Stalin, Mao, Communism, and their 21st-Century Aftermath in Russia and China

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By

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INTRODUCTION

In modern political theory, there is a distinction made between socialism and communism, and thereby the relative positions they occupy on schematic diagrams of the political spectrum.

In communism, the state, incarnated in one political party, owns all means of production, distribution, and even consumption, ostensibly under an egalitarian and "on need" basis. In practice, communist party officials, as political elites, are "more equal than others," and reserve to themselves their "fair share" at the expense of the masses. Moreover, communism comes about by the "class struggle" and imposition by force and violent revolution, for the establishment of the "dictatorship of the proletariat."

To paraphrase Mao Tse-tung, communism is the attainment of political power by the barrel of a gun and complete control of all services and the methods of production, distribution, and consumption of goods by the omnipotent state. There are minimal or no private property rights. The repressive machinery of the secret police and the military maintain the social, economic, and political power structure in the nation.

My definition of modern socialism is the assumption and maintenance of power via incremental evolution—that is, seduction of the population by political elites who promise something for nothing but in reality, take from some to give to others; the use of envy to incite class strife and the dark side of human nature in order to justify wealth redistribution schemes carried out by legalized plunder. The redistribution of wealth and management of power is orchestrated by the political elites who are above the rest of the common people, and ostensibly to protect the common people for their own good. This unnatural "equality" is maintained by the state controlling through regulation or taxation the means of production, such as manufacturing, the distribution of products via transportation or communication, and the consumption of goods or services (for example, food, health care, housing, education indoctrination, et cetera).

Therefore, communism and socialism are derived from Marxist dogma—a fact that is frequently forgotten. Both communism and socialism are collectivist forms of regimes of the left in the political spectrum, as predicated by the tenets of excessive, oppressive, or brutally authoritarian governments. These "isms" are considered "working class movements" by

the ones espousing them. The seemingly benign connotation of socialism today as democratic and altruistic would be a source of laughter to the innovators, namely, Karl Marx (1818–1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820–1895), and to the actual applicators like Vladimir I. Lenin (1870–1924), Joseph Stalin (1879–1953), Mao Tse-tung (1893–1976) or Fidel Castro (1926–2016). If one visited the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) website, or read the *Collected Works of Lenin*, or listened to the speeches of Fidel Castro, one would quickly realize that all communist demigods use the terms socialism and communism interchangeably.

In the Preface to *The Communist Manifesto,* Friedrich Engels explained why he and Marx chose to call their manifesto "communist" rather than "socialist." Marx and Engels wanted to differentiate their political theory from other brands of socialism and not be confused with the British or European movements then in vogue, which referred to themselves as "socialists." Thus, their incendiary document was named *The Communist Manifesto* instead of "The Socialist Manifesto."[1]

Vladimir Lenin wrote that in the relentless march of history (positivism) and the class struggle (dialectical materialism or dialectics), the ultimate goal of socialism was communism and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Lenin called American and European liberals of his day "useful idiots" and "fellow travelers" because they wanted to believe in the "workers' paradise" instead of the harsh reality of Soviet socialism. It was Lenin, and not Joseph Stalin, who heralded the era of the concentration camps in Soviet Russia and ordered the formation of the Cheka, the infamous secret police under the direction of Felix Dzerzhinsky. Lenin also began the extermination of the Kadets (Constitutional Democrats) to his right and Socialist Revolutionary (LSR) opponents to his left in the political struggle. Stalin intensified the process and not only exterminated the purported "enemies of the people" but also wiped out almost the entire ranks of Lenin's old Bolshevik comrades, including Lev Kamenev, Gregory Zinoviev, Nikolai Bukharin, Karl Radek, Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko (leader of the Bolshevik Military Organization that stormed the Winter Palace during the 1917 October Revolution), Gleb I. Bokii, Y.A. Ganetsky (Polish communist who was Lenin's liaison with the Germans during World War I and the sealed train affair), and Leon Trotsky, et cetera. No one killed more communists than the communist-in-chief himself, Joseph Stalin.[2]

So, class warfare, the inception of the labor camps, the Gulag, the Red Terror, the extermination of class enemies and political opponents all began with Vladimir Lenin soon after the October Revolution of 1917 and, as we shall learn in the following chapters, intensified to a fevered pitch

under Joseph Stalin. That is why Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* contains *1918–1956* in the title.[3] Those years include the Lenin, Stalin, and early years of the collective Soviet leadership, ostensibly led by Georgy Malenkov.

Soviet repression moderated under Nikita Khrushchev. But even Khrushchev crushed the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, the same year he denounced Stalin at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. He also ordered the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 and brought the world to the brink of nuclear war in the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. Leonid Brezhnev, who engaged United States President Richard Nixon and the West in détente, ordered the crushing of the Prague Spring in 1968 and the fatal invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Thus, Soviet repression did not end, in fact, until the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the disintegration of the USSR and its satellites (1989–1991). Nevertheless, authoritarianism seems to be an inherent part of the Russian character and persists to this day under Russian "democracy" and Vladimir Putin.[4]

And as much as the proponents of social democracy (SD) would like to forget, social democracy is also derived from Marxist ideology and grounded in the social revolutionary faith.[5] At the turn of the century, Rosa Luxemburg (1871–1919) and Karl Liebknecht (1871–1919) were the patron saints of Marxism and social democracy in Germany. Later, they participated in the Spartacus League and founded the Communist Party of Germany. Their counterpart in Russia was Georgi Plekhanov (1856–1918), the father of the Social Democratic Party of Russia to which both Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin initially belonged before the SD split into the more moderate, democratic Mensheviks and the conspiratorial, communist Bolsheviks.

After Alexander Kerensky's Provisional Government was overthrown in the October Revolution, it was Vladimir Lenin and the Bolsheviks that came to power. Many of the Mensheviks went into exile, and those who stayed in Russia were hunted down by Lenin's Cheka or exterminated by Stalin's security apparatus or in the destructive gulag labor camps. Furthermore, the derivation of social democracy from Marxism is not denied or contended by the European social democratic parties today.

Despite the fall of the Berlin Wall, socialism in the Western democracies, including in the United States, has continued to grow either surreptitiously or openly and incrementally by the seduction of the masses rather than by a violent class struggle or radical revolution. In the United States, socialism is expanding in the form of increased dependence on government and the welfare state.

Governments that fully embrace socialism soon find their economies weakened or near collapse from debt and overindulgence. When they try to dump Karl Marx's socialism, riots ensue as we have seen repeatedly in many nations of Western Europe. It is difficult for people who have become dependent on government to move away from it and regain personal autonomy. It is a vicious cycle of dependency that is very difficult to break once instituted.

Socialism is the theoretical and historic precursor to communism. The nations of Central and Eastern Europe that experienced the full brunt of socialism and communism in the past no longer brag about Marxism and are trying to move as far away as they can from collectivism.

It is time we heed the warnings and learn from the brutal lessons of totalitarian history.

Finally, this book is not a comprehensive or a chronological history of the Soviet Union, China, or Russia in the 20th and 21st centuries. It is a literary investigation annotating the salient events in the history of the Soviet Union under Stalin and, very briefly, of some of his successors. We only take a glimpse of Mao Tse-tung and China, and "democratic" Russia under Vladimir Putin.[6] The events that piqued my interest are the ones described in this tome.

Miguel A. Faria, Jr., M.D.
Milledgeville, Georgia
September 6, 2023

PART I

JOSEPH STALIN AND THE YEARS OF TERROR

CHAPTER 1

YOUNG STALIN— THE GEORGIA BANDIT

Joseph Vissarionovich Djugashvili (1879–1953), later known as Stalin, began his revolutionary career as a communist subversive or, more accurately, a bandit in his native country of Georgia, part of the Tsarist Russian Empire. The story is enthrallingly recounted in *Young Stalin*, the absorbing and authoritative biography of Stalin's early years, written by Simon Sebag Montefiore. There is a lot more that we learn from Montefiore that was not commonly known or written about in the previous biographies of Stalin, especially during his early years before he became the Red Tsar.

In the tantalizing Prologue, Montefiore related the details of the audacious robbery and bloody bombing at the festive Yerevan Square in the center of the town of Tiflis (now Tbilisi, the capital of the Republic of Georgia). The heist, which was carried out on June 13, 1907, by the 29-year-old Soso (Stalin's nickname) and his band of Georgian gangsters, was orchestrated to help finance Vladimir Lenin's communist revolution.[1]

The terrorists made off with an incredible sum of money, approximately 300,000 rubles or over $34 million U.S. dollars. Dozens of innocent bystanders as well as Tsarist Cossack guards were killed or wounded in the attack when the terrorists detonated a number of powerful bombs that shook the center of the town. Nevertheless, it was the perfect crime in that afterwards no one talked (even then Stalin ran a tight ship with hermetically sealed security) and no one got arrested.[1]

Most of the stolen money was funneled clandestinely to Lenin, who had authorized the young Stalin to carry out the sanguinary deed. However, the blood money caused financial bickering among the revolutionaries, and the carnage marred the image of the more radical faction in the Russian Social-Democrats that was led by Stalin in Georgia and by Lenin, the supreme leader or "the eagle of the mountain," in Russia.

By 1912, the Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party (SDP) had irrevocably split between the factions of Lenin's Bolsheviks, the purported "majority," and the more moderate Mensheviks, the followers of Jewish revolutionist Yuli Martov and Georgi Plekhanov, the father of the

SDP. Generally, the Bolsheviks wanted a small, tightly controlled, conspiratorial, intellectual group to rule in the name and place of the workers in order to establish a "dictatorship of the proletariat." For the Bolsheviks, the end always justified the means so violence, assassinations, and bank robberies were considered necessary, and suspected traitors were promptly annihilated to "protect" the revolution. Young Stalin became an "immediate" Bolshevik.

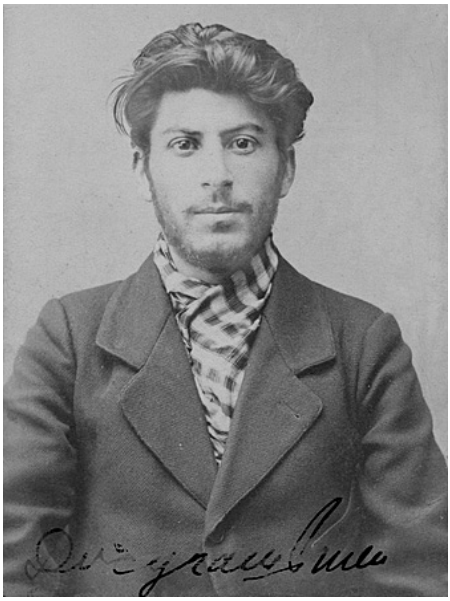

Figure 1: Police photograph of Stalin ("Soso") when he was 23 years old in 1902. Batum Gendarme Administration

On the other hand, the Mensheviks tended to be somewhat more democratic, and were prepared to allow both workers and peasants to participate in the ruling oligarchy. The Mensheviks were also less violent and by in large condemned terrorism, murder, and bank robbery. So a split between the two rival factions of the SDP was bound to occur. Soso and his Georgian bandits helped to accelerate that split and make it irrevocable. Decades later and when firmly in power, Stalin would hunt down former members of the Menshevik Party in one of his early purges, the 1931 Menshevik Trial.[2]

Stalin had a “saintly” mother, Ekaterina “Keke” Geladze, who sacrificed everything in order to educate her poor but gifted son in a seminary in an attempt to convert and have him embrace the Orthodox Church. But he also had a drunkard for a father, a cobbler named Vissarion “Beso” Djugashvili, who frequently beat young Soso and Keke.

The reader is also introduced to the three powerful men who protected Soso and Keke from Beso as the young Stalin grew up. All three men at various times were suspected of being Stalin’s real father. Stalin would not have survived childhood without them.[3]

Figure 2: Ekaterina Djugashvili (“Keke” Geladze), mother of Joseph Stalin in 1892. Gori photographer

Montefiore describes the evolving attitude and explains the psychological profile of the studious child and rebellious youth who grows up to be a ruthless, sanguinary, unforgiving young adult with an imperturbable and treacherous disposition. In rapid strides the child becomes a man, a man who becomes a monster, a monster that reigns as communist dictator over the vast Russian Empire (1924–1953)—the same empire over which the ineffectual Romanov Tsar, Nicholas II, was forced to abdicate following the February Revolution of 1917.

Montefiore used archival material that laid forgotten in dusty storage for years, interviewed eyewitnesses or their descendants, and perhaps most importantly, uncovered and published material made available for the first time from a number of previously unpublished memoirs. This included material from Stalin's former girlfriends, terrorist comrades, and revolutionary rivals who knew him well; many of them later turned against him and perished.

Lazar Kaganovich, a Bolshevik and a Stalin stalwart, once said there were several versions of Stalin's persona. Indeed, we learn about young Stalin's various developing personalities: The hard working and gifted student; the talented Georgian poet; the seminary choirboy and later tenor singer; the "consummate actor"; and the revolutionary bandit and terrorist enforcer. It is easy to follow the progression then from Bolshevik leader to communist tyrant, and ultimately to totalitarian monster.

Figure 3: Lazar Moiseevich Kaganovich in the 1930s, Deputy Premier of the Soviet Union and Stalin's henchman in his inner circle. Eleazar Langman

Additionally, we are reassured by Montefiore that what we learned from authors like exiled and literary figures Fyodor Dostoevsky and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn about the Tsarist prison and exile system, where

many revolutionary figures spent considerable time prior to the October Revolution of 1917, was indeed correct.[4]

In fact, Montefiore expounded on the Tsarist judicial system as it related to revolutionaries:

> *The Tsarist authorities recognized, due to the special challenges of evidence and secrecy, that terrorists and revolutionaries could not be tried by jury or judge: the local Gendarme officer recommended a sentence to the local Governor-General who forwarded it on to the Special Commission—five Justice and Interior officials who passed sentence. The Interior Minister confirmed it; the Emperor signed off. Stalin was habitually sentenced this way. Between 1881 and 1904, only 11,879 were sentenced like this, while during Stalin's reign of the same approximate time span, he presided over the deportation of an astonishing 28 million, several million of whom never returned. As for capital punishment under the Tsars, Catholic Poles and Jews in the western provinces were much more likely to be hanged than Orthodox Russians or Georgians.[5]*

The Tsarist prison-exile penal system was very lenient, particularly for well-placed revolutionaries like Vladimir Lenin. Even Montefiore—who wrote at times with subtle admiration for the idealist, young revolutionaries and almost always with clear distaste for the old Tsarist regime—was forced to admit:

> *Siberian exile was regarded as one of the most terrible abuses of the Tsarist tyranny. It was certainly boring and depressing, but once settled in some god-forsaken village, the exiles, intellectuals who were frequently hereditary noblemen, were usually well treated. Such paternalistic sojourns more resembled dull reading holidays than the living hell of Stalin's murderous Gulag. The exiles even received pocket money from the Tsar—12 roubles for a nobleman such as Lenin, 11 roubles for a school graduate such as Molotov, and 8 for a peasant such as Stalin—with which to pay for clothes, food and rent. If they received too much money from home, they lost their allowance.[6]*

In support of Alexander Ostrovsky, who denied the much-disputed assertion that Stalin had been a part-time agent of the Tsar's secret police, the Okhrana, in pre-revolutionary days, Montefiore agreed that it would have been easy for Stalin to obtain the money for the false papers he needed to escape at various times because escape was not difficult from the lenient Tsarist exile:

Between 1906 and 1909, over 18,000 obscure exiles out of a total of 32,000 raised the 100 roubles needed 'to buy their boots'—the false papers needed to escape.[7]

Even in exile Stalin preferred to associate with the criminal elements rather than with his political intellectual confreres. And from these associations, he learned valuable lessons that he would continue to apply criminally and politically after he became dictator—for example, to manipulate the criminal elements to do his bidding as informants, enforcers, and later as dreaded members of his security apparatus.

The similarities in the upbringing and modus operandi of Joseph Stalin and Fidel Castro in their youth are so striking that I cannot pass up the opportunity to point them out. Although the two men came from different socioeconomic backgrounds, as youngsters both thought they were special, different from and better than other children, despite the fact they grew up in the shadow and stigma of possible illegitimacy. Both children went to religious schools, where they excelled and strove to be the best at everything, but they were also bullies and had to be the leaders. As they became older, these men became more ruthless and unforgiving, and did not hesitate to eliminate opponents; they were troublemakers and trouble followed them wherever they went (for example, Stalin in Batumi and burning Baku, and Castro in Santiago de Cuba and Havana student days and in Colombia's "Bogotazo").[8]

Both men became criminal gangsters and carried guns (Stalin was a "Mauserist," Castro, a "pistolero"), but they learned to delegate the dirty work of killing to others (enforcers). They were master conspirators, who controlled the underground (Stalin was the supreme instigator of *konspiratsia*); and both were actors and orators (at this, Castro was the better of the two). Both men came to believe that because of their sense of revolutionary mission and leadership, they were owed everything that their comrades, and anyone who came in contact with them, could provide (for example, shelter, food, money and women). When in prison, both Stalin and Castro were treated very leniently, at times almost like celebrities, and so frequently they made successful demands upon their jailers, such as the use of books, and permission to teach their militant catechism to fellow prisoners—all of which would be unthinkable for prisoners of communist regimes.

Both Stalin and Fidel Castro used women as lovers and were frequently supported by them, but these women comrades were discarded when they were of no further use to the two leaders. Both men vehemently condemned the "crimes" of their predecessors (namely, Tsar Nicolas II and Fulgencio Batista), only to vastly surpass them in cruelty and barbarity once

they attained power. And when Stalin and Castro reached supreme power, they knew how to wield it and hold onto it, so that even the members of their inner circle and security apparatus feared them.

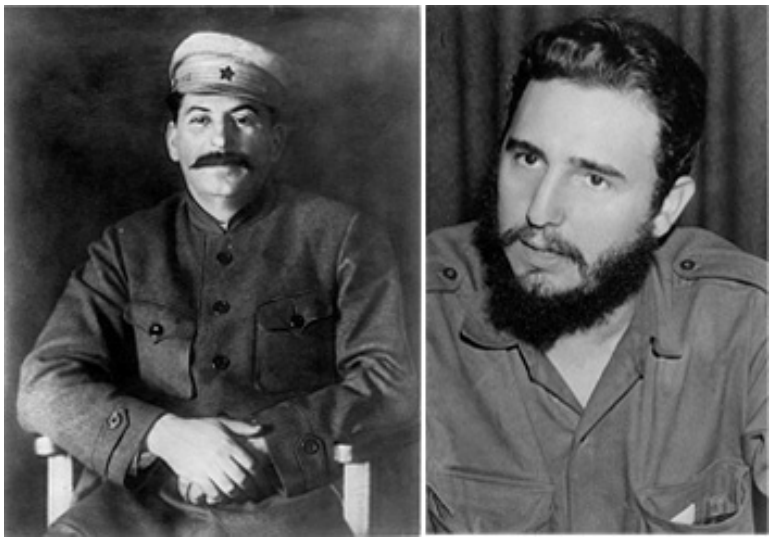

Figure 4: Joseph Stalin in 1920 (left) and Fidel Castro in the 1950s (right). Stalin Digital Archive/Mondadori Publishers

Yet, both men could be pragmatic when they had to be, such as Stalin opening churches during World War II to inspire patriotism and temporarily closing the Comintern to charm the allies, and Fidel Castro allowing tourism and travel to Cuba for much needed hard cash and supporting the Soviets during the crushing of the Prague Spring in 1968.

Both men reinterpreted Marxism-Leninism to serve their needs in wielding absolute power and to feed their cults of personality. In short, one cannot avoid drawing the conclusion that the two men differ only in quantity, not in kind. Fidel Castro ruled over a circumscribed and captive island; Stalin ruled over a vast empire with influence over the entire globe. As Lord Acton's aphorism observed, "Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely.[9]

I would also be remiss if I did not state that I agree with Montefiore in one of his underlying themes, namely that Stalin played a much larger role in the Russian revolution than we have heretofore been led to believe by some historians and documentary filmmakers. Following Leon Trotsky's

judgment of Stalin as "an outstanding mediocrity of our Party" (a fatal error on his part) and his insistence that Stalin's role in the revolutionary struggle was minimal, many historians took note. Trotsky, for example, wrote that Stalin spent the Revolution of 1905 (what Trotsky famously called the "dress rehearsal") "in an unpretentious office writing dull comments on brilliant events."[10] Unquestionably, historians have followed the historical line of Trotsky, who was a prolific writer and lived in Mexico until his assassination at Stalin's direct order in 1940.

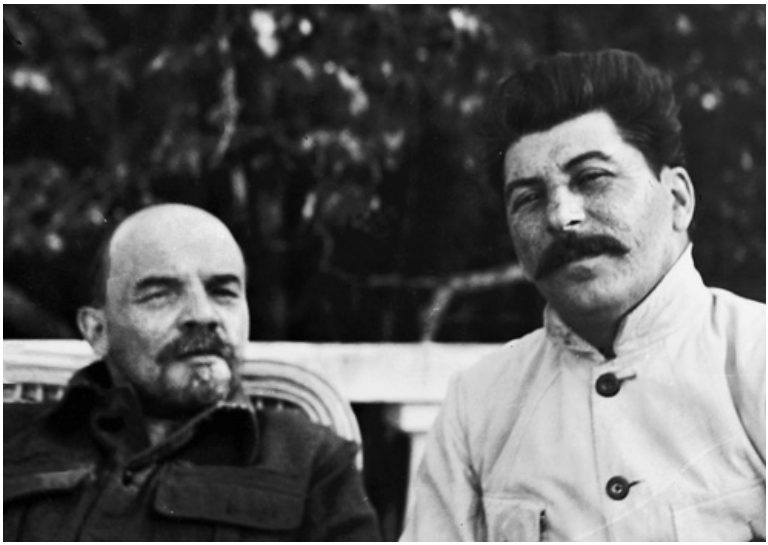

Figure 5: Stalin (right) confers with an ailing Lenin at Gorki in September 1922. Maria Ulyanova

In 1956, Nikita Khrushchev began to dismantle Stalin's cult of personality and rewrite the story of the Russian revolution that had been previously revised by Stalin and Lavrenti Beria to give Stalin the central role next to Lenin. In the subsequent revision processes, the early part Stalin played in Georgia, and later in Russia, was ignored and forgotten. Montefiore's *Young Stalin* brings that forgotten history to the fore, accurately readjusting the chronicles to document Stalin's proper role up to the time of the Revolution of 1917. Suffice to say, Stalin had a major and bloody role to play as a Georgian bandit, conspiratorial enforcer, ruthless terrorist, efficient organizer, even orator and Bolshevik. While Lenin tarried in Zurich, bickering with other exiles and the German Social Democrats or

at times remaining disconsolate, doubting that revolution would ever come to Russia[11]; Stalin was active, robbing banks and eliminating enemies, yet imperturbable, even in prison or in exile in Siberia, certain that "blood would run in torrents" and that the Bolsheviks would topple the Tsar and gain power.

Young Stalin is a well-organized tome of over 400 pages and includes Stalin's family tree, maps, quaint and rare illustrations and photographs, lists of characters, et cetera. The text, source notes, selected bibliography and index are 397 pages. Montefiore's research is exemplary. He has written a fascinating book for those interested in Stalin and Soviet history as well as political science, terrorism, revolutions, the psychology and incarnation of evil, and ultimately the ascent to power of arguably the worst tyrant and the greatest mass murderer in history, except perhaps Mao Tse-tung. The book adds significantly to those areas and becomes absolutely the authoritative biography of Stalin in his early years. One caveat, despite Montefiore's view to the contrary, some readers may still not be convinced that Stalin did not at times cooperate with the Okhrana as a double agent.[12]

Although Montefiore carried out superb scholarship and was very diligent in condemning Stalin's crimes, I must warn the readers that he evinced an almost subliminal admiration for Stalin the revolutionary that may be disconcerting for some readers who have experienced the evils of communism first hand. Indeed in his Acknowledgments, Montefiore humorously wrote that his wife found the "blood soaked presence of Stalin in our marriage a trial of endurance," but after publication of the work, "we finally enter our own period of deStalinization."[13] I expect his deStalinization to be complete now, and I congratulate him on this magnificent tour de force.

CHAPTER 2

A LITERARY OVERVIEW OF STALIN'S MEAT GRINDER

Several Russian and non-Russian authors have written excellent biographies of Joseph Stalin from the time of Mikhail Gorbachev's glasnost and perestroika to the democratic Russia of Boris Yeltsin. Let us now briefly mention several of those biographies in this chapter for those seeking material on this subject for further research.

Stalin in "Triumph and Tragedy" (1988)

As head of the Institute of Military History of the USSR and General of the Soviet Army, Dmitri Volkogonov had access to secret Soviet documents that were not available to other historians up to the time of Mikhail Gorbachev's glasnost and perestroika.

Volkogonov's *Stalin: Triumph and Tragedy* is authoritative, engaging, and an instructive biography of the Joseph Stalin, the Red Tsar of Soviet communism. It was published in Russia in 1988 but was not translated into English and published in the West until 1991—the pivotal year when the Russian bear stumbled, bringing about the total collapse of Soviet communism.[1]

The fact that Volkogonov's biography of Stalin was completed and published during the years of glasnost and perestroika is crucial in understanding his work. One gets the impression that he had ambivalent feelings about the ideals, utility, and worthiness of Soviet communism, which he usually referred to as socialism. His ambivalence may have been the result of political doubts and anxiety from his dual life in the communist Soviet Union and then in a democratic Russia in transition.

Even by 1988, the general had not quite shed the skin of his "socialist" background. To all outward appearances, Volkogonov was a hardline military man, a general, and deputy chief of the main political section of the Soviet army and navy. Secretly, he was a historian, researching and writing about the life of crime of the Red Tsar, Joseph

Stalin. One is left to wonder if Volkogonov would have concluded his assessment differently had the Russian edition been finished in 1992 or 1993, rather than 1988.

At times, Volkogonov seemed to imply that if Stalin had not usurped the reins of power and Vladimir Lenin's course had been followed then Soviet communism in the USSR—as originally traced by Lenin and theoretically enforced after his death by a collective leadership—might have ended in a more democratic socialism, a true Russian socialistic, but always elusive, "workers' paradise."

At other times, Volkogonov seemed to admit that even with the collective leadership, the course of Russian history might not have made a difference because Lenin, just like Stalin, had called for the pragmatic use of force and terror.

In a footnote, Volkogonov recalled that after the February Revolution, the Provisional Government convened a Constituent Assembly that would have established a constitution for the Russian people to "determine the nature of the state." But lawful, constitutional rule never happened. After Lenin seized power, elections were held, but when the Bolsheviks received less than a quarter of the votes, they quickly dispersed the Assembly by force on January 18, 1918—thereby ending the one and only "democratic" session.[2]

Neither Lenin nor Stalin wanted democracy or constitutional rule; they wanted to eliminate the opposition at any cost and establish a "dictatorship of the proletariat"—not in the image of the workers or peasants as they proclaimed, but in their own conspiratorial and dictatorial image. And yet, Volkogonov was at times reluctant to cast Lenin and Stalin in the same collectivist, autocratic, totalitarian mold. The general insisted that events could have taken a different turn if only they had paid heed to Lenin's less strident course.

Volkogonov asserted that possibility, despite the fact that he himself provided evidence that, except for Nikolai Bukharin in the 1920s and 1930s, all of the Bolsheviks followed the lead of Lenin and Stalin—not only Stalin's minions, such as Vyacheslav Molotov, Kliment Voroshilov, and Lazar Kaganovich, but also Leon Trotsky, Lev Kamenev, and Gregory Zinoviev. All of the Bolsheviks sanctioned the use of violence, the use of coercive state power, and the use of terror in peacetime or wartime to consolidate Soviet power and subdue the Russian masses in whose name they supposedly ruled.[3]

Volkogonov documented that Kamenev and Zinoviev, leading Politburo members, ironically orchestrated Stalin's election to the office of General Secretary of the USSR. They erred in the belief that they could

manipulate Stalin against Trotsky and that they could then exercise more power through the influential Politburo. Simply, they feared Trotsky more than they feared Stalin. They would later pay with their lives for that misjudgment and become two of Stalin's most celebrated Bolshevik victims.[4]

Figure 6: Nikolai Bukharin in 1930, Marxist philosopher and former Editor-in-Chief of *Pravda*, shot by Stalin's NKVD in 1936 during the Terror

Stalin's craftiness and will power were vastly underestimated by his Bolshevik comrades. During the Party Congresses, verbal duels over Trotsky's call for "world revolution" versus Stalin's state policy of "socialism in one country" erupted. Trotsky thought of Stalin as an "outstanding mediocrity," another misjudgment that later proved fatal to Trotsky.[5]

Volkogonov's engaging narrative takes us through the political purges, the meat grinding of Russian society, and the elimination of Stalin's real or imagined opponents: The "Right deviationists," such as Alexei Rykov, Mikhail Tomsky, and of course, their leader, Bukharin (who Lenin called "the favorite of the whole Party") and the military exemplified by Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky; the Left internationalists like Trotsky and his followers; and the vacillators, including the Bolshevik duo, Kamenev and Zinoviev.[6]

Figure 7: Leon Trotsky in January 1924 on the cover of the magazine *Prozhektor*

Even those who once served in Stalin's secret police, the NKVD, were not immune from scrutiny, and a number of them who had killed other comrades in his name, such as Genrikh Yagoda and Nikolai Yezhov, were executed as the meat grinder continued. Other NKVD security personalities survived Stalin, such as Viktor Abakumov, but feared by the collective leadership that followed, was finally executed in 1954 under the regime of Georgy Malenkov and Nikita Khrushchev.[7]

One cannot help but note the similarities to events that took place in France a little more than a century earlier. In the French Revolution, Maximilien Robespierre destroyed his royalist enemies first; next, the courageous Girondins led by Madame Roland, Jacques Pierre Brissot, Pierre Vergniaud and their followers on the right; followed by the vicious troublemakers of the left, including the cowardly "enrages," René Hébert (founder and editor of *Le Pere Duchesne,* the extreme radical newspaper) and the Paris Commune leader Pierre Gaspard Chaumette; and finally, the moderate "indulgents," who eventually included Camille Desmoulins and Georges Danton, the "Titan of the French Revolution."

Figure 8: Andrey Vyshinsky in 1940, Procurator General of the Soviet Union ("hanging judge"), Soviet diplomat. Grigory Mikhailovich Vayl/RIA Novosti

Even Stalin's sanguinary state prosecutor, the odious Andrey Vyshinsky, who tormented and harangued "enemies of the people" during the secret or kangaroo trials of the Great Purge of 1937 elicits in the reader images of Antoine Fouquier-Tinville, the sinister, bloodthirsty Prosecutor for the Revolutionary Tribunals during the French Revolution. Acting under orders from Robespierre, just as Vyshinsky acted under orders from Stalin, Fouquier-Tinville administered grotesque impersonations of justice, preordained convictions, summary executions, and the perpetuation of terror. But unlike the reign of terror of Robespierre, which lasted less than two years, Stalin's reign of terror lasted decades, fluctuating in intensity as he saw fit during the entire period of his emerging dictatorship from approximately 1924 until the day of his death, March 5, 1953. And Stalin's legacy of totalitarian communism lived on until 1991.

Therefore, it was with good reason that the French Girondin Deputy and orator, Vergniaud, exclaimed, "The revolution, like Saturn, devours its own children."[8] And so it did in Russia too. Toward the end, only Stalin and his inner circle of loyal henchmen (dissimulating or not) survived; that circle included, Beria, Malenkov, Molotov, Kaganovich, Anastas Mikoyan, Nikolai Bulganin, and Khrushchev.

While General Volkogonov described the brutality and the crimes of the Stalin years in graphic detail—reconstructed from interviews as well as secret documents from the archives of the Communist Party of the USSR, military records, Comintern papers, and letters—one must keep in mind that intelligence (NKVD) records were not available to him.

Ironically, for secret foreign intelligence and Stalin's use of espionage and the KGB against the United States and Western Europe, one must still turn to materials mostly collected and published in the West—for example, books on the decrypted Venona documents, the Mitrokhin Archive, and the excellent work of the British historian Christopher Andrew—which will be cited in later chapters.

Stalin as "Breaker of Nations" (1991)

Stalin: Breaker of Nations by the British-American historian, Robert Conquest, covers the life of Joseph Stalin, from his childhood in Gori in the Republic of Georgia, to his death at his Nearer dacha in Kuntsevo, a former town near Moscow, on March 5, 1953.[9]

Conquest began by informing the reader:

> *In the early summer of 1918, the Bolsheviks moved into a 'socialist phase,' with nationalization, food requisitioning and all the other dictatorial measures later described as 'War Communism'—though at the time clearly presented as the fulfillment of the party's long term aims.[10]*

Only popular opposition and peasant rebellions forced Lenin to temporarily change course with the New Economic Policy. Without exception, all of the Bolsheviks—that is, Lenin, Trotsky, Kamenev, Zinoviev, Bukharin, Yakov Sverdlov, Sergo Ordzhonikidze, et cetera—condoned violence and terror against the enemies of the Revolution, real or imagined. What separated Stalin from the rest was that Stalin would use terror indiscriminately as a matter of course, not only against the civilian population but also most ominously and unflinchingly against his former comrades, and without sparing the families of his political opponents (including his own).[11]

Through the sequential Congresses of the Party, one follows Stalin's career as he ascended the levels of power with words and deeds, until he reached the zenith of despotic, autocratic, and absolute power.

After the 17th Party Congress of 1934, "the Congress of Victors," Stalin's triumph was complete. Then, the Congress ceased convening. He now ruled with his inner circle, his minions, who flattered and cajoled him but also feared him.