit{Kniga vtoraiia}, 307-308.
USSR will be terminated.”  On 18 June, Tsanava sent an even longer report providing a further litany of signs of German mobilization. Two days later, his NKVD counterpart in Belorussia, the Chief of the Border Troops, notified Moscow that he was strengthening the border with Poland. For the remainder of the month, guard posts were to be reinforced, patrols increased and leaves cancelled. Unfortunately, the increase in Border Troops would do little to slow the onslaught of an entire German Army Group days later.

In mid-June, Zakhar forwarded information from Starshina to the NKGB in Moscow, which in turn composed a report for Stalin, Molotov and Beria. According to Starshina, the “ruling circles” in the Ministry of Aviation believed that the decision for war was finally made, and Germany would deliver the “unexpected blow” very soon. He also stated that Germany was in the final stages of negotiations for joint action with the Finnish and Romanian General Staffs. That same day, Beria informed Stalin of the total number of German trespassers in 1941 thus far. Between 1 January and 10 June, the NKVD had detained almost 2100 “infiltrators” and potential “saboteurs,” of whom 183 admitted to being German operatives. In many cases, the Border Troops discovered these individuals carrying portable radios, weapons and grenades. Beria’s report did not suggest any impending peril. However one week later, an NKGB report, likely from a rezident in German-occupied Poland or possibly Berlin, elevated the threat posed by

244 “Prikaz nachal’nika pograniicheskikh vozduzhnykh sorazmeriy gostubrannikov SSSR, 22 June 1941,” in Naumov 1998, Kniga vtoraja, 282.
246 “Iz soobshchenii NKVD SSSR v TsK VKP(b) i SNK SSSR o narusheniakh gosudarstvennoi granitsy SSSR s noiabrim 1940 g. po po iiunja 1941 g., 12 June 1941,” in Naumov 1998, Kniga vtoraja, 350.
these agents. According to a source within German intelligence, from mid-June onward, agents crossing the border for reconnaissance purposes were under orders to stay no longer than two or three days before returning to the German frontlines in Poland. For those agents who were unable to return, they were to remain in place, undercover and, once the invasion began, to “report to any German unit on Soviet territory.” The Wehrmacht was unmistakably seeking the most current intelligence on Soviet force dispositions prior to their attack.

On 17 June, Starshina reported from Berlin that, “All German military preparations for an attack against the USSR are complete and a strike can be expected at any time.” Upon receipt of the message, Merkulov forwarded it to Stalin and Molotov. Stalin, still clinging to the belief that Germany would not attack the USSR until defeating Britain and that any signs otherwise were British propaganda, lashed out. On top of the report he wrote, “Comrade Merkulov - Can you send your ‘source’ in the German aviation staff to his fucking mother? This is not a ‘source,’ but a disinfomer.” Despite all of the intelligence from the GRU, NKVD and NKGB that Stalin had personally reviewed up to that point, he was still unambiguously firm in his deep-seated preconceptions.

The following day, Merkulov wrote to Stalin, Molotov and Beria about the mass departure of “staff, their wives and children” from the German Embassy in Moscow. Between 10 and 17 June, 34 individuals returned to Germany, including most of the military attaché staff. On 15 June, the military attaché and his deputy apparently spent

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the entire day burning classified material. On 16 June, the remaining employees of the military attaché staff were ordered to evacuate their apartments and prepare to return to Germany. The report was very similar to the information provided by X, the GRU illegal rezident within the embassy. However, given the strict compartmentalization of the Soviet intelligence system, neither the NKGB nor GRU knew of the other organization’s source. In this sense, the compartmentalization should have strengthened the credibility of both sources; however, there is no documentary evidence about if and/or how Stalin reacted to the GRU and NKGB sources within the German embassy.

In addition to the reports from NKGB rezidents and the Border Troops, the NKVD also collected numerous telegrams of foreign governments in June 1941, all of which suggested an impending German attack. The NKVD used SIGINT within the Soviet Union and document theft and well-placed sources abroad to acquire copies of the messages. Collectively, these telegrams demonstrate the widely held suspicions of most foreign governments that a German-Soviet war was near.

On 3 June, an NKVD agent obtained a telegram from the U.S. Ambassador in Romania, Franklin Gunther, to the State Department in which the diplomat described the arrival of German Field Marshals von Reichenau and von List to Romania to assume command of Armies stationed near the border. Gunther also wrote that, according to his sources in Bucharest, the Romanian military had completed its mobilization and stood prepared to fight alongside the Germans. At least two GRU rezidents also passed similar information on Romanian mobilization around this time. The Border Troops

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stationed along the Romanian border relayed the same message on 2 June and again on 9 June. In the latter report, the NKVD noted a Romanian order for civilians to evacuate from the border area.251

NKVD records indicate that the organization had particularly good SIGINT coverage of the Japanese Embassy in Moscow, although the FSB and SVR have only declassified a handful of intercepts. On 9 June, Yoshitsugu Tatekawa, the Japanese ambassador to the Soviet Union, telegraphed his counterpart in Bulgaria. He explained that rumors were swirling about Germany, Hungary, Romania and in the Soviet Union itself about an impending war. He even noted preparations within Moscow, despite Molotov’s firm position that “there is no friction that could lead to war” with Germany. Tatekawa fully expected the conflict to begin soon.252 The following day, the Japanese consul in Konigsberg telegraphed Tokyo, along with the Japanese embassies in Berlin, Rome and Moscow, notifying them of the massive transport of German divisions through the city eastward. Units stationed in the city had been issued gas masks and the civilian population was bracing for war.253

On 18 June, the Japanese ambassador in Helsinki sent a message to Tatekawa informing him of Finnish preparations for war. In the capital, more than 10,000 citizens were preparing for the defense of the city. The Finnish military completed general mobilization and had amassed along the Soviet border. Some young, untrained Finns

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251 “Telegramma upolnomochennogo TsK VKP(b) i SNK SSSR v Moldavii S. A. Goglidze v TsK VKP(b) o kontsentratsii krupnykh chastei nemetskoi i Rumynskoi Armii na granitse s SSSR, 2 June 1941,” in Eroshin 1995, Kniga vtoraja, 200-201, and “Spravka zamestitelia narokma vnutrennikh del USSR o voennykh meropriiatijakh Germanii po sostoianiiu na 9 iiunia 1941 g., 9 June 1941,” in Eroshin 1995, Kniga vtoraja, 213-214.
were even approaching German and Finnish units asking to fight the Soviets in retribution for the Winter War one year prior. The following day, the NKGB rezidentura in Rome forwarded a telegraph obtained from the Italian ambassador in Helsinki to the Foreign Ministry in Rome. He too confirmed the completion of Finnish general mobilization. The country was “on a war footing” and the “decision” was imminent. The rezidentura also wrote to Moscow that the Italian Foreign Ministry had received a telegram from its ambassador in Berlin. The NKGB did not obtain a copy of it, though two of its sources within the ministry were able to view it. The ambassador reported that senior members of the German command had informed him that war with the Soviet Union would begin sometime between 20 and 25 June. On that same day, the Italian ambassador to the Soviet Union wrote that the German ambassador, von Schulenburg, had expressed his concerns that war could break out in two or three days’ time, though he had no official notification from Berlin. The NKVD collected its final piece of SIGINT before the war on 20 June. The Japanese ambassador in Bucharest telegraphed Tatekawa, along with the Foreign Ministry in Tokyo, relaying a conversation he had with the German ambassador to Romania. The latter stated, “The situation has entered a critical phase of development. Germany has completed preparations from

northern Finland to the southern part of the Black Sea and is confident of a lightning victory.”

The signals and human intelligence collected by the NKVD and NKGB, as well as the reports from the Border Troops, mirrored intelligence gathered by the GRU and Red Army units stationed along the border. Between the three intelligence organizations, there were multiple, independent sources relaying the same information. There were dozens of reports on Finnish and Romanian mobilization and an even greater number of final warnings about an impending German attack. Only Stalin and Molotov could dismiss the plethora of corroborated and consonant evidence as rubbish. It would not be until the evening of 21 June when Alfred Liskow crossed the border to warn of the approaching attack that Stalin began to accept the intelligence. Both the NKGB and the Red Army reported Liskow’s defection to Moscow, the latter in the late hours of 21 June and the former at 3 a.m. on the morning of 22 June, just one hour before the start of Barbarossa.

When Stalin received word of the event from the Red Army in the waning hours of 21 June, he finally permitted Generals Timoshenko and Zhukov to take action. Shortly after midnight on 22 June, the two senior Red Army officers sent a directive to commanders in the western USSR, only after being carefully reviewed by Stalin, ordering them to prepare for a German offensive. Even in these final hours of peace, Stalin was still concerned about provoking Germany. Timoshenko and Zhukov’s orders read,

1. During 22-23 June 1941 there is a possibility of surprise attack by the Germans on the fronts of the LVO [Leningrad-], PriOVO [Pribaltic

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Special], ZapOVO [Western Special-], KOVO [Kiev Special-] and OdVO [Odessa] [Military Districts]. An attack might start with provocative activities.

2. The task of our forces is not to give in to any sort of provocative activities, which might lead to major complications. At the same time forces of the Leningrad, Pribaltic, Western, Kiev and Odessa Military Districts are to be at full battle readiness in order to meet the possible surprise blow by the Germans or their allies.

I order:

a) During the night of 22 June 1941 to covertly man firepoints of the fortified districts on the state border;

b) Before dawn on 22 June 1941 to disperse all aviation, including military, on field aerodromes, and to carefully camouflage it;

c) To bring all units to battle readiness. Forces are to be held dispersed and camouflaged.

d) To bring anti-aircraft to battle readiness without additional personnel. To make all preparations in blacked-out towns and installations;

e) No other actions are to be taken without special authorization.

Many Red Army units stationed along the border never received the directive. For those that did, it was far too late to enact. Just as Timoshenko and Zhukov expected, the “surprise blow” began just hours after they dispatched their message from Moscow.

Luftwaffe Overflights

As the NKVD and NKGB collected intelligence in the Soviet Union, along the border and throughout Europe, Germany and its allies also engaged in their own intelligence collection efforts. While the NKVD apprehended hundreds of German agents conducting espionage on Soviet territory, the Luftwaffe undertook its own aerial reconnaissance campaign largely unhindered. Soon after German and Soviet forces invaded Poland in the fall of 1939, German aircraft began encroaching into Soviet airspace. In these early months, such incursions were trivial concerns. The border was new and aircraft navigation systems primitive. However, by the turn of the New Year, Border Troops became increasingly impatient with errant German pilots. Stationed along
the length of the border, the troops began shooting at German aircraft, occasionally with
anti-aircraft weapons but usually only with their sidearms. On 17 March 1940, an
unusually high number of aircraft, 32 in total, crossed into Belorussia. The undoubtedly
alarmed Border Troops opened fire, downing one aircraft just short of the German border
on its return. When the commander of the area reported the incident to higher
headquarters, he noted that it was the thirteenth incursion in the past three months.260
Fearing the consequences of additional shoot downs and likely under pressure from
Stalin, Beria issued NKVD Directive 102 about two weeks later. In explicit terms, he
forbade the Border Troops from firing upon German aircraft, even in cases of blatant
violations. The directive began, “In case of violations of the Soviet-German border by
German aircraft or balloons, do not open fire. Limit yourselves to preparing a report on
the violation...”261

The orders to not fire upon German aircraft meant the Luftwaffe could fly
unchallenged, thus further negating any deterrent to curb their activities. In a message to
the NKVD Headquarters in Ukraine on 26 May 1940, the republic’s Chief of the Border
Troops, Major General Vasilii Khomenko, noted a rise in Luftwaffe incursions.
Conveying his blunt assessment, he wrote, “I think that the Germans are photographing
our frontiersmen, and particularly our roads.”262 About a month later, Khomenko
reported on overflights from not only German but also Hungarian and Romanian aircraft
from across the latter’s border. Given Moscow’s ultimatum to Romania to surrender

260 “Iz dokladoi zapiski NKVD v tsentral’nye organy o neprimennennii oruzhiia protiv nemestskikh
samolotov, narushaushchikh sovetskiiu granitsu, i o zaiaavlении v etikh sluchaakh protesta germanskim
vlastiam, 17 March 1940,” in P.I. Zyrianov et. al. (eds.), Pogranichnye Voiska SSSR, 1939-iiun’1941:
261 Murphy 2005, 165.
262 “Soobshchenie upravleniia pogranichnykh voisk NKVD USSR No. 005628 v NKVD USSR o
ravezdybatel’nykh poletakh Germaneskich samolotov v pogranpolose, 26 May 1940,” in Eroshin 1995,
Kniga pervaya, 189.
Northern Bukovina and Bessarabia (essentially modern-day Moldova) around this time, the overflights were not unexpected. In a few cases, Romanian pilots and Soviet border troops exchanged shots, despite the supposed peaceful annexation. However, it was Khomenko’s descriptions of eleven separate incursions over a three-day period that cast light on the sporadic photoreconnaissance methods of Germany and her allies. In some instances, aircraft flew only a few hundred meters into Soviet territory before quickly retreating. Other times, they flew many kilometers deep. There were single-engine “reconnaissance aircraft” and twin-engine bombers. Some flew only a few hundred meters off the ground, while others flew at altitudes greater than 2,500 meters. Khomenko had no explanation for the variations but confidently asserted that nearly every aircraft served a reconnaissance purpose.263

On 24 January 1941, the Chief of the Border Troops in the Belorussian Republic, Lieutenant General Ivan Bogdanov, submitted a summary on NKVD activities and sightings along the German border throughout the previous year. Noting a number of border disputes, Bogdanov explained that they were “resolved in mutual consent and in relatively short time.” Regarding the Luftwaffe overflights, he reported that there were 87 incursions of Belorussian airspace, three of which resulted in German aircraft landing in Soviet territory. All of the aircraft were eventually returned to Germany. Bogdanov was apparently unconcerned with the activity, both on the ground and in the air. He wrote, “Relations with Germany during this reporting period were normal.”264

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263 “Spetssoobschchenie upravleniia pogranichnykh voisk NKVD USSR No. 007005 v NKVD USSR o narusheniakh granity SSSR Rumynskimi samoletami, 26 June 1940” and “Iz operativnoi cvodki shtaba pogranichnykh voisk NKVD USSR No. 006328 ob obstanovke na granitse s Rumyniei, 27 June 1940,” in Eroshin 1995, Kniga pervaia, 194-197.

he, like Stalin, truly believed the incursions were innocuous and “normal,” when they were in reality, as his counterpart in Ukraine warned, intelligence collection missions.

NKVD/NKGB sources confirmed the purposes of these overflights. In January 1941, Starshina reported that Ministry of Aviation ordered a large-scale photoreconnaissance effort of the Soviet border and certain key cities, including Leningrad. Aircraft equipped with “advanced cameras” were to fly over Soviet territory at high altitudes to reduce the chances of detection. In early March 1941, Starshina reported that the Luftwaffe was “yielding good results” in their efforts to photograph key targets in western Belorussia, Ukraine and northern Russia. Five days after receiving the message, Merkulov forwarded it to Stalin, Molotov and Beria. On 27 March, Merkulov sent the same individuals, plus Timoshenko, another report from Starshina. Germany was supposedly planning a massive aerial bombardment campaign to coincide with the start of ground operations, which Starshina estimated to be at the end of April or beginning of May. Until that time, the Luftwaffe had orders to photograph as many Soviet cities and lines of communication as possible. Leningrad, Vyborg and Kiev were particularly important, as they would be the primary targets in the first days of the war.

While Beria issued orders against firing upon German aircraft in Soviet airspace, the Soviet Union did not sit idly as the incursions occurred. Per a Soviet-German convention on “Procedures for Regulating Border Conflicts and Incidents” signed on 10 June 1940, either party could raise a formal protest when a violation occurred. If the

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266 “Iz soobshcheniia Berlinskoi rezidentury NKGB SSSR o podgotovke fashistskoi Germanii k napadeniui na SSSR, 9 March 1941,” in Eroshin 1995, Kniga vtoraya, 45-46.
violation was found to have occurred in error, the wayward aircraft and its crew, if held in the other country, were to be released immediately.\textsuperscript{269} In every recorded instance of a German violation, the Soviet Union lodged a complaint. The German response was nearly always the same – deference to the Soviet position through an overly apologetic excuse about its pilots’ poor navigation skills. On 20 March, the NKVD published a report on German border incursions that highlighted some of the protests. The unknown author explained, “German border officials in most cases do not deny the facts of violations of the Soviet border by German aircraft. [They] explain that there are numerous flight schools to train pilots near the border.” These amateur pilots were prone to “losing their orientation” and inadvertently violating Soviet airspace. As if to assuage Soviet concerns, the German officials assured that violators would receive “disciplinary sanctions.” The NKVD report concluded, “Despite these statements by German representatives, German aircraft continue to violate the Soviet border.”\textsuperscript{270}

And the violations would continue until the start of Operation Barbarossa. On 12 June 1941, Beria wrote a report to Soviet leadership discussing the Luftwaffe incursions. Between November 1940 and 10 June 1941, the Border Troops noted at least 185 overflights by German aircraft, almost half of which occurred in the preceding six weeks. Beria wrote, “German aircraft are not trespassing across Soviet border by accident, as evidenced by the direction and depth they fly over our territory. In some cases, German planes flew over our territory by more than 100 kilometers, particularly towards fortifications....and large Red Army garrisons.” Beria also described an incident in western Ukraine on 15 April 1941. Red Air Force planes intercepted an errant German

\textsuperscript{269} Murphy 2005, 166-167.
\textsuperscript{270} “Iz doklada NKVD v tsentral’nye organy o narushenii sovetskoi granitsy germanskimi samoletami s 16 oktiabria 1940 g. po 1 marta 1941 g., 20 March 1940,” in Zyrianov 1970, 364.
aircraft and forced it to land in the city of Rovno. Upon inspection of the plane, the NKVD found equipment and film for aerial photography, as well as maps of the Chernihiv Oblast in north-central Ukraine, another 200 kilometers further into the USSR.\textsuperscript{271} On 20 June, just two days before the invasion, one of Beria’s deputies provided updated numbers to Stalin. Between 10 and 19 June, the Border Troops noted 86 violations of Soviet airspace by German, Romanian, Finnish and Hungarian aircraft.\textsuperscript{272} The increased rate of overflights was staggering. The 86 incursions in the ten-day period essentially equaled the total number of incursions over the previous six weeks. Yet, despite the recognizable upsurge, there are no records of the NKVD or GRU attempting to explain why it was occurring. If anyone suspected Germany and its allies were conducting last minute intelligence collection missions before an invasion, their concerns are not evidenced in any declassified material.

It is clear that the NKVD, from the border guards to the leadership in Moscow, was aware of the true nature of the German overflights. They were not so naïve as to believe the excuses about inexperienced and wayward pilots. There was more than sufficient proof to substantiate their suspicions of intelligence collection. However, given Stalin’s fear of provoking Germany into war before the Red Army was prepared, the NKVD could do nothing but watch as the planes flew unmolested overheard. The Border Troops simply recorded the incidents, protested the Germans and notified higher headquarters. The price for allowing such unhindered German intelligence collection from the air would be over 1,200 Red Air Force aircraft and countless Soviet airfields.

\textsuperscript{271} “Iz soobschheniia NKVD SSSR v TsK VKP(b) i SNK SSSR o narusheniakh gosudarstvennoi granitsy SSSR s noiaabria 1940 g. po 10 iiunia 1941 g., 12 June 1941,” in Naumov 1998, Kniga vtoraiia, 350.
\textsuperscript{272} “Iz soobschheniia NKVD SSSR v TsK VKP(b) i SNK SSSR o narushenii sovetskoii granitsy inostrannymi samoletami s 10 po 19 iiunia 1941 g., 20 June 1941,” in Naumov 1998, Kniga vtoraiia, 396-397.
destroyed in the first morning of Operation Barbarossa.\textsuperscript{273} One week after the start of the invasion, Pravda, a Soviet newspaper and mouthpiece of the Kremlin, notified the Soviet people for the first time about the overflights. There had been at least 324 recorded incidents.\textsuperscript{274}

*Analyzing NKVD/NKGB Intelligence before Barbarossa*

The NKVD, and later the NKGB, collected less strategic intelligence than its counterparts in the GRU, in part due to the late purging of the NKVD and in part due to differences in responsibilities. The NKVD was first and foremost an internal security organization charged with protecting Communist ideals and enforcing the dictates of the Soviet government. Foreign intelligence and counterintelligence were only two subsets of the NKVD’s overall portfolio. The available records indicate that the NKVD and NKGB were regularly able to collect intelligence on German intentions only through a handful of human sources in Berlin and a number of SIGINT intercepts from foreign embassies in Moscow. There are no records of collection on Japanese intentions. Corsican and Starshina provided accurate, valuable intelligence, especially from mid-May onwards; however, as evidenced by Stalin’s crude remarks, he did not believe their information. Starshina was among a number of other NKGB human sources that, from the beginning of May onward, cautioned frequently about a German attack “soon” or “in the near future.” Given the number of weeks that passed peacefully, it was easy to discount their warnings.

However, human intelligence was not the only method by which the NKVD and NKGB gathered warnings. Given its diverse mission set, the two organizations were able

\textsuperscript{273} Glantz 1995, 49.
\textsuperscript{274} Murphy 2005, 171.
to provide a greater array of indicators and warnings than the GRU. In addition to HUMINT, they also collected signals intelligence and counterintelligence information, and provided very frequent updates of German activities in the General Government. While the fragmentary nature of NKVD/NKGB intelligence does not create as coherent a picture as that provided by the GRU, there were more than a sufficient number of signs, especially by the first week of June. The Border Troops reported on changes in German activities near the border, including the cancellation of leaves and shift towards nighttime operations, as well as on a marked increase in Luftwaffe incursions. Signals intelligence and captured documents from numerous foreign governments, some allied with Germany, all indicated their expectations that war was only days away. NKGB counterintelligence units reported on instructions to German agents to gather information in the Soviet Union for only two or three days before returning to German lines in order to provide Wehrmacht units the most current intelligence available. Within Moscow, the NKVD watched as dozens of German embassy staff members and their families packed up belongings and boarded trains to Berlin. A source within the embassy also reported that the remaining staff was feverishly burning all classified and sensitive information. Together, NKVD and NKGB clearly demonstrated an impending German blow, especially when placed alongside the plethora of other indicators gathered by the GRU. However, unlike its brethren in the Red Army Main Intelligence Directorate, neither Beria nor Merkulov nor any other senior NKVD or NKGB leader provided any blunt warnings to Soviet government. It fell to Stalin to interpret the intelligence as he (inaccurately) saw fit.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

The Wehrmacht unleashed Operation Barbarossa without mercy on 22 June 1941. The Border Troops and Red Army units stationed near Finland, the General Government, and Romania had no time to enact Timoshenko and Zhukov’s last-ditch effort to prepare for the onslaught. The Red Air Force did not have time to disperse its aircraft. Civilians received no warnings at all. During the first morning, the Luftwaffe destroyed 1200 Soviet aircraft. Within days, the Wehrmacht destroyed 90% of the Soviet mechanized corps. Within one week, German units captured Minsk.²⁷⁵ By 10 July, Germany had captured Lithuania, Latvia, and most of Estonia and Belorussia. In some areas, German units had pushed 600 kilometers into Soviet territory. In those first three weeks, at least 28 Soviet divisions vanished and another 70 divisions lost at least half of their personnel and equipment.²⁷⁶ By 26 July, Smolensk fell; by late September, after being encircled and cut-off for weeks, so too did Kiev.²⁷⁷ And yet, despite its success in surprising the USSR and despite the rapid initial gains, Germany failed to achieve its ultimate objective. Barbarossa is not only a model of strategic surprise, but also a powerful demonstration of how strategic surprise does not necessarily equate to victory. For four years, the Soviet Union endured the horrors of war and slowly, painstakingly pushed the “fascist horde” back to Berlin. It paid a high cost, one likely much higher than necessary had Stalin listened to Golikov’s warnings and recognized the multitude of complementary warning signs from the GRU, NKVD and NKGB in early June 1941.

²⁷⁷ Ibid, 865, 874-875.
Intelligence is inherently complicated, muddled and difficult to interpret. Rarely does it provide an unambiguous picture of enemy capabilities, and even less so of its intentions. Soviet intelligence before Operation Barbarossa was no different. There was considerable doubt and uncertainty. Nearly all within the Soviet government, Red Army and intelligence apparatus expected war with Germany at some point. The role of the GRU and NKVD/NKGB was to determine *when* and how exactly that would occur. Throughout 1940, Soviet intelligence clearly expected Germany’s attention to be on Western Europe. After the fall of France, there was a wide consensus that Great Britain would be the next target. The GRU and NKVD’s inability to penetrate the highest level of the German military, which was planning for an attack on the USSR since the summer of 1940, coupled with German deception, only reinforced the preconception of “Britain first.” Between January and March 1941, there was almost an equal split between reports of Germany turning east against the Soviet Union, and preparing for an amphibious assault of Great Britain or an invasion of the British position in the Middle East. The intelligence organizations, and Stalin himself, were predisposed to expect the latter course of action. When Germany invaded the Balkans in early April, some *rezidents* reported that operations in Yugoslavia would indefinitely delay an attack on the USSR, while others reported that it would cause only a slight delay and still others said it would have no effect. Not until the second half of May did GRU reporting began to coalesce around one possibility. From that point forward, there were no longer any reports about an attack on Britain. Ten independent GRU and NKGB *rezidents* from seven separate *rezidenturas* forwarded human intelligence to Moscow about an impending German attack. The information matched reports from Red Army units and Border Troops in the
western USSR. Golikov recognized the impending calamity. Not only were his *rezidents* warning him in uncharacteristically explicit terms, Romania and Finland were mobilizing. This combination of intelligence and military realities along the entire length of the western Soviet border led Golikov to inform Stalin that Germany was on the verge of major action. Within the Stalinist system of intelligence, his warning that Germany and her allies required “special attention,” was notable and dangerous. He would not have been so blunt and jeopardized his life had he not truly believed the Wehrmacht was about to invade. Given the circumstances, he must be judged a brave and competent intelligence professional.

In addition to the human intelligence, the GRU, NKVD and NKGB also collected warning signs through a number of other methods. In early June, the Border Troops began noting changes in the nature of German activities in the General Government. Training was increasing, particularly at night. Leaves were cancelled. The Luftwaffe was violating Soviet airspace much more frequently. Espionage along and across the border was increasing. Captured German agents told their Soviet interrogators that their missions were to last no more than two or three days. Those few on longer missions were to stay undercover until the Wehrmacht reached their locations inside the Soviet Union. Signals intelligence and captured documents from foreign governments demonstrated the world’s belief that Germany was about to invade. The NKVD and NKGB acquired secret telegrams from American, Japanese and Italian diplomats, all of whom warned their respective governments that war was imminent. Finally, GRU and NKGB sources within the German embassy in Moscow noted that dozens of personnel had already or were about to return to Berlin. The remaining staff was under orders to burn all sensitive
and classified material, and on the night of 21 June, to sleep within the embassy. The combination of human intelligence, signals intelligence, aircraft sightings, border reports, and counterintelligence presented a clear picture in the final days of peace. The only point of debate that remained was the question of when the invasion would begin.

In one sense, Soviet prewar intelligence, particularly the GRU, was fairly good. By the middle of May, GRU rezidents throughout Europe and in Japan reported similar intelligence, none of which fundamentally conflicted with each other. By the first week of June, Golikov clearly believed the war was imminent as he took the bold step of explicitly warning Stalin. The performance of the GRU was only slightly worse than British intelligence, with different sources and methods and a high reputation. Whereas the GRU’s most valuable collection means was human intelligence, for the British it was signals intelligence. Having broken the Enigma system, they were able to decrypt and read a large amount of German wireless traffic. Until the end of March, the British also expected that they would be Hitler’s next target. Churchill noted,

Up until the end of March I was not convinced that Hitler was resolved on mortal war with Russia, nor how near it was. Our intelligence reports revealed in much detail the extensive German troop movements towards and into the Balkan states...But none of these necessarily involved the invasion of Russia and all were readily explainable by German interests and policy in [that area].

By early April, British intelligence began to come around to the possibility of an impending German-Soviet war, but by no means was there consensus on this point. Some believed that Germany would continue to push south, against the British Middle East, while others believed it would turn east. However, by May, there was a growing confidence that the Wehrmacht was staging for an invasion of the Soviet Union. Enigma

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278 Hinsley 1979, 450.
decryptions showed that Germany was transferring a large number of first-rate units out of Western Europe and into the General Government. Numerous Luftwaffe units in France and western Germany that had been used for attacks against Britain were ordered to relocate to Poland, while spoofing their presence in old locations through wireless deception, which British signal intelligence recognized as such. Human intelligence from Polish, Czech and Yugoslav sources also confirmed the eastward movements from Germany into the General Government and northern movements from the Balkans into Romania. By the middle of May, the Government Code and Cypher School at Bletchley Park, the site of British signals intelligence, confidently asserted that the possibility of a German attack against the Soviet Union was now a probability.

In another sense, however, Soviet prewar intelligence failed. If intelligence is to be of any value, it must be instrumental. When British intelligence detected and warned that Germany was turning against the USSR, Churchill and his generals listened. Soviet intelligence, conversely, was instrumental over the long-term, but not in the last weeks of peace, when it mattered most. Stalin clearly did not believe, or want to believe, the final warning signs collected by the GRU, NKVD and NKGB. It was not until only hours before the invasion that he let the Red Army to occupy forward defensive positions and ordered the Red Air Force to disperse its aircraft. Even then, soldiers were under explicit instructions to avoid antagonizing the Germans. Yet while Stalin was unwilling to believe the pace of intelligence in spring and early summer of 1941, he certainly recognized its trend over previous years. He viewed Germany as the Soviet Union’s most likely threat from the mid-1930s onward. He permitted the Molotov-Ribbentrop

\[\text{\textsuperscript{280} Ibid, 460-462.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{281} Ibid, 465.}\]
Pact as a means to delay an inevitable war with Hitler. Even most tellingly, he authorized a “creep up” to war. Between June 1938 and June 1941, the Red Army grew from 1.5 million to 5.3 million men. During that time, it created 31 motorized divisions, 61 tank divisions, 16 airborne brigades and almost 100 rifle divisions.\textsuperscript{282} Stalin and his generals accurately expected a massive war.

In light of the international threat environment and growing size of Soviet forces, the Soviet Main Military Council ordered the Red Army General Staff to prepare a new mobilization plan (MP-41) in August 1940. As one Soviet general explained in December 1940, “[W]e must in the shortest possible time, reorganize our army, and genuinely bring it to a high state of military readiness, to achieve a state of affairs whereby we are constantly ready at any time to set forth on the orders of the government.”\textsuperscript{283} While the People’s Commissariat for Defense approved MP-41 in February 1941, the General Staff made changes to it the following month and ordered military districts to submit their amendments by 1 May. Given the complexity of the new mobilization plan, particularly on the specifics of force mobilization, the revised version of MP-41 was not complete by Operation Barbarossa.\textsuperscript{284} Thus, when the Soviet Union entered a “special threatening military period” in April 1941, the specifics of how general mobilization would occur before war were still incomplete. Nonetheless, the Red Army, with Stalin’s approval, began to secretly transfer, as to not alarm Germany, a large number of divisions from the Far East and interior USSR to its western borders. In addition, at least seven armies and one mechanized corps were to be formed from interior

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{282} Glantz 1998, 101, 107.
\item \textsuperscript{283} “Results and tasks of military preparation of the ground forces, VVS and operational preparation of the officer corps: General K.A. Meretskov’s introduction to a conference of the upper echelons of the leadership of the Red Army, no later than 24 December 1940,” in Hill 2009, 27-28.
\item \textsuperscript{284} Glantz 1998, 100.
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forces in order to create a strategic reserve in Belorussia, Ukraine and western Russia. By 22 June, many of these divisions and armies were still moving westward. Insufficient transportation and Stalin’s demand for secrecy prevented efficiency. Similarly, from late May, Stalin allowed units already stationed in western border military districts to begin slowly and surreptitiously regrouping for improved defense. However, regrouping was only permitted for forces in the central and eastern parts of the military districts; those units along the border, closest to the Wehrmacht, were ordered to maintain their current disposition, again as to not unnecessarily provoke the Germans. Just as intelligence demonstrated by mid-April, Germany was clearly the more likely threat than Japan. Sufficient intelligence and the Soviet-Japanese non-aggression pact satisfied Stalin that Tokyo would focus on Southeast Asia. While he did not believe the intelligence about war with Germany in June 1941, he knew that it would eventually come, likely after Hitler subjugated Great Britain either through peace or war. Stalin was slowly and cautiously positioning the Red Army to meet the fascist danger.

Viktor Suvorov used many of the secretive westward Red Army deployments as evidence for his claim that Stalin was planning for an offensive against Hitler in July 1941. Several historians, including David Glantz, Gabriel Gorodetsky, Evan Mawdsley and Teddy Uldricks, effectively argued, with much more proof that Suvorov, that the Red Army was in no position to launch an attack in July. While new literature suggests that Stalin was likely planning for an offensive war at some point, perhaps in 1942, it was simply not possible in the summer of 1941. In addition to the slow, secret Red Army deployments, from May 1941, Stalin and the Soviet propaganda machine began to slowly prepare the state for war, possibly one that would be offensive in nature. On 5 May,

\[285\] Ibid, 103-104.
Stalin spoke at a military academy graduation ceremony in the Kremlin. He declared, “Defending our country, we must act offensively. From defense to go to a military doctrine of offensive action. We must transform our training, our propaganda, our agitation, [and] our press in an offensive spirit. The Red Army is a modern army and the modern army is an offensive army.”\footnote{Hill 2009, 29.} Russian historian V.A. Nevezhin characterized this speech as “the cornerstone in the internal restructuring of Soviet propaganda in the spirit of the idea of an ‘offensive’ war.”\footnote{V.A. Nevezhin, “The pact with Germany and the idea of an ‘offensive’ war (1939-1941)” \textit{The Journal of Slavic Military Studies} 8, no. 4 (1995), 833.} For example, the following week, the Soviet government tasked its filmmakers to “indoctrinate the people ‘in the spirit of a dynamic, aggressive military offensive.’” By the end of the month, the Propaganda and Agitation Directorate of the Party Central Committee drafted a proposal for a shift in propaganda efforts, including the need for new slogans such as “Defend our own land on foreign territory” and “The best defense is an offense.”\footnote{Ibid, 834, 836-837.} As Nevezhin warned, Stalin’s speech and the subsequent subtle shifts in propaganda do not mean he was preparing for an offensive war in the summer of 1941.\footnote{Ibid, 839.} However, coupled with the Red Army deployments, it does suggest that by May 1941 Stalin had begun the process of slowly and gradually preparing the Soviet people for an offensive war with Germany not in the long-term, but more likely in the medium-term.

If Stalin expected war with Germany, perhaps even one might preempt, why then did he ignore the warning signs from his intelligence organizations? This is the key question for Soviet decision-making before Barbarossa. It may not be capable of being answered, since some of the relevant evidence may not have been released and even more

\footnote{Hill 2009, 29.}
never written down, but rather remained in Stalin’s skull. In order to address this issue at all, one must combine the evidence released since 1990 on Soviet intelligence and on military planning. Firstly, the intelligence he received was conflicting until late May (GRU) and early June (NKVD and NKGB). Until only a few weeks before the invasion, some sources were still reporting that Britain was Hitler’s priority, either the Middle East or the British Isles. One NKGB source even proposed that the mass of German troops along the border was only meant to intimidate the Soviet Union into economic agreements more favorable to Berlin. Since Soviet intelligence had provided conflicting reports for so long and the preconceptions of leaders were so strong, the sudden diffusion of opaqueness and advent of clarity was not as foreboding at that time as hindsight may suggest. Even if Golikov and Zhukov saw the danger, Stalin, no idiot, did not. Equally, from as early as December 1940, sources had proposed a smattering of invasion dates. By the middle of June, many of those dates had passed peacefully. While Golikov’s intelligence summaries and sources of both the GRU and NKVD explained that the German invasion of the Balkans delayed action against the Soviet Union, a biased user of intelligence like Stalin could easily discount the perpetual warnings as red herrings, or more sinisterly, as part of a British propaganda campaign to lull the USSR into war with Germany. While Churchill did indeed want Stalin to attack Hitler, it did not mean that intelligence of German ill intentions against the USSR was of British origin. The two possibilities were not mutually exclusive, as Stalin had seemed to think them. Herein lies another shortcoming of Soviet prewar intelligence. The sole decision-maker viewed himself as the ultimate analyst. Years of meticulous involvement over intelligence with Yezhov in the Great Purges and international successes in the late 1930s, most of all the
The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, led Stalin to believe that his assessments alone were valid. He did not realize that his accomplishments in certain competitions did not translate into others. The German deception campaign was tailored specifically to Stalin, aiming to augment the ambiguity of his perceptions and to impede his decision to mobilize. It successfully catered not only to his preconceptions but also to his autocratic tendencies as a leader and consumer of intelligence. This combination of self-inflated analytical skills, absolute power and adroit German deception crippled the Soviet decision-making process.

Secondly, though more difficult to prove, Stalin likely feared the prospects of war in June 1941. The Red Army unquestionably was not prepared. It was still expanding in size and units were still slowly moving westward. The reorganization efforts of the incomplete MP-41 were “progressing less rapidly than might have been deemed desirable in May 1941.”

The Soviet government noted with unease the Wehrmacht’s rapid conquest of both France and the Balkans, which again demonstrated how powerful the enemy was. Stalin could have ordered a general mobilization as proposed by Zhukov and Timoshenko, which arguably would have put the Red Army on a better defensive footing. However, fears of provoking Germany into war cast away such an option. Furthermore, there is growing evidence that when, on 15 May 1941, Zhukov and Timoshenko proposed an offensive against Germany, Stalin entered a state of “cognitive dissonance.”

The record is incomplete and difficult to stitch together. However, it does appear with the Red Army graduation speech on 5 May and concurrent shift in propaganda, Stalin began to accept the prospects of war sooner than he originally

290 Hill 2010, 69.
291 Ibid, 70.
expected. The question was *when?* – immediately, weeks away, months away? Zhukov and Timoshenko, using Golikov’s intelligence, clearly believed war would come in 1941, though probably not as early as it did; Golikov explicitly warned Stalin in early June that it was on the verge of commencing. All three men, forgoing concerns of self-preservation in Stalin’s post-purges intelligence system, boldly tried to coax their leader into action, but to no avail. Recognizing that his military was still “creeping up” to war and perhaps appreciating the growing evidence of Germany’s short-term plans against the USSR, Stalin decided to reject, rather than accept, that the inevitable war would occur in 1941, as opposed to 1942 or 1943. The apex of Stalin’s cognitive dissonance may have been a government-sponsored communiqué on 13 June. TASS, a media arm of the Kremlin, reported,

> According to Soviet data, Germany, like the USSR, is also strictly observing the stipulations of the Soviet-German non-aggression pact, and therefore, in the opinion of Soviet circles, rumors of Germany’s intention to break the pact and open an attack on the USSR are devoid of all foundation; the recent transfer of German troops, freed from operations in the Balkans, to the eastern and north-eastern regions of Germany is, it must be assumed, connected with other reasons which have no bearing on Soviet-German relations.²⁹²

The last ditch, public attempt to avert disaster directed to Berlin obviously failed.

The inability of Soviet intelligence organizations to determine the precise date of the invasion is one the greatest impediments to victims of strategic surprise. Very often, as with the Americans and British before 7 and 8 December 1941 and the Israelis before the Yom Kippur War, victims have some sense of an impending calamity. They do not necessarily understand how or when the threat will manifest, but they understand that it is looming. Intelligence organizations tuned to detect enemy intentions face the dilemma of

²⁹² “TASS communiqué – Soviet denial of reported disagreements between the USSR and Germany, 13 June 1941, published in Izvestia, 14 June 1941,” in Hill 2009, 26-27.
sounding alarms too early and too often, thus creating a “cry wolf” situation as in the Soviet Union in 1941 in which leaders dismiss warnings, or waiting to acquire a theoretically perfect intelligence picture, which realistically is often too late to act upon. The best a victim can do once they begin to detect signs that they may be attacked is to prepare for the onslaught. However, lacking full knowledge of the enemy’s plans, they must spread their forces to protect numerous avenues of approach. The enemy needs only to concentrate in a few places. The predicament makes the victim inherently more susceptible to failure, and raises the aggressor’s chances of success. To complicate matters, the aggressor may undertake deception efforts to cover its intentions, as indeed the Germans did quite well. Furthermore, the aggressor’s own intelligence forces monitor the victim, thus may be able to note changes in force disposition that would indicate the victim was cognizant of an attack. This, in turn, allows the aggressor to either accelerate or delay its actions, as to further confuse the victim. The nature of the competition is such that the aggressor holds nearly all the power, unless of course the victim decides to attack preemptively. For the Soviet Union in June 1941, a preemptive offensive, however much considered, was not possible. Germany held nearly all the power.

Ignoring the counterfactual, even if Stalin had accepted Golikov’s warning on 7 June, it is debatable to what degree the Red Army could have prepared. On one hand, he could have ordered troops to their forward defensive positions and ordered the Red Air Force to disperse its aircraft. When he gave these orders on the night of 21 June, it was far too late. Had Stalin done so in the beginning of June, the Red Air Force would have suffered far fewer losses and the Red Army may have been able to better slow down the
German steamroller. On the other hand, the Red Army units in the western Soviet Union still would have been largely on their own. As part of the secret “creep up,” new units were arriving almost daily, but capacity constraints on the railroad, meant that Stalin would not have been able to provide any significant additional firepower. Finally, as Glantz noted, German intelligence would have likely detected these movements and accelerated Barbarossa’s start date. By early June, the Soviet Union was in an almost impossible situation. It could not prevent a German invasion. It could not, as the new wave of propaganda was going to profess, defend the Soviet Union “on foreign territory.” It could not avoid devastating losses during the initial phases of the attack, yet arguably could have reduced the scale, perhaps even by millions of men, and never approached the desperate circumstances that befell Moscow and Leningrad months later. These gains would have mattered.

Ultimately, Soviet intelligence between 1939 and June 1941 had a mixed performance. It was not until the spring of 1941 that it began to accept the possibility of a German attack before Hitler subjugated Great Britain, despite the fact that the Führer made such a decision in July 1940. The inability of the GRU and NKVD to access the highest echelons of the German government and an active German deception campaign that supposedly prioritized Britain created a situation in which a mountain of intelligence was necessary to dispel firmly-held preconceptions. It was not until mid to late May that Soviet intelligence began to coalesce and the confliction began to evaporate. It was not until 7 June that the GRU warned Stalin outright; the NKVD and NKGB never did so. To compound the difficulties of assessing German intentions, Soviet intelligence officers had to operate in a rigidly compartmentalized, overly bureaucratized and potentially
perilous intelligence system in which Stalin detested predictive analysis and explicit warnings. Despite the hurdles, the signals were present in the noise. By the first week of June, intelligence collected from a variety of sources, both within the Soviet Union and abroad, clearly demonstrated an impending calamity. The unresolved question of \textit{when} the attack would begin, coupled with the previous supposed invasion dates that passed peacefully, strengthened Germany’s position. The inability of Stalin to forgo certain preconceptions, or unwillingness to accept the clarity of Soviet intelligence, in the last weeks of peace ensured that the Wehrmacht achieved strategic surprise on 22 June 1941.
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