

Glantz Soviet Military Operations during the Soviet-German War 1941-45 as Indicators of the USSR's Postwar Territorial Ambitions and International Influence

研究会記録

Soviet Military Operations during the Soviet-German War 1941-45 as Indicators of the USSR's Postwar Territorial Ambitions and International Influence

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Defining the Question

Recent research on military operations the Soviet Army conducted during the Soviet-German War (1941-45) and the Soviet-Japanese War (August-September 1945), together with new Russian archival releases, indicate that Josef Stalin, Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars and Generalissimo of the Soviet Union, sought territorial acquisitions and the expansion of the USSR's foreign influence to a far greater degree than formerly believed. Research demonstrates that, as early as February 1943 and to a vastly increased extent thereafter, Stalin orchestrated Red Army offensive actions designed not only to restore the territorial integrity of the prewar Soviet Union but also to extend Soviet control or influence over other territories external to its prewar boundaries. Further, in the winter campaign of 1945, Stalin's insistence on accomplishing these goals prompted him to alter existing strategic plans fundamentally in order to exploit unanticipated opportunities afforded by sharply altered diplomatic circumstances.

Admittedly, since important Soviet archival materials remain to be released, this study is inherently incomplete. However, the facts and patterns the study identifies leave no doubt about the fundamental premise; that is, for whatever reason, Stalin's program for aggrandizing Soviet power in the postwar world was indeed genuine.

The First Period of the War, 22 June 1941-18 November 1942

Of necessity, as he orchestrated military operations during the first period of the Soviet-German War, Stalin's actions and strategic intent were governed largely by defensive concerns. By definition, this period of the war encompassed German Operations *Barbarossa* and *Blau*, twin strategic offensives that the German Wehrmacht and its Allies conducted successively in the summers and falls of 1941 and 1942, which sought nothing short of the outright destruction of the Red Army and Stalin's Soviet Union as a whole.

The spectacular successes the Germans achieved during the early and middle stages of these offensives did catastrophic harm to the Red Army, deprived the Soviet

Union of thousands of square kilometers of territory, along with much of its industrial and agricultural base, and left Stalin with no choice but to manage chaos, erect defenses, and strike back at the enemy at every opportunity simply to slow or contain his advance. As head of the country's *Stavka* (High Command) and, later, its Supreme High Commander, Stalin's preeminent task was to halt the German invasion before it achieved its aims and to strike back sufficiently to regain the strategic initiative and force the Wehrmacht to make the transition from offense to defense. Fortunately for the Soviet Union, the Red Army was able to do so at the gates of Moscow in December 1941 and, once again, in the Stalingrad region in November 1942.

Therefore, excepting the brief period of euphoria generated by the Red Army's victory at Moscow during the winter of 1941-42, survival was the Soviets' principal goal during the first sixteen months of the war. Translated into military jargon, this meant that the "center of gravity" [or strategic focal point] of Red Army offensive operations during the first period of war was the destruction of the Wehrmacht's military forces, with territorial acquisitions distinctly playing "second fiddle." This strategic pattern persisted during the summer and early fall of 1942, when, after pummeling the Red Army unmercifully, the advancing Wehrmacht reached the Volga River at Stalingrad and drove deep into the Caucasus region. However, as had been the case in 1941, in 1942 sheer attrition exacted its deadly toll on the Germans, in the process producing another unexpected Soviet victory that would alter the outcome of the war.

The Second Period of the War, 19 November 1942-31 December 1943

The Red Army launched Operation Uranus, its long-anticipated strategic counteroffensive in the Stalingrad region, on 19 November 1942. Within the astonishingly brief period of four days, the attacking Soviet forces destroyed Romanian Third and Fourth Armies and encircled German Sixth Army in the Stalingrad pocket. After defeating German attempts to rescue or relieve German forces encircled in this pocket by 19 December, fresh Soviet offensives along the middle reaches of the Don River and in the Kotel'nikovo region destroyed Italian Eighth Army and severely damaged German Fourth Panzer Army. Thereafter, while the armies of the Soviet Don Front destroyed German forces encircled at Stalingrad, the armies of three more *fronts* [army groups] expanded the counteroffensive into a full-scale winter campaign during which the advancing Soviet forces destroyed Hungarian Second Army, severely

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damaged German Second Army, and thrust westward into the Kursk, Khar'kov, and Donbas [Donets Basin] regions by early February 1943. Swept away by enthusiasm and optimism generated by these victories, Stalin unleashed a series of massive new multi-*front* offensives in mid-February, which aimed at nothing short of driving German forces westward across the Dnepr River, raising the siege of Leningrad, and pushing Army Group North's forces back to the eastern borders of the Soviet Union's former Baltic republics.¹

The Red Army's spectacular achievements during the Uranus counteroffensive and the subsequent winter campaign of 1942-43 began fundamentally altering Soviet military strategy. Prior to early February 1943, Stalin sought, first and foremost, to destroy German forces and compel their remnants to retreat westward. During this period, territorial gains were essentially coincidental to these aims. However, this strategic pattern began changing by mid-February. Sensing that a collapse of Axis forces might be imminent, Stalin and his *Stavka* now began assigning missions to its operating *fronts* that were characterized by vastly expanded territorial objectives.

For example, beginning in early February, the *Stavka* directed the Southwestern and Southern Fronts, flanked on the right (north) by the Voronezh Front, to clear the Khar'kov and Donbas regions of German forces, penetrate to Poltava, and reach the Dnepr River from the Kremenchug region southward to the Black Sea and entrance to the Crimean peninsula. Once these offensives were under way, the *Stavka* ordered its newly-formed Central Front, supported on the right (north) by the Bryansk Front and the armies on the Western Front's left wing, to expel German forces from the Orel and Sevsk regions and march westward to liberate Bryansk and reach the Desna River. Subsequently, this offensive expanded when the *Stavka* directed the Kalinin Front and the remainder of the Western Front to support the Central Front's offensive by advancing to eradicate the Germans' Rzhev-Viaz'ma salient and exploit westward to seize Vitebsk and Smolensk.²

Finally, and more germane to this study, Stalin approved Marshal Zhukov's

¹ See, David M. Glantz, with Jonathan M. House, *To the Gates of Stalingrad: Soviet-German Combat Operations April-August 1942, The Stalingrad Trilogy, Volume 1; Armageddon in Stalingrad, September-November 1942, The Stalingrad Trilogy, Volume 2; and Endgame in Stalingrad: Book One: November 1942 and Book Two: December 1942-January 1943, The Stalingrad Trilogy, Volume 3* (Lawrence, Kansas: The University of Kansas Press, 2009, 2009, and forthcoming in 2014) and for "forgotten battles" during the winter campaign of 1942-43, David M. Glantz, *After Stalingrad: The Red Army's Winter Offensive 1942-1943* (Solihull, England: Helion & Company, 2008).

² Glantz, *After Stalingrad*, 228-390.

proposal to conduct Operation Polar Star, which sought to employ the Northwestern, Leningrad, and Volkhov Fronts to envelop and defeat German Army Group North, drive its remnants back to the eastern borders of the Soviet Union's Baltic republics, and seize the cities of Narva, Pskov, and perhaps, Ostrov. The *Stavka's* directive to the Special Group Zhozin, which was to spearhead the Northwestern Front's advance, read, "After seizing the Luga and Strugi Krasnye [region], part of the group will seize the Kingisepp and Narva region, having cut off the enemy's withdrawal into Estonia."³ Capture of these fortress cities would pave the way for a subsequent invasion of the Baltic region. This objective was indicative of the territorial dimensions of Stalin's military strategy throughout the entire second period of the war, which was, specifically, to liberate the territories of the prewar Soviet Union that German forces had occupied in 1941 and 1942.

For a variety of reasons, all of the offensives the *Stavka* ordered the Red Army to conduct in mid-February 1943 failed and did so spectacularly. They did so, first and foremost, because Stalin and his *Stavka* were woefully over-optimistic. Despite winning a major victory at Stalingrad and the early stages of the winter campaign, during which the Red Army's forces destroyed the majority of six Axis armies (German Sixth and much of the original Fourth Panzer, Romanian Third and Fourth, Italian Eighth, and Hungarian Second), attacking Soviet forces themselves suffered grievous losses in men and equipment. Hence, the forces designated to conduct the new wave of offensives after mid-February were woefully understrength when those operations commenced. This, plus the resultant overextension of advancing Soviet forces, together with the deteriorating weather conditions in early spring and problems with the Soviet transportation network, rendered the attacking Soviets vulnerable to German counteractions. Consequently, after being reinforced by fresh troops (SS Panzer Corps) from the West, Field Marshal von Manstein was able to orchestrate a counteroffensive in the Donbas region after mid-February and in the Khar'kov region during early March that defeated the ambitious Soviet offensives in these regions. Manstein's counteroffensive was so successful that, by drawing large Soviet forces from other sectors of the front, it also put paid to the equally ambitious Soviet offensives against Orel, Briansk, and Smolensk, as well as Operation Polar Star.

³ Glantz, *After Stalingrad*, 390-443 and V. A. Zolotarev, ed., *Russkii arkhiv: Velikaia Otechestvennaia. Stavka Verkhovnogo Glavnokomandovaniia: Dokumenty i materialy. 1943 god. T. 16 (5-3)* [The Russian archives: The Great Patriotic. *Stavka* of the Supreme High Command: Documents and materials. 1943. Vol.16 (5-3)] (Moscow: TERRA, 1999), 71. Hereafter cited as "*Stavka* 1943," with appropriate page(s).

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Chastened by these frustrating defeats, Stalin deferred further actions designed to clear Axis forces from Soviet territory until his forces completed defeating German forces in the summer campaign of 1943. Therefore, during the summer of 1943, Stalin's strategy once again focused on destroying German forces instead of acquiring territory. This strategy culminated in the famous battle for Kursk (German Operation *Zitadelle*), the defeat of German forces in Operations Kutuzov, Rumiantsev, and Suvorov (the Red Army's Orel, Belgorod-Khar'kov, and Smolensk offensives), and the ensuing frenetic "Race to the Dnepr River," during which Soviet forces pursued withdrawing German forces westward to what was supposed to be the Germans' vaunted "Eastern Wall."

The Third Period of the War, 1944

The Winter Campaign of 1944

The offensive operations Stalin and his *Stavka* planned and conducted during the initial stages of the third period of the war focused primarily on defeating Axis forces and forcing them to withdraw from the Leningrad region, Belorussia, and the Ukraine. These were preceded by the necessary prerequisites of seizing operational-scale bridgeheads on the western bank of the Dnepr River (what the Russians termed the Eastern Wall), together with penetrations of the strong defenses to the north along the Germans' "Panther Line," which extended from Narva in Estonia southward to and along the Dnepr River and its tributaries to the northern coast of the Sea of Azov.⁴ The Red Army satisfied these prerequisites in October and November 1943 when its forces penetrated the Panther Line in the Nevel' region, secured large bridgeheads across the Dnepr River in the Gomel', Chernobyl', Kiev, and Kremenchug regions, and collapsed German defenses in the Melitopol' region. Although Soviet forces managed to exploit these offensive gains only in a limited number of sectors during December 1943, these offensives set the stage for far more formidable and ambitious offensive operations by the Red Army in the New Year.

⁴ The Panther Line extended from Narva in Estonia, southward across Lake Peipus through the fortress cities of Pskov, Ostov, Nevel', Vitebsk, Orsha, and along the Pronia, Sozh, and Dnepr Rivers to Dnepropetrovsk and further south past Melitopol' to the northern coast of the Sea of Azov. However, this line consisted primarily of strong points anchored on populated points rather than a continuous fortified line.

The Baltic Region

Pursuant to Stalin's orders, the Red Army began operations in 1944 with the massive Leningrad-Novgorod strategic offensive by the Leningrad, Volkhov, and 2nd Baltic Fronts.⁵ This operation had the objective of raising the siege of Leningrad, destroying German Army Group North, liberating Novgorod and Luga, and driving German forces from the Leningrad region back to the eastern borders of the Baltic region.⁶ Characteristic of operations throughout the remainder of the year, once the main offensive achieved its objectives, Stalin insisted the three victorious *fronts* exploit their successes by breaching the German "Panther Line" and driving ever deeper into the Baltic region. Consequently, in early February 1944, the Leningrad and Volkhov Fronts, flanked on the left (south) by the 2nd Baltic Front, launched fresh incursions into the Narva region of Estonia, the Pskov region south of Lake Peipus, and westward toward Ostrov and the southern and western borders of Estonia and Latvia.⁷ These offensives produced heavy fighting in the Narva region during February, March, and the first half of April and especially fierce struggles in the vicinities of Pskov, Ostrov, and Pustoshka during March and April.

The Leningrad Front's thrust into Estonia, which was designed to pave the way for subsequent operations to seize the Estonian capital city of Tallinn, had clear political (and thus territorial) overtones. Evidencing this fact, the *Stavka* directive requiring the Leningrad Front's 2nd Shock Army to capture Narva stated, "It is necessary that Narva be taken no later than 17 February 1944. This is required by both the military and the political situation. This [the latter] is now – the most important. I demand you take all necessary measures for liberating Narva no later than the date indicated" [signed I. Stalin].⁸

On 4 February 1944, while one rifle corps of the Leningrad Front's 2nd Shock Army attacked but failed to crack German defenses along the Narva River north of

⁵ See, among other sources, David M. Glantz, *The Battle for Leningrad 1941-1944* (Lawrence, Kansas: The University Press of Kansas, 2002), 327-367.

⁶ The offensive was essentially a "replay" of Zhukov's aborted Operation Polar Star of February 1943.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 367-415; and David M. Glantz, *Forgotten Battles of the Soviet-German War (1941-1945), Vol. VI: The Winter Campaign (24 December 1943-April 1944) (Part One: The Northwestern Axis)* (Carlisle, PA: Self-published, 2003). The *Stavka* disbanded the Volkhov Front on 15 February, assigning its armies to the Leningrad and 2nd Baltic Front. The latter had been formed on 16 October 1943 to operate along the Novosokolniki axis.

⁸ V. A. Zolotarev, ed., *Russkii arkhiv: Velikaia Otechestvennaia. Stavka VGK: Dokumenty i materialy. 1944-1945. T. 16 (5-4)* [The Russian archives: The Great Patriotic. *Stavka VGK: Documents and materials. 1944-1945. Vol.16 (5-4)*] (Moscow: TERRA, 1999), 4. Hereafter cited as "*Stavka 1944-45*," with appropriate page(s).

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Narva proper, other corps from the shock army advanced across the river southwest of the city. A desperate battle ensued as Soviet forces attempted to expand their bridgehead on the Narva River's western bank northward to envelop German forces defending Narva from the west, while German forces and their Estonian allies struggled to contain the Soviet assaults. Several weeks of heavy fighting ensued, during which the Soviets attempted but failed to complete the encirclement operation by conducting an amphibious landing on the coast of the Gulf of Finland on 13-14 February. Fighting raged on for weeks without resolution, culminating in a German counterstroke in April, after which the *Stavka* postponed further offensive operations to a later date.

Nor did the offensives conducted further to the south by the Leningrad Front's 42nd, 67th, and later 54th Armies and the 2nd Baltic Front's 1st and 3rd Shock, 22nd, and 10th Guards Armies accomplish much more. These offensives, which sought to capture the fortress cities of Pskov and Ostrov and exploit into the Tartu and Võru regions in southern Estonia and into western Latvia also faltered in two bursts of heavy fighting in March and April 1944. Attesting to the *Stavka's* ambitious objectives, its 22 February directive required the Leningrad Front's left wing, "to capture the Ostrov region, envelop Pskov from the south, and force the Velikaia River," after which it was "to develop the offensive toward Riga [Latvia]."⁹ A subsequent directive issued to the 2nd Baltic Front on 1 April demanded it complete destroying the Germans' Ostrov grouping and "subsequently, attack toward Valga and the Riga – Ostrov railroad, which is to be cut" and reach the Ostrov – Jaunlatgalis railroad no later than 18-20 April and the Valga – Jaunizbalga line no later than the end of April."¹⁰ Since none of these offensives proved successful, the 2nd Baltic Front went over to the defense on 18 April.

Like most of those which would follow in 1944, all of these offensives were attempts by the *Stavka* to exploit the Soviet Army's offensive successes and apparent German weakness to a maximum. Therefore, the attacking forces were generally weak because of losses suffered in the previous "main" offensive, with rifle divisions reduced in strength to from 3,500 to 6,000 men and tank and self-propelled gun brigades and regiments at well under 50 percent strength. In addition, over-extended and often inadequate logistical support and rainy weather and mud associated with the usual *rasputitsa* (period of flooding rains) hindered operations and led to the

⁹ Ibid., 50.

¹⁰ Ibid., 67.

unusually high likelihood of failure. Nonetheless, for the sake of new victories, however elusive they were, the *Stavka* accepted the risks associated with these operations.

The Balkans

If Soviet and Russian sources have acknowledged the conduct of the operations to begin liberating the Baltic region, they have been utterly silent about similar operations in the Balkans. In fact, most Soviet and Russian histories of the war claim the Soviet Army avoided attempts to penetrate into the Balkans until August 1944, that is, after they took care of matters along the vital Belorussian and Ukrainian axes. Thus, they assert that the Iasi – Kishinev offensive, which the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts commenced on 22 August 1944, was the first attempt by Soviet forces to invade the Balkans region. We now know, however, that this is pure fiction because the same two *fronts* tried but failed to invade and capture Romania in April and May 1944.

The Soviet invasion of the Balkans actually began in mid-April 1944, when the forces of the 2nd Ukrainian Front crossed southward over the Prut River into the region north of Iasi in northern Romania.¹¹ Simultaneously, the armies of the 3rd Ukrainian Front pushed westward toward the Dnestr River and Kishinev (Chisinau), the capital of Romanian Bessarabia. In preliminary operations during late April, the 2nd Ukrainian Front consolidated its positions north of Iasi, and the 3rd Ukrainian Front seized bridgeheads over the Dnestr east of Kishinev. Once in position, the *Stavka* directed the two *fronts* to launch an offensive designed to smash opposing German Eighth Army (Group Wöhler) and German Sixth Army, capture the cities of Iasi and Kishinev, and advance deep into northern Romania. For example, the 2nd Ukrainian Front's directive dated 23 April required its forces to penetrate enemy defenses east and west of the Seret River, "advance in the general direction of Sagna and Bacesti," and with its 5th Guards and 2nd Tank Armies, "capture Bacau and Vashui and cut the withdrawal routes of the enemy's Iasi – Kishinev group of forces from the west."¹² Similarly, the 3rd Ukrainian Front was to expand its bridgeheads over the Dnestr River and attack westward to encircle the defending German forces in cooperation with the 2nd Ukrainian Front.

¹¹ For details on this offensive, see David M. Glantz, *Red Storm over the Balkans: The Failed Soviet Invasion of Romania, Spring 1944* (Lawrence, Kansas: The University Press of Kansas, 2007).

¹² Glantz, *Red Storm over the Balkans*, 168.

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The heaviest fighting in this region took place in late April, when the 2nd Ukrainian Front's forces made minor gains northwest of Iasi and from 2-6 May, when a fierce armor battle took place in the Tirgu-Frumos region, northwest of Iasi, between the two Soviet tank armies and German LVII Panzer Corps (principally 24th Panzer Division, and *Grossdeutschland* Panzer Grenadier Division). After this fighting ended in virtual stalemate, German Sixth Army conducted a surprise attack against the 3rd Ukrainian Front's largest bridgehead across the Dneestr River on 8 May, just as this *front's* main shock group (8th Guards Army) was relieving another army prior to delivering the *front's* main attack. The surprise attack which savaged 8th Guards Army, together with the 2nd Ukrainian Front's failure to defeat Axis forces northeast of Iasi prompted the *Stavka* to cancel further offensive operations in the region by late May, thus ending Stalin's first attempt to insert Soviet Army troops into the Balkans.¹³

Although the offensive by the two Ukrainian Fronts into Romania was far more powerful than the blows being launched toward the Baltic region, it failed for many of the same reasons as its counterpart to the north. In addition, German forces, assisted by two Romanian armies, were far stronger and operated more effectively than their counterparts to the north. This ultimately conditioned the sharp Soviet defeat.

Thus, in general, although Soviet forces reached the eastern border of the Baltic and northern border of the Balkan regions by the spring of 1944, their strength permitted them to do little more than to seize small footholds in the regions. Thereafter, further offensive action in the two regions would have to wait until after Soviet forces conducted major strategic offensives in Belorussia and the western Ukraine during the summer of 1944.

The Summer Campaign of 1944

The Finnish Front

As they had done in the winter of 1944, Stalin and his *Stavka* began military operations in the summer with an offensive whose intent was as political as it was military. After enduring the threat posed by Finnish forces to its defenses at Leningrad and along the Svir River to the east, Stalin ordered the Soviet Army to strike back in June 1944. As was the case with the Leningrad-Novgorod offensive in

¹³ In actuality, the *Stavka* intended to resume operations in northern Romania until 26 May, when it issued a directive ordering 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts to go over to the defense and begin preparing for another offensive later in the summer.

January, this fresh offensive against Finnish forces on the Karelian Isthmus preceded the priority strategic offensives the Soviet Army planned to conduct in Belorussia and the western Ukraine, beginning in late June.

After the failure of Soviet diplomatic efforts to drive Finland from the war (from late February through May), the *Stavka* ordered its Leningrad and Karelian Fronts to launch twin offensives on the Karelian Isthmus and along the Svir River front between Lakes Ladoga and Onega. The Leningrad Front was to conduct the main attack on 10 June with its 21st and 23rd Armies, penetrate the Finnish defenses in the Mannerheim Line, and exploit northwestward to capture Vyborg (Viipuri).¹⁴

The offensive kicked off on 10 June as planned and developed successfully enough for the *Stavka* to label it a success and, on 11 June, to direct the Leningrad Front's forces "to seize the Vyborg region by 18-20 June."¹⁵ After 21st Army's forces captured Vyborg by 20 June, the *Stavka* directed the Leningrad Front "to capture the Imatra, Lappenranta, and Viroioki line by 26-28 June," "attack toward Keksholm and Elisenvara to clear the Karelian Isthmus of enemy forces," and "subsequently, exploit the offensive to capture the Kouvola and Kotka line."¹⁶ If successful, this offensive would place Soviet forces 50-75 kilometers inside Finland and about 120 kilometers east of Helsinki. Subsequently, beginning on 25 June, the Leningrad Front tried to mount a so-called "continuation offensive" designed to "advance into the depth of Finland," only to encounter stiffened Finnish resistance and failure to register substantial gains. Consequently, the *front* terminated offensive operations on 11 July, clearly well short of its intended objectives.¹⁷ While the offensive cleared Finnish forces from the Karelia Isthmus and captured Vyborg, it failed in its penultimate objective of driving Finland from the war. However, the deteriorating Axis situation would prompt Finland to sue for peace on 19 September 1944.

The Baltic Region

After operations were well under way in Karelia, the Soviet Army began Operation Bagration, its high-priority strategic offensives along the vital central (Minsk-Warsaw-Berlin) axis. Attacking on 23 and 24 June 1944, the 1st Baltic and 2nd and 3rd Belorussian Fronts, together with the right wing of the 1st Belorussian Front

¹⁴ For details on this offensive, see Glantz, *The Battle for Leningrad*, 415-459.

¹⁵ Zolotarev, "*Stavka* 1944-45," 96.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 97-98.

¹⁷ The term "continuation" offensive was coined by the Finns. The Russians have yet to acknowledge they sought to accomplish much more than they had.

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assaulted German Army Group Center's defenses in Belorussia in Operation Bagration. Within days, the advancing Soviet forces encircled Army Group Center's Third Panzer and Ninth Armies in the Vitebsk and Bobruisk regions and pushed Fourth Army back toward Minsk, where it too was encircled and destroyed along with the other encircled armies, during the first week in July. Exploiting westward, now opposed by the shattered remnants of Army Group Center, by 22 July the four Soviet *fronts* penetrated the eastern borders of Latvia and Lithuania and reached and crossed the Western Dvina River in eastern Poland.¹⁸

Midst the carnage in German ranks caused by Operation Bagration, on 13 and 18 July, the 1st Ukrainian Front and the left wing of the 1st Belorussian Front commenced offensives against German Army Group North Ukraine's Fourth and First Panzer Armies, respectively. After smashing both German armies within hours, the forces of these two *fronts* encircled German forces in the Brody and L'vov regions, captured Lublin, and thrust deep into Poland, reaching the approaches to the Vistula and San Rivers on a broad front from Warsaw southward to Peremyshl' by 22 July.¹⁹

Exploiting the growing chaos in German ranks, in late July Stalin and the *Stavka* once again activated offensive actions in the Baltic region. Attempting to fulfill the political objectives he had articulated in the late winter of 1944, Stalin ordered the Leningrad Front to seize Narva and advance into Estonia, the 3rd Baltic Front to capture Pskov and Ostrov and begin the liberation of southern Estonia and Latvia, and the 2nd Baltic Front to penetrate to and capture Riga. As expressed in the mandating directives, these *fronts* were to do the following:

- **Leningrad Front** – Leningrad Front's Operational Directive No. 79/op, 14 July, and *Stavka* Directive No. 220157, 28 July – seize Narva by 26 July, Rakvere and Avinurme by 5-8 August, and subsequently, Parnu and Tallinn, and the northern approaches to Tartu.²⁰

¹⁸ Among many sources, see Paul Adair, *Hitler's Greatest Defeat: The Collapse of Army Group Centre, June 1944* (London: Arms and Armour, 1994); David M. Glantz, ed., *1985 Art of War Symposium: From the Dnepr to the Vistula: Soviet Offensive Operations – November 1943 – August 1944* (Carlisle, PA: Center for Land Warfare, US Army War College, 1985), 243-449, reprinted with maps by the Foreign Military Studies Office, Combined Arms Command, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, in 1992 and self-published in Carlisle, PA, by David M. Glantz in 1996; and David M. Glantz, ed., and Harold S. Orenstein, trans., *Belorussia 1944: The Soviet General Staff Study* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001).

¹⁹ David M. Glantz, ed., and Harold S. Orenstein, trans., *The Battle for L'vov, July 1944: The Soviet General Staff Study* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002).

²⁰ Zolotarev, "Stavka 1944-54," 116.

- **3rd Baltic Front** – *Stavka* Directives Nos. 220150 and 220151, 21-22 July – occupy Laura, Aluksiz, and Leiastsiema (left wing) by 27 July and Pskov (right wing) by 28-29 July. Subsequently advance on Aluksis and Valga.²¹
- **2nd Baltic Front** – *Stavka* Directives No. 220151 and 220158, 22 and 28 July – advance to Gaulgauska and Tsesvaina Station by 28 July, Golgauska, Madona, and Krystpils by 1-2 August, and Riga by 10 August.²²
- **1st Baltic Front** – *Stavka* Directive No. 220159, 28 July – cut communications between German forces in the Baltic region and East Prussia by seizing Siauliai, Riga, and Memel'.²³

As was the case in the spring, because the forces conducting these offensives were under-strength and relatively starved of resources for the sake of the *fronts* delivering the more important strategic offensive to the south, these offensives too achieved only limited success. Although the Leningrad Front's 2nd Shock Army managed to force the Narva River on 24 July and capture Narva city on the 26th by envelopment from the north, problems encountered while regrouping 2nd Shock and 8th Armies for a subsequent advance toward Tallinn permitted German and Estonian forces to contain any further Soviet advance in bitter and desperate fighting in the vicinity of the Sinimae Hills, about 20 kilometers west of Narva. Therefore, on 11 August, the Leningrad Front postponed any further attacks.²⁴

Likewise, after seizing the Laura region by 12 August, Võru on the 13th, and Tartu on the 25th, hastily orchestrated German and Estonian counterattacks thereafter forced the 3rd Baltic Front to cease its offensive on 6 September. The 2nd Baltic Front also did so on 13 August, after capturing Rēzekne, Madona, and Gulbene. Further

²¹ Zolotarev, “*Stavka* 1944-54,” 114.

²² *Ibid.*, 114 and 116.

²³ *Ibid.*, 117.

²⁴ For the most thorough description of this offensive from the Estonian perspective, see Koostanud Marek Nisuma, *EESTI piirikaitserēcemendid ja politseipataljonid: NARVA RINDEL 1944. AASTAL* (Tallinn: Kirjastas Varrak, 2011). See Soviet accounts in “Nastuplenie voisk 2-i udarnoi armii Leningradskogo fronta v iiule 1944 g. s firsirovaniem r. Narva” [The offensive of the forces of the Leningrad Front's 2nd Shock Army in July 1944 with the forcing of the Narva River], in *Sbornik boevykh dokumentov Velikio Otechestvennoi voiny, vypusk 24* [Collection of combat documents on the Great Patriotic War, issue 24] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1955), 92-122. Prepared by the Soviet Army General Staff and classified top secret. This account covers only the successful Soviet river crossing operation. The most balanced account of this operation is Major Andrew Michael Del Gaudio, *Operational Art and the Narva Front 1944, Sinimaed and Campaign Planning*, a doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Liverpool, June 22, 2012.

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south, however, the stronger armies of the 1st Baltic Front accomplished far more by seizing Siauliai on 27 July, Tukums on the 30th, and Jelgava on the 31st, and by reaching the southern coast of the Gulf of Riga at Krapkalis by month's end. By doing so, the 1st Baltic Front succeeded in isolating the remnants of Army Group North in the Baltic region.

In terms of the objectives Stalin would have liked to achieve, attempts to exploit the successes in Belorussia turned out to be disappointing. With Axis defenses along or within the eastern border of the Baltic region relatively intact, the *Stavka* had no choice but to postpone complete liberation of the Baltic region until the fall of 1944.

The Balkans

After savaging German Army Groups Center and North Ukraine by early August 1944, Stalin and his *Stavka* turned their attentions once more to German Army Group South Ukraine, which was still defending Romania and the path into the Balkans. As early as late July, the spectacular gains made by the 1st Ukrainian Front in the L'vov region and in the northern foothills of the Carpathian Mountains further south prompted the *Stavka* to focus the *front's* attention on seizing passes through the mountains to reach the eastern portions of Czechoslovakia and the plains of Hungary.²⁵ However, at this point, this only portended things to come, since Stalin's attentions were focused primarily on Romania, where the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts had experienced frustrating failures in April and May.

In the wake of the Soviet Army's victories in Belorussia and the western Ukraine, Stalin was satisfied that the prerequisites had been met for a fresh offensive into Romania. Principal among these was the departure of most of the German Army's armored forces in Romania to threatened regions further north. Consequently, on 2 August the *Stavka* ordered its 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts to plan what became the Iasi – Kishinev offensive, a penetration and double envelopment of all German and Romanian forces defending Romania.²⁶ The ensuing offensive, which began on 20

²⁵ For example, *Stavka* Directive No. 220163, dated 28 July 1944, ordered the 1st Ukrainian Front's 1st Guards and 18th Armies "to seize and firmly hold the passes through the Carpathian Mountains along the Gumenne, Uzhrorod, and Mukachevo axes, with the aim of subsequent entry into the Hungarian Plain," see Zolotarev, "*Stavka* 1944-45," 119, and *Stavka* Directive No. 220168, dated 30 July 1944, ordered the newly-formed 4th Ukrainian Front "to seize and firmly hold the passes through the Carpathian Mountains along the Gumenne, Uzghorod, and Mukachevo axes, with the aim of subsequent entry into the Hungarian Plain" and to present a plan to that effect by 8 August. See *Ibid.*, 122.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 124. *Stavka* Directive No. 220170, dated 2 August, ordered the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian

August, succeeded in encircling and destroying German Sixth Army and a portion of Eighth Army, forced the Romanian Third and Fourth Armies to surrender (and then change to the Soviet side), and drove the remnants of Eighth Army westward through the Carpathian Mountains into the Transylvanian region of Romania.²⁷ Thereafter, the two Soviet *fronts* captured Ploesti and Bucharest and advanced southward to the Danube River and westward across the Carpathians into western Romania and the plains of eastern Hungary.²⁸ An important feature of these operations was the *Stavka's* demand that part of the 2nd Ukrainian Front's forces advance into the Satu-Mare region of northern Hungary to assist the 4th Ukrainian Front's passage through the Carpathian Mountains and possibly encircle all German and Hungarian forces remaining in eastern Hungary.

Therefore, by the end of August, the Soviet Army had liberated Romania, forcing its army to change sides in the war, and, in addition to approaching the Danube River and Bulgaria, it was preparing for operations to seize the eastern half of Hungary. By this time, as was the case in the Baltic region, the seizure of as much of the Balkan region as possible as rapidly as possible had become an important political objective of Stalin's military strategy.

The Fall Campaign of 1944

After its spectacular advance to the Narew, Vistula, and San Rivers from late June through September 1944, in October Stalin focused his attentions on securing the Soviet Union's position in both the Baltic and the Balkans regions. First, he ordered the Red Army's *fronts* operating along the central (Warsaw – Berlin) axis (2nd and 1st Belorussian and 1st Ukrainian) to consolidate their hold on bridgeheads on the western bank of the Narew and Vistula Rivers. Then, while this was being done, he directed

Fronts "to prepare and conduct an operation... to destroy the enemy grouping in the Iasi, Kishinev, and Bendary region and capture the Bakeu, Leovo, Tarutini, and Moldavka line, having in mind a subsequent offensive toward Fokshany, Galats, and Izmail."

²⁷ For details on the Iasi – Kishinev offensive, see *1985 Art of War Symposium*, 449-539.

²⁸ See Zolotarev, "*Stavka 1944-45*," 134-135. *Stavka* Directives Nos. 220191 and 220192, dated 29 August 1944, directed the 2nd Ukrainian Front's left wing to exploit southward to capture Ploesti and Bucharest, complete the liberation of Romania, and reach the Danube River and its right wing to "capture the passes across the Eastern Carpathian Mountains, reach the Bistritsa, Cluj, Sebes, and Sibiu line by 15 September, and subsequently exploit [northwestward] toward Satu Mare to cooperate with the 4th Ukrainian Front's forces in crossing the Carpathians and reaching the Uzhgorod and Mukachevo regions." The 3rd Ukrainian Front was to capture the remainder of eastern Romania and reach the Romanian-Bulgarian border by 4-5 September.

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the *fronts* on the flanks (1st, 2nd, and 3rd Baltic and 4th, 2nd, and 3rd Ukrainian) to conduct offensives designed to seize the remainder of the Baltic and Balkans regions. This produced a variety of both well-known and “forgotten” operations, the latter actually covered up essentially because they failed to achieve the most important of their missions.

The Baltic Region

The centerpiece of Soviet Army operations in the Baltic region during the fall was the Riga strategic offensive, which the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Baltic Fronts conducted from 15 September through 22 October. Attacking in tandem, the three *fronts* assaulted the defenses of Army Group North's Eighteenth and Sixteenth Armies in the sector from south of Riga, Latvia, northward to Tartu, Estonia. In addition, the *Stavka* ordered the armies on the 1st Baltic Front's left wing (3rd and 4th Shock, 42nd, and 5th Guards Tank Armies) to prevent German armored forces (XXXIX, XXXX, and later III SS Panzer Corps) from breaking through Soviet defenses along the Mitau (Jelgava) axis to rescue German forces defending the Riga region.²⁹ Developing slowly against desperate German resistance, the armies of the 2nd and 3rd Baltic Fronts seized northern and western Latvia by the end of September and, joined by the armies on the 1st Baltic Front's right wing, captured Riga from 13 to 15 October.

Only days after the Riga offensive commenced, the armies on the Leningrad Front's left wing began its culminating offensive to seize Tallinn, Estonia, and the rest of the region on 17 September. Attacking from the Tartu region on the *front's* left wing, 2nd Shock Army overwhelmed the German and Estonian defenses of Army Detachment (*Abteilung*) Narva west of Lake Peipus (Chud) in a matter of hours and raced northward to Jogeva. Joined by the *front's* 8th Army, which attacked westward from the Sinimäe region, 2nd Shock Army captured Tallinn on 22 September and drove the remnants of German and Estonian forces to Hiiumaa (Dago) and Saaremaa (Ösel) Islands off Estonia's western coast by 25 September. The 2nd Shock Army wheeled

²⁹ See *Stavka* Directive No. 220189, dated 29 August 1944, which ordered the 2nd Baltic Front, in cooperation with the 1st and 3rd Baltic Fronts, “to destroy the enemy grouping north of the Western Dvina River and capture Riga” on 5 to 7 September, later postponed to 15 September. Subsequently, *Stavka* Directive No. 220190, dated 29 August 1944, ordered the 1st Baltic Front “to wear down the enemy tank grouping in defensive battles and, under no circumstances, permit it to penetrate the *front's* left wing along the Mitau (Jelgava) and Shavlin axes,” and “in cooperation with the 2nd and 3rd Baltic Fronts, destroy the enemy's Riga grouping operating south of the Western Dvina River and prevent the withdrawal of the enemy's northern group to East Prussia.” See Zolotarev, “*Stavka* 1944-45,” 132-133.

south to capture Parnu, Estonia, and revert to the *Stavka's* reserve by month's end.³⁰

Capping the climax in the Baltic region, the *Stavka* organized two more offensives in October. The first, the well-known Memel' offensive operation, occurred from 5 through 22 October 1944. During this operation, the 3rd Belorussian Front, spearheaded by 1st Tank Corps, and the armies on the 1st Baltic Front's left wing, spearheaded by 5th Guards Tank Army, crushed the defenses of Army Group North's Third Panzer Army and advanced westward to encircle German forces in the port of Memel' on the Baltic Sea by 22 October. This offensive resulted in the isolation of the remnants of Army Group North in the Courland Peninsula, west of Riga, where the Germans managed to defend until war's end.

The second offensive, which although "forgotten" was equally important, was an attempt by the 3rd Belorussian Front to seize East Prussia and the fortress city of Königsberg by a bold coup de main. Attacking on 16 October, the 3rd Belorussian Front's 39th, 5th, 11th Guards, and 31st Armies assaulted German Army Group Center's defenses at the boundary between its Fourth and Third Panzer Armies. After penetrating German defenses in a broad sector on both sides of the Vilnius – Insterburg road, the *front* committed its 28th Army and 2nd Guards Tank Corps in an attempt to capture Insterburg and advance westward to seize Königsberg. However, in one of the last instances of a successful German armored counterstroke in the war, a hastily-assembled armored force subordinate to the *Hermann Göring* Panzer Corps defeated the exploiting Soviet armor in and south of the Gumbinnen region, forcing the Soviets to terminate the offensive on 5 November.³¹

The Red Army's offensive operations in the Baltic region during September and October 1944 were successful largely because the forces of Army Detachment Narva and Army Group North's Eighteenth and Sixteenth Armies were far too weak to

³⁰ *Stavka* Directive No. 220204, dated 2 September 1944, ordered the Leningrad Front "to transfer one army and eight rifle divisions from the Narva region to the Tartu region and attack from the Tartu region toward Rakvere with a force of 14 rifle divisions [on 14 September] to capture Rakvere and Tapa and subsequently advance westward to capture Tallinn." See *Ibid.*, 138. Subsequently, *Stavka* Directive No. 220211, dated 10 September, criticized the Leningrad Front for complaining about its weakness and directed it to continue planning the offensive to capture Tallinn. The front had claimed it needed 12,400 replacements to bring 116th and 118th Rifle Corps' six divisions up to a strength of 5,000 men each. See *Ibid.*, 142 and 296.

³¹ *Stavka* Directive No. 220235, dated 3 October, ordered the 3rd Belorussian Front and the *Stavka* representative, Marshal A. M. Vasilevsky, to conduct an offensive in cooperation with the 1st Baltic Front to destroy the enemy's Tilsit - Insterburg grouping and capture Königsberg, and *Stavka* Directive No. 220257, dated 5 November, ordered the 3rd Belorussian Front to go over to the defense. See *Ibid.*, 154-155 and 166.

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resist effectively. As a result, Stalin achieved his political, as well as military objectives, in the Baltic region. However, despite multiple Soviet offensives to eradicate the German-defended enclave on the Courland Peninsula, the remnants of Army Group North were strong enough to defend this strong hold until war's end.

The Balkans

The most spectacular and promising of Soviet Army advances during the fall of 1944 took place in the Balkans. This was the case because, by far, the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts' Iasi – Kishinev offensive in August 1944 was one of the most successful and decisive offensives the Soviet Army conducted in the entire war. By annihilating one German army and shattering a second and by defeating two Romanian armies and compelling both to shift sides in the war, this offensive cracked open the entire Balkans region for future Soviet conquest. Stalin clearly appreciated the opportunity. Consequently, the frequency, intensity, and aims of these offensives underscore the importance that Stalin attached to possession of this region.

The directives the *Stavka* issued in the wake of the August victory vividly illustrate Stalin's strategic ambitions. During the first ten days of September, Stalin directed the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts to expand their operations into eastern Hungary and Bulgaria, added Bulgaria and its army to the anti-Hitler coalition (once the country decided to change sides), established favorable political and military relationships with Yugoslavia, and sketched out the parameters for precisely how and where the Soviet Army would operate in Hungary.³²

The most important of these directives, which it issued on 5 September, set the basic parameters for the 2nd Ukrainian Front's subsequent operations:

The main mission of the forces of the 2nd Ukrainian Front is to overcome the Transylvanian Alps and the southern part of the Carpathian range by a strike from the south through Brasov and Sibiu (toward Cluj) and by an offensive by 40th and 7th Guards Armies from the east and reach the Satu-Mare, Cluj, Deva, and Turnu Severin front. By reaching the Satu Mare region, assist the 4th Ukrainian Front to pass through the Carpathians and capture Uzhgorod, Chop, and Mukachevo. Subsequently, develop an offensive with the aim of reaching the Tisza (Tisa) River in the Nyirejyháza and Szeged

³² Politically, see *Stavka* Directive Nos. 220209 and 220210 dated 8 and 9 September, which ceased military operations in Bulgaria, since it had declared war on Germany. See *Ibid.*, 141.

region with your main forces, while protecting the Szeged and Turnu Severin front.

Do not attack into Yugoslavia, since it would lead to dispersing our forces.³³

In essence, this operational concept projected Soviet forces westward along the Cluj axis through the Transylvanian region of western Romania and into the Debrecen region of eastern Hungary. Thereafter, the 2nd Ukrainian Front's axes of advance diverged, with roughly half of the *front's* forces, including 6th Guards Tank Army, heading westward toward Budapest, Hungary, and the other half, together with several mobile groups made up of cavalry and armored corps, lunging northward through Nyirejyháza to the Chop region in northern Hungary, where they could link up with either 4th Ukrainian Front's forces in the Mukachevo and Uzhgorod regions in Ruthenia or the 1st Ukrainian Front's 38th Army in western Slovakia. These operational lines offered the military advantages of possibly encircling German and Hungarian forces (German Eighth and Hungarian First and Second Armies) in eastern Hungary and marching westward on Budapest, as well as the political advantages of driving Hungary from the war, inserting Soviet forces (hence, influence) into the Ruthenian and Slovakian regions of eastern Czechoslovakia, and perhaps seizing the entire vital Danube River Basin from Budapest westward to Vienna, Austria (then the Ostmark region of Germany).

In addition, using the 3rd Ukrainian Front's forces, in early September the *Stavka* took measures to solidify Soviet political ties with Bulgaria, reinforce the 2nd Ukrainian Front, and provide protection and support for the latter's southern flank during its advance into Hungary. In three directives issued on 8, 9, and 10 September, the *Stavka* ordered the 3rd Ukrainian Front and Black Sea Fleet to capture the Bulgarian ports of Burgas and Aytos of the Black Sea by 8 September and then halt along the Ruschuk (Ruse), Razgrad, Turgovishte, and Karnobat line in the northeastern quarter of Bulgaria, cease operations against the Bulgarian Army at 2200 hours on 9 September, and transfer its 46th Army, 7th Artillery Penetration Division, and 7th Mechanized Corps to the 2nd Ukrainian Front in the Craiova region of southern Romania no later than 20-21 September.³⁴

³³ *Stavka* Directive No. 220207, dated 5 September 1944, in *Ibid.*, 140.

³⁴ See *Stavka* Directives Nos. 220209, 220210, and 220212, dated 8, 9, and 10 September, in *Ibid.*, 141-142.

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During the second half of September, the *Stavka* provided the 2nd Ukrainian Front with further guidance and support as it planned and conducted its advance across the Carpathians and through Transylvania. This included three key directives dated 15 through 17 September:

- **15 September** -- directed the 2nd Ukrainian Front “to close up to the Cirlibaba, Bistrita, Cluj, and Ludos line [in Romania] from 15-19 September and continue its advance toward Cluj, Debrecen, and Miskolc to reach the Tisza River in the Chop and Szolnok sector and assist the 4th Ukrainian Front’s passage through the Carpathians and seize Uzhgorod.... Subsequently reach the Tisza River in the Chop and Szeged region no later than 7-10 October.” Also created Group Pliev, consisting of 7th Mechanized and 4th and 6th Guards Cavalry Corps, to operate independently under the *front’s* control.³⁵
- **16 September** -- assigned Marshal of the Soviet Union S. K. Timoshenko to coordinate the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Ukrainian Fronts’ operations. ³⁶
- **17 September** -- approved the 4th Ukrainian Front’s plan for crossing the Carpathian Mountains, ordered it to advance along the Komancha, Humenné, and Michalovce axes to reach the Polish-Czech border no later than 19 September and capture the Hanušovce, Čemerné, Humenné, and Stakčín line no later than 30 September and Michalovce by 3 October, and also cooperate with 1st Ukrainian Front’s 38th Army, which was to attack southward from Krosno [Poland] through the Dukla Pass toward Prešov in Slovakia.³⁷

These and other *Stavka* directives precipitated the 2nd Ukrainian Front’s Debrecen offensive, which lasted from 6 through 28 October 1944. The *Stavka* approved the *front’s* plan for an advance to seize bridgeheads across the Tisza River on 3 October and, once the *front’s* forces reached the Tisza River south of Debrecen on 12 October, it approved the *front* concept of operation for capturing Debrecen and exploiting toward the north.³⁸ This concept required the capture of Debrecen,

³⁵ See *Stavka* Directive No. 220215, dated 15 September, in *Ibid.*, 144-145.

³⁶ See *Stavka* Directive No. 220216, dated 16 September, in *Ibid.*, 145.

³⁷ See *Stavka* Directive No. 220217, dated 17 September, in *Ibid.*, 146, and the 4th Ukrainian Front’s Order No. 11097/op, in *Ibid.*, 297-298.

³⁸ See *Stavka* Directive No. 220234, dated 3 October, which approved 2nd Ukrainian Front’s plan for advancing to the Tisza River and the *front’s* offensive plan in Order No. 00622/op of 2 October, in *Ibid.*, 154 and 305-306.

consolidation of forces along the Tisza River, and a bold drive northward to link up with the forces of 4th Ukrainian Front and encircle German and Hungarian forces in eastern Hungary. Accordingly:

The main aim of the operation -- While protecting ourselves along the Tisza River with the units of 46th and 53rd Armies, assist the 4th Ukrainian Front's most rapid entry into Hungarian plain by a blow by the *front's* cavalry-tank forces with the main forces of 4th and 6th Guards Cavalry and 7th Mechanized Corps, toward Nyirejyháza and Chop and by a blow from the Oradea Mare region to Carei and Satu Mare with part of the forces consisting of 5th Guards Cavalry Corps and 23rd Tank Corps [Group Gorshkov] to get to the routes of withdrawal of the enemy's Cluj - Sighet grouping, and encircle and destroy it.³⁹

This plan envisioned conducting a three-stage operation to occupy the eastern half of Hungary and, most important, a northward advance designed to link up with either the 4th Ukrainian Front's forces or those of the 1st Ukrainian Front's 38th Army to encircle and destroy German and Hungarian forces left behind in northeastern Hungary and northwestern Romania. The targets of this encirclement were Army Group Wöhler (German Eighth Army), together with Hungarian First and Second Armies. During the first stage from 13-14 October, Cavalry-Mechanized Group Pliev, 6th Guards Tank Army, and 53rd Army's right wing were to advance westward through Transylvania to destroy the enemy grouping encircled south and southeast of Debrecen.

In the second stage, which was projected to last from 15-17 October, Group Pliev was to capture Debrecen and immediately advance northward to the Nyirejyháza region, where it was to seize bridgeheads across the Tisza River. On Pliev's right, Cavalry-Mechanized Group Gorshkov was to reach the Carei and Satu Mare regions, while on its left, 53rd Army would reach the Tisza River south of Rakamaz. To contain the Axis forces being encircled, on Group Gorshkov's right, 40th and 27th Armies were to attack to reach the Petrova, Baia Mare, and Marghita line in northern Romania, while 7th Guards Army's main forces concentrated in the region south of Oradea Mare, and

³⁹ See *Stavka* Directive No. 220240, dated 14 October, which approved the 2nd Ukrainian Front's plan, and the plan itself in Order No. 00641/op, dated 13 December, both in *Ibid.*, 158 and 306-307.

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33rd Rifle Corps reached Debrecen and the region to the east. Finally, 6th Guards Tank Army was supposed to concentrate in the Debrecen region to rest and refit.

During the third stage of the Debrecen offensive, from 18-20 October, Group Pliev was to lunge northward to capture the Sătoraljaújhely region in northern Hungary and the Chop region in western Ruthenia, where it was to link up with the 4th Ukrainian Front's 1st Guards Army. At the same time, on Group Pliev's right, Group Gorshkov, together with 27th and 40th Armies, was to destroy the enemy's Cluj–Sighet grouping in northwestern Romania and capture the cities of Sighet, Carei, and Veshad, and on Pliev's left, 7th Guards Army's 33rd Rifle Corps was to reach Nyirejyháza and its main forces, Oradea Mare. The 6th Guards Tank Army, the *front's* powerful armored reserve would prepare to reinforce Groups Pliev or Gorshkov or to receive an axis of its own toward Miskolc, while 53rd and 46th Armies were to hold firm along the Tisza River in and south of the Szolnok region. Finally, if the offensive developed as planned, the *Stavka* authorized 53rd and 46th Armies to regroup and attack westward along the Szolnok axis toward Budapest.⁴⁰

However, as with the case with many carefully-laid plans, things did not develop as favorably as the 2nd Ukrainian Front anticipated. Although the plan called for Debrecen to be taken by 17 October, the city did not fall until the 20th. Worse still, after Group Pliev reached the Nyirejyháza region on 21 October, it was struck by a counterstroke from east and west, which was orchestrated by Sixth Army's III Panzer

⁴⁰ This plan envisioned three stages with the following specific objectives:

- 13-14 October – Destroy the encircled enemy grouping west and south of Berettyoufalu with the forces of Group Pliev, the right wing of 53rd Army, and 6th Guards Tank Army.
- 15-17 October – 1) Group Pliev will capture Debrecen and reach the Nyirejyháza region, while seizing bridgeheads over the Tisza River on this axis; 2) Group Gorshkov will reach the Carei and Satu Mare region; 3) 53rd Army, with 4 Romanian Army divisions, will reach, fully, the Tisza River, with its right flank in the Rakamaz region; 4) 40th and 27th Armies will continue their offensives and reach the Petrova, Baia Mare, and Marghita line; 5) 7th Guards Army will continue concentrating in the region south of Oradea Mare and reach the Săcueni and Debrecen region with its 33rd Rifle Corps; and 6) 6th Guards Tank Army will concentrate in the Debrecen region to put its forces in order and become the *front's* reserve.
- 18-20 October – 1) Group Pliev will reach the Sătoraljaújhely and Chop region; 2) Group Gorshkov, in cooperation with 27th and 40th Armies, will fight to destroy the enemy's withdrawing Cluj – Sighet grouping; 3) 40th and 27th Armies will reach the Sighet, Carei, and Veshad line; 4) 7th Guards Army will reach the Nyir Bogat and Nyirejyháza line with 33rd Rifle Corps; 5) 7th Guards Army's main forces will reach the Oradea Mare region; 6) 6th Guards Tank Army will either reinforce the axis of Group Pliev or the axis of Group Gorshkov or receive an independent axis toward Miskolc; and 7) 53rd and 46th Armies will hold firmly to positions along the Tisza River. In the event of favorable conditions, it can carry out a regrouping for strengthening the axis toward Szolnok.

Corps and Army Group Wöhler's (Eighth Army's) XXIX Army Corps.⁴¹ The ensuing six days of heavy and complex fighting defeated and decimated Group Pliev, ended any Soviet hopes of cutting off and destroying German forces in eastern Hungary, and prompted the *Stavka* to reorient the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Front's forces on a march westward toward Budapest. In fact, the subsequent operations to reach and encircle German and Hungarian forces in the Hungarian capital city soon morphed into a painfully prolonged and complex struggle which, along with numerous German counterstrokes, lasted into early February 1945.⁴²

The upshot of all of this was that Stalin's anticipated conquest of the Danube Basin languished, leaving Soviet forces in possession of only the basin's eastern half. Despite heavy fighting in and around Budapest and the oil-rich Lake Balaton region, this remained the case until early February 1945, when unforeseen diplomatic developments finally provided Stalin with new opportunities to realize political and military aspects of his strategy for expanding Soviet control and influence over the remainder of the Danube Basin region.

The Far North

Complementing the offensive operations the *Stavka* mandated, at least in part for political reasons, in the fall of 1944 was the Petsamo-Kirkenes offensive operation, which the Karelian Front conducted from 7-29 October 1944. This offensive, which sought to drive the forces of German Twentieth Mountain Army's XIX Mountain Corps from northern Finland to protect the approaches to the Kola Peninsula, was spectacularly successful.⁴³ In well under a month's time, by employing both ground

⁴¹ Among the German and Hungarian forces participating in the defense and counterstroke in the Nyirejyháza region were Sixth Army's III Panzer Corps (1st and 23rd Panzer, 46th and 76th Infantry, and 22nd SS Cavalry *Marie Theresa* Divisions, and a combat group from *Feldherrnhalle* Panzer Grenadier Division) and Army Group Wöhler's (Eighth Army's) XXIX Army Corps (3rd Mountain Jäger, 8th SS Cavalry Division *Florian Geyer*, and 9th Hungarian Replacement Divisions). For additional details on this fighting see, Perry Moore, *Panzerschlacht: Armoured Operations on the Hungarian Plains, September-November 1944* (Solihull, England: Helion & Co., 2008) and Sázmvéber Norbert, *Pánéclosok a Tiszántúlon: Az alföldi páncéloscsata 1944 októberében* (Budapest: Paktum Nyomdaipari Társaság, 2002).

⁴² Among the many *Stavka* directives related to combat in Hungary from 29 October 1944 through 13 February 1945, see *Stavka* Directive No. 220251, dated 28 October, which ordered the 2nd Ukrainian Front to mount an offensive to capture Budapest, and *Stavka* Directive No. 220256, dated 4 November, which amplified and corrected the *front's* offensive plan, see Zolotarev, "*Stavka* 1944-45," 163 and 165-166.

⁴³ See *Stavka* Directive No. 220226, dated 26 September, which ordered the Karelian Front to prepare the offensive to protect Murmansk from German forces, and *Stavka* Directive No. 220228, dated 29 September, which approved the Karelian Front's offensive plan, in *Ibid*, 149

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and amphibious operations, the Karelian Front's 14th Army seized Petsamo on 15 October and Kirkenes, Norway, on 25 October.

Therefore, Stalin achieved many but not all of his political goals in the fall of 1944. By shifting the focus of the Soviet Army's main strategic effort from the Warsaw-Berlin axis to the Baltic and Balkans regions, he re-conquered virtually all of the territory of the Soviet Union's former Baltic republics save Courland. By doing the same in the Balkans, the Soviet Army cleared Axis forces from Romania, forced Bulgaria to enter the war on the Allied side, supported the emergence of a Communist Yugoslav state, and occupied Ruthenia, part of western Slovakia, and the eastern two-thirds of Hungary. However, while doing so, it failed in its ambitious effort to encircle and destroy German and Hungarian forces in eastern Hungary and western Romania, and suffered an embarrassing defeat at Nyirejyháza, which forced the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts to conduct an agonizingly slow advance toward Budapest. This won time necessary for Germany to reinforce its forces in Hungary and to retain the Budapest region and vital oil fields in the Balaton region for several month's more. Thus, it is not surprising that, when presented another opportunity to seize the remainder of the Danube Basin in February 1945, Stalin would readily exploit it.

The Third Period of the War, 1945

The Winter-Spring Campaign of 1945

Preparations for the Advance on Berlin, 26 January-13 February

Together with July 1944, when the Wehrmacht lost the bulk of two army groups, Belorussia, and the eastern half of Poland, arguably the most catastrophic month in the third period of the war for the Germans was January 1945. This is so because in January the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Belorussian and the 1st Ukrainian Fronts launched strategic offensives into East Prussia and from the Vistula River line in Poland that propelled Soviet forces upwards of 700 kilometers westward to the gates of Königsberg and into bridgeheads across the Oder River within 80 kilometers of the

and 152. The most thorough study of the Petsamo-Kirkenes offensive is, Major James F. Gebhardt, *The Petsamo-Kirkenes Operation: Soviet Breakthrough and Pursuit in the Arctic, October 1944*. Leavenworth Papers Number 17 (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Combat Studies Institute, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1990).

center of Berlin.

The 1st Belorussian and 1st Ukrainian Fronts commenced their offensives on 12 and 14 January, the latter from the Sandomierz (Baranow) bridgehead on the 12th and the former from the Magnuszew and Pulawy bridgeheads on the 14th. After thoroughly smashing German Army Group A (Center on 26 January), the forces of the two *fronts* captured Warsaw on 17 January, seized Kraców and Łódź and crossed the border into Germany on 19 January, encircled German forces in Poznan by 25 January, and reached and seized bridgeheads across the Oder River in late January. The 1st Ukrainian Front's forces captured bridgeheads in the Opole (Oppeln) region on 23 January and north of Breslau (Wroclaw) on the 24th, while the 1st Belorussian Front's 8th Guards and 5th Shock Armies seized bridgeheads over the river north and south of Kústrin (Kostryzn) from 31 January through 3 February.⁴⁴ The latter expanded the Kústrin bridgehead and encircled the Kústrin Fortress on 4 February.⁴⁵ At this point, with virtually no substantial German units defending on the Oder River's western bank, the way to Berlin seemed wide open, a fact known to most Soviet senior officers in the 1st Belorussian Front.⁴⁶

In fact, as early as 26 January, Marshal of the Soviet Union G. K. Zhukov, the commander of the 1st Belorussian Front, submitted to the *Stavka* a plan, which proposed developing the offensive further by forcing the Oder River and advancing to capture Berlin.⁴⁷ This plan, developed under Zhukov's direct supervision, called for

⁴⁴ The 5th Shock Army's 89th Guards Rifle Division crossed the Oder River overnight on 30-31 January and captured the village of Kienitz, several kilometers north of Kústrin, the next afternoon. The same day 1st Guards Tank Army's 44th Guards Tank Brigade did the same south of Kústrin. For details on the Vistula-Oder offensive, see David M. Glantz, ed., *1986 Art of War Symposium: From the Vistula to the Oder: Soviet Offensive Operations – October 1944 – March 1945* (Carlisle, PA: Center for Land Warfare, U.S. Army War College, 1986), 487-663, reprinted with maps by the Foreign Military Studies Office, Combined Arms Command, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, in 1992 and self-published in Carlisle, PA by David M. Glantz in 1996.

⁴⁵ The 8th Guards Army finally captured the Kústrin Fortress on 13 March.

⁴⁶ German operational maps show that, in addition to *Volksturm* (Home Guards) units, a battalion-size force of trainees from SS Panzer Grenadier Division *Feldherrnhalle* and 25th Panzer Grenadier Division were closing into the Kústrin region beginning on 31 January, to be joined by 506th SS Heavy Mortar Battalion on 2 February and a battalion from the *Kurmark* Panzer Regiment with Panther tanks, which tried but failed to collapse the Soviet bridgehead on 4 February. In addition, Detachment Schimpf and Division Headquarters, z.b.V. 606 (606th Infantry Division) reached the Oder north of Kústrin by 1 February, and 303rd Doberitz Infantry Division arrived along the Oder River at Frankfurt, south of Kústrin, beginning on 3 February. By day's end on 2 February, 25th Panzer Grenadier Division was responsible for defending the Kústrin sector, as well as the almost 50-kilometer-wide sector northward along the Oder's western bank to Bad Freienwald.

⁴⁷ See "Report of the commander of the 1st Belorussian Front No. 163/op to the Supreme High

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the *front's* forces “Having deployed 3rd Shock and 1st Polish Armies, to continue the offensive with all of the *front's* forces on the morning of 1-2 February 1945, with the immediate missions to force the Oder River from the march and subsequently develop a decisive blow to Berlin, while directing the main forces to envelop Berlin from the northeast, the north, and the southwest.”⁴⁸ The advancing forces were to reach and cross the Oder by or on the sixth day of the offensive and subsequently envelop the city of Berlin. Since Zhukov asked for one combat load of ammunition by 5 February and one more by 15 February, the offensive was to begin on 5-6 February and conclude by 25-28 February.

Marshal of the Soviet Union I. S. Konev, the commander of the 1st Ukrainian Front, submitted his plan for future operations to Stalin on 28 January. It required the *front's* main grouping of six armies (3rd Guards, 13th, 52nd, and 6th Armies and 3rd Guards and 4th Tank Armies), supported by 25th Tank and 7th Guards Mechanized Corps, “to attack on 5-6 February from the bridgehead west of Keбен and Steinau in the general direction of Sprottau, Kottbus, and Jüterbog,” with the two tank armies leading the advance.⁴⁹ Simultaneously, the *front's* 5th Guards and 21st Armies, spearheaded by 4th Guards and 31st Tank Corps, were “to attack from bridgeheads southeast of Breslau along the Striegau, Gorlitz, Grossenhaim, and Leipzig axis to capture the Dresden industrial region,” and 59th and 60th Armies, together with 1st Guards Cavalry Corps, were, “in cooperation with the 4th Ukrainian Front's forces, to protect the main grouping from the south and southwest by an offensive through Waldenburg and Zittau.”⁵⁰ Konev informed Stalin that the offensive could begin on 5-6 February, after the *front's* forces expanded their bridgeheads and refilled their stocks of ammunition and fuel. The *front* commander ended the plan by stating that the objectives of the offensive were, “to destroy the enemy's Breslau-Dresden grouping and reach the Elbe River by 25-28 February,” and, with the *front's* right wing, “to

Commander on a plan for developing the offensive and forcing the Oder River,” in *Ibid.*, 326-328.

⁴⁸ See the missions assigned to 1st Belorussian Front's subordinate armies in *Ibid.* The three-stage operation required the armies to reach and cross the Oder River in six days (on 7-8 February) and subsequently complete the offensive sometime in mid-February.

⁴⁹ See “Nizhne-silezskaiia nastupatel'naia operatsiia voisk 1-go Ukrainskogo fronta” [The Lower Silesian offensive operation of the 1st Ukrainian Front], in *Sbornik voenno-istoricheskikh materialov Velikoi otechestvennoi voiny, vypusk 10-11* [A collection of military-historical materials of the Great Patriotic War, issue 10-11] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1953). Prepared by the Military-Historical Department of the Soviet Army General Staff's Military-Scientific Directorate and classified secret. Hereafter cited as *SVIMVOV*, with appropriate page(s). The *front's* proposed plan was in its Order No. 0074/op, dated 28. 1. 1945, is on pages 134-135.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 134-135.

capture the city of Berlin in cooperation with the 1st Belorussian Front.”⁵¹

The *Stavka* approved the 1st Belorussian Front’s plan on 27 January with only minor changes to the *front’s* boundary lines with the 2nd Belorussian and 1st Ukrainian Fronts and with a requirement that Zhukov protect his right flank with one army and one tank corps to prevent any enemy attack from the north.⁵² Konev’s plan too received the *Stavka’s* endorsement the next day.

Subsequently, by 31 January, the two attacking *fronts* prepared operational directives governing the conduct of the forthcoming offensive for their subordinate forces. Issued at 0345 hours on 31 January, the 1st Ukrainian Front’s directive began by stating “The *front’s* armies will go over to a decisive offensive on 6 February and deliver the main attack in the general direction of Sprottau, Kottbus, and Júterbog, with the mission to destroy the enemy’s Breslau grouping and reach the Elbe River with their main forces by 25 February. The *front’s* right wing will capture Berlin in cooperation with the 1st Belorussian Front.”⁵³ As the two *fronts* developed their offensive plans, they conducted operations to expand their bridgeheads on the Oder River’s western bank from 28 January through 7 February. Accordingly, on the 1st Ukrainian Front’s left wing, 3rd Guards and 4th Tank Armies “destroyed a large grouping of German forces on the right bank of the Oder,” while its right wing armies “reached the Oder on a broad front and established tactical cooperation with the forces of the 1st Belorussian Front; and its left-wing formations dug into bridgeheads they seized earlier west of Keben.”⁵⁴ During this period, the army commanders adjusted their offensive plans several times to conduct new offensive waves on 3 and 5 February, 3rd Guards Army shifted from the *front’s* left wing to its right wing, and the *front’s* armies planned to resume the offensive on 8 February. However, on the *front’s* left wing, 60th Army went on the defense on 8 February, and 59th Army did likewise on the 9th because of strong enemy resistance.

Meanwhile, beginning on 28 January and ending late on 7 February, the 1st

⁵¹ Ibid., 135

⁵² Zolotarev, “*Stavka* 1944-45,” 196.

⁵³ *SVIMVOV*, 136-138, which includes all the details concerning the offensive. As for its armored strength, by the end of January, the 1st Ukrainian Front fielded 2,215 tanks and self-propelled guns, 250-300 supporting the combined-arms armies, 567 and 414, respectively, in 3rd and 4th Guards Tank Armies, 150-200 in 4th Guards and 31st Tank Corps, and 241 in 7th Mechanized Corps. See Ibid., 11.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 27-28. This study added, “However, the armies did not fulfill their main mission assigned to them during this period. The armies did not crush enemy resistance on the approaches to Glogau, force the Oder in all of its offensive sectors, and broaden the bridgeheads they seized to the scale designated by the *front’s* commander.”

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Ukrainian Front deployed its forces into positions mandated by the *front's* 31 January directive for the culminating offensive on Berlin.⁵⁵ During this period, the *Stavka* issued a series of directives which significantly reinforced its *fronts* designated to conduct the advance on Berlin with fresh infantry, artillery, and massive new air forces.⁵⁶

The 1st Belorussian and 1st Ukrainian Fronts' forces resumed offensive

⁵⁵ See *Ibid.*, 43-52.

⁵⁶ The reinforcements the *Stavka* dispatched to its operating *fronts* during the period from 31 January through 12 February included:

- *Stavka* Directive No. 101729 (1 February) – 71st Antiaircraft Artillery (AA) Division to the 1st Ukrainian Front.
- *Stavka* Directive No. 101732 (1 February) – 18th and 48th Separate Tank Destroyer Artillery Brigades (TDB) from the 2nd Baltic Front to the RVGK.
- *Stavka* Directives Nos. 101733 and 101777 (1 and 3 February) -- 33rd and 45th TDBs from the 1st Baltic Front to the RVGK and to the 1st Belorussian Front.
- *Stavka* Directive No.101728 (1 February) – 93rd Rifle Corps to the 1st Ukrainian Front's 6th Army.
- *Stavka* Directive Nos. 13571/10/org., 13572/10.org.,13573/10/org., 13574/10/org., 13575/10/org., and 13578/10/org. (3 February) – 1st, 2nd, and 4th Guards Bomber Aviation Corps to the 2nd Belorussian, 1st Ukrainian, and 1st Ukrainian Fronts, respectively, 15th Guards Bomber Aviation Division to the 3rd Ukrainian Front, Headquarters, 18th Air Army to the 1st Belorussian Front, and 3rd Guards Bomber Aviation Corps to the 1st Belorussian Front.
- *Stavka* Directives Nos. 101828, 101829, and 101830 (5 February) – Headquarters, 2nd Artillery Penetration Corps, with 19th Artillery Penetration Division; Headquarters, 9th Artillery Penetration Corps, with 30th Artillery Penetration Division; and 24th Artillery Penetration Division to the 3rd Ukrainian, 2nd Ukrainian, and 4th Ukrainian Fronts, respectively.
- *Stavka* Directives Nos. 101860 and 1010861 (6 February) – 5th Guards Mechanized Corps and 126th and 127th Light Mountain-Rifle Corps from the RVGK to the 4th Ukrainian Front.
- *Stavka* Directives Nos. 101934 and 101935 (9 February) – one AA artillery division each from the 2nd and 3rd Belorussian Fronts to the 1st Belorussian Front.
- *Stavka* Directives Nos. 101996, 101993, 101994, and 101992 (12 February) – three AA artillery divisions from the Leningrad Front to the RVGK and one AA artillery division each to the 3rd Belorussian, 1st Belorussian, and 1st Ukrainian Fronts.

operations on 8 February and were joined on the 10th by the forces of the 2nd Belorussian Front, which attacked German forces in Pomerania. Appreciating a possible threat against the 1st Belorussian Front's right wing as its forces advanced on Berlin, on 8 February, the *Stavka* had ordered the 2nd Belorussian Front "to go on the offensive westward from the Vistula River on 10 February with the *front's* center and left wing (2nd Shock and 65th, 49th, and 70th Armies, 1st Guards Tank, 8th Mechanized, and 3rd Guards Cavalry Corps, and no fewer than four artillery penetration divisions) to capture positions from the mouth of the Vistula River southward through Dirschau, Berent, and Rummelsburg to Neustettin." Subsequently, the *front* was to, "with the arrival of 19th Army, develop the offensive in the general direction of Stettin, capture the Danzig and Gdynia regions, and clear the enemy from the coast up to the Pomeranian Bay."⁵⁷ The 2nd Belorussian Front promptly complied with this directive on the morning of 10 February.

Meanwhile, on 10 February Marshal Zhukov sent another report to Stalin regarding his offensive intentions. After pointing out that "the enemy is carrying out a regrouping of Army Group Vistula, with the aim to organize a firm defense on the approaches to Stettin and on the Oder River line," Zhukov declared that his intent was "to disrupt the enemy's operational concentration, penetrate his defenses on the western bank of the Oder River, and capture the city of Berlin."⁵⁸ He dispatched orders to that effect to his subordinate armies at 0210 and 0245 hours on 13 February. These required the *front's* combined-arms armies to penetrate German defenses west of the Oder River beginning 20 February and 1st and 2nd Guards Tank Armies to envelop and capture Berlin by month's end.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ See Zolotarev, "*Stavka* 1944-45," 198.

⁵⁸ See "Doklad No. 00297/op komanduiushchego voiskami 1-go Belorusskogo fronta Verkhovnomy Glavnokomanduiushchemu o plane Berlinskoi nastupatel'noi operatsii" [Report No. 00297/op of the commander of the forces of the 1st Belorussian Front to the Supreme High Commander about a plan for the Berlin offensive operation], in A. M. Zolotarev, ed., *Russkii arkhiv: Velikaia Otechestvennaia: Bitva za Berlin (Krasnaia armia v poverzhennoi Germanii, T. 15 (4-5)* [The Russian archives: The Great Patriotic: The battle for Berlin (The Red Army in the defeat of Germany), Vol. 15 (4-5)] (Moscow: TERRA, 1995), 56-60. The report is dated 1515 hours 10 February 1945.

⁵⁹ See, "Operativnaia direktiva No.00310/op komanduiushchego voiskami 1-go Belorusskogo fronta komanduiushchim 8-i gvardeiskoi, 69-i i 33-i armiami na provedenie Berlinskoi operatsii" [Operational directive No. 00310/op of the commanders of 8th Guards, 69th and 33rd Armies on the conduct of the Berlin operation], in *Ibid.*, 60-62; and "Operativnaia direktiva komanduiushchego voiskami 1-go Belorusskogo fronta komanduiushchim 47-i, 5-i udarnoi, 1-i i 2-i gvardeiskimi tankovymi armiami na provedenie Berlinskoi operatsii" [Operational directive No. 00310/op of the commanders of 47th, 5th Shock, and 1st and 2nd Guards Tank Armies on the conduct of the Berlin operation], in *Ibid.*, 62-64.

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Berlin Delayed and the Exploitation into the Eastern Danube Basin, 14 February-15 April 1945

As of 13 February, it appeared to most Soviet officers and soldiers that the final offensive of the war was in the offing. However, this was not to be. Before the 1st Belorussian and 1st Ukrainian Fronts could begin their offensive, sometime on 13 or 14 February, Stalin postponed the offensive and, instead of mounting the attack on Berlin, on 15 February directed Zhukov and Konev to prepare and submit to him by 16 February plans for clearing German forces from Pomerania and Silesia. The two *front* commanders submitted their plans for doing so to Stalin on 16 February. Zhukov's proposal called for conducting a local offensive with 61st Army, supported by all of 2nd Guards Tank Army and 7th Guards Cavalry and 9th Tank Corps, on his *front's* right wing. These forces were "to throw back the enemy toward the north and reach the Lubow, Tempelburg, Falkenburg, Dramburg, Wangerin, Massow, Gollnow, and Stettin line with the *front's* right wing, cut the communications of the enemy's Pomeranian grouping, and assist the advance by the 2nd Belorussian Front's left wing to the Stettin region as rapidly as possible. Zhukov proposed to begin the offensive on 19 February and suggested it would last six to seven days.⁶⁰

Submitting his proposal the same day as Zhukov, Konev's plan called for the 1st Ukrainian Front's main shock group (3rd Guards, 13th, and 52nd Armies, spearheaded by 4th Tank Army) to reach the Neisse River, capture bridgeheads on its western bank, and dig in, while 3rd Guards Tank Army was capture the Gorlitz region, and 5th Guards Army, which was being brought forward, would also dig in. On the *front's* left wing, 21st, 59th, and 60th Armies, supported by 4th Guards and 31st Tank Corps and parts of 5th Guards Army, were to continue their offensive "to throw the enemy back to the Sudeten Mountains and protect that mountain flank with 59th and 60th Armies." Konev's plan left 6th Army to contain the German forces already encircled in Breslau.⁶¹

Stalin responded to these proposals on 17 February by approving them both.⁶² All of this meant that the 1st Belorussian Front's forces were to fortify their

⁶⁰ See "Doklad No. 00318/op komanduiushchego voiskami 1-go Belorusskogo fronta Verkhovnomy Glavnokomanduiushchemu plana nastupleniia na Stettinskome napravlenii" [Report No. 00318/op of the commander of the forces of the 1st Belorussian Front to the Supreme High Commander for plan of an offensive on the Stettin axis], in *Ibid.*, 328-329.

⁶¹ See Konev's proposal in, *SVIMVOV*, 139-140

⁶² See *Stavka* Directive No. 11024, dated 1815 hours 17 February, in Zolotarev, "Stavka 1944-45," 200. -The directive approving Konev's plan has not yet been released from the archives.

bridgeheads along the Oder River and shift forces northward to join the 2nd Belorussian Front's offensive against German forces in Pomerania, while the 1st Ukrainian Front would concentrate its efforts on clearing German forces from lower Silesia and reaching the Neisse River line in an operation which lasted until 24 February. These actions would be complemented by 3rd Belorussian Front's continued offensive to complete destroying remaining German forces in East Prussia.⁶³

Also on 17 February, the *Stavka* added an entirely new dimension to these operations, while doing so also providing essential context, as well as a probable explanation, for Stalin's 13 or 14 February decision to postpone the offensive to capture Berlin. It did so by directing the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts to begin planning for an offensive to capture Vienna and the eastern half of Austria, known at the time as Germany's *Ostmark*.⁶⁴ At the same time, the *Stavka* approved an offensive plan submitted by the 4th Ukrainian Front to conquer the Moravska-Ostrava industrial region at the headwaters of the Oder and Vistula River.⁶⁵ These directives ordered the commanders of the three *fronts* to:

2nd Ukrainian Front:

Prepare and conduct an offensive operation with the aim to occupy Bratislava by an attack north of the Danube River in the general direction of Nové Zámky, Malacky, and Znojmo, with a simultaneous offensive of the *front's* left wing along the southern bank of the Danube, capture Brno and Znojmo no later than the 20th day of the operation, and, in cooperation with the forces of the 3rd Ukrainian Front, capture Vienna. Subsequently, develop the offensive in the general direction of Pilsen (Plzeň).

3rd Ukrainian Front:

Prepare and conduct an offensive operation with the aim to destroy the enemy grouping north of Lake Balaton by an attack from the Szekésferhérvár region in the general direction of Papa and Szombathely and reach the Austro-Hungarian border no later than the 15th day of the operation.

⁶³ *Stavka* Directive No. 11023 of 9 February had ordered the 3rd Belorussian Front to complete destroying German forces in East Prussia by 20-25 February. See *Ibid.*, 199.

⁶⁴ See *Stavka* Directive No. 11027, dated 2015 hours 17 February 1945, in *Ibid.*, 202-203.

⁶⁵ See *Stavka* Directive No. 11029, dated 2010 hours 17 February 1945, in *Ibid.*, 201. The 4th Ukrainian Front's complete proposed plan is in *Ibid.*, 330-333.

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4th Ukrainian Front

The *Stavka* of the Supreme High Command approves your Operational Plan No. 2301, dated 14 February 1945, “to capture the Moravska-Ostrava industrial region.” Use the 126th and 127th Mountain Rifle Corps [from the RVGK] for the penetration on the main axis.... Begin the operation no later than 10 March...

As reflected by these directives, Stalin's decisions indicate nothing less than a sharply altered military strategy for ending the war in Europe. To the point, rather than ending the war abruptly in February 1945 by destroying Hitler and the remainder of his Wehrmacht in the ruins of Germany's capital city, instead, Stalin delayed the Berlin operation for two months, probably for the sake of consolidating his military and political aims in the Danube Basin region.⁶⁶

For more than 60 years since war's end, the Soviets postulated and the world accepted the rationale that Stalin and most of his senior marshals advanced for postponing the February offensive to capture Berlin. This rationale insisted that the Soviet dictator reached this decision because:

- German forces in Pomerania posed a serious threat to the 1st Belorussian Front's right flank in early February;
- German forces defending along the Oder River were sufficient to contain or severely hinder any Soviet advance across the water barrier;
- The Red Army was critically short of supplies, and its forces and their supply lines were woefully over-extended;

⁶⁶ The operative word here is “probably.” While this change in Stalin's strategy is consistent with his actions since the spring of 1944 concerning the Balkans region, recent in-depth studies still argue that, although he indeed altered his strategy in mid-February, Stalin did so by halting the advance on Berlin because of deteriorating operational conditions on the flanks of the 1st Belorussian and 1st Ukrainian Fronts' flanks. The most cogent of these sources is Aleksai Isaev, *Berlin 45-go: Srazheniia v logove zvera* [Berlin 1945: The battle on the lair of the beast] (Moscow: “Iauza” “Eksmo,” 2007). Thus, this argument remains to be resolved. The most contentious issue requiring resolution is determining the real strength of the German forces defending along the Oder River and preparing to attack southward from Pomerania. For the time being, however, in part because political pressure on historians is still “operative” in today's Russian Federation, I believe Stalin's fixation on securing the Danube Basin remains the primary driving force in his decision to halt the offensive on Berlin and shift the center of gravity of the Soviet Army's advance into western Hungary.

- German forces encircled in the 1st Belorussian and 1st Ukrainian Fronts' rear areas threatened the 1st Belorussian and 1st Ukrainian Fronts' lines of communications; and
- The two attacking *fronts* were too weak to accomplish the overly-ambitious objectives of Zhukov's and Konev's *fronts*.⁶⁷

Only once during the postwar period did any senior Soviet military leader seriously challenge Stalin's rationale. This occurred in 1964 and early 1965, when Marshal and twice Hero of the Soviet Union V. I. Chuikov, the former commander of 62nd Army at Stalingrad and the 1st Belorussian Front's 8th Guards Army at Berlin, broke ranks with his colleagues and sharply criticized Stalin's and Zhukov's decision to postpone the Berlin offensive. In an article published in the journal *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia* [New and recent history] in February 1964, Chuikov asserted, "Berlin could have been taken in February. And that, of course, would have hastened the end of the war. And the victims claimed would have been fewer than those we lost in April."

The famous Hero defender of Stalingrad went on to explain his views in greater detail in a book published in early 1965, but no doubt written the year before. Entitled, *Konets tret'ego reicha* [The End of the Third Reich], a chapter entitled "Some Miscalculations" castigated Stalin and Zhukov for their decision, stating categorically:

[T]hat we had sufficient forces to continue the Vistula-Oder operation

⁶⁷ In his defense of Stalin's decision, in *Berlin 1945*, 158-159, Isaev writes:

Having collided with crises on the flanks in February 1945, the Soviet command was forced, temporarily, to renounce the seizure of territory and make a transition to a strategy of smashing enemy forces. The groupings of enemy forces which remained on the flanks and had been bypassed gave cause for great anxiety. In miniature, this was repeated in the course of the 1st Ukrainian Front's offensive. The slipshod conduct of the encirclement operation against the "*Grossdeutschland*" Corps in the initial days of the offensive led to the fact that the corps fought its way from encirclement through the forests and was subsequently employed for a counterstroke which broke 4th Tank Army in two.

Despite all of the obvious minuses of a strategy of rapid penetration into the depth together with a classic battle of encirclement, one must acknowledge that the choice of the Soviet command was justified. It is completely unclear [not evident] that the mission of reaching the immediate approaches to Berlin would be resolved by a series of "cauldrons" ["*kotlov*," meaning "encirclement pockets"]. The restoration of the front and the conduct of counterstrokes by the Germans leaned [depended] to a great degree on the flow of reserves from without rather than formations bursting forth from the Vistula.

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right on to the storming of Berlin;

that the fears for the right flank of the 1st Belorussian Front were groundless, since the enemy had not got sufficient reserves at his disposal to mount a serious counter-blow (incidentally, Guderian admits to as much himself in his memoirs);

that the blow which the enemy planned to launch from the Stettin region could not have been carried through earlier than 15 February, and with only insignificant forces at that;

that a determined advance on Berlin in the beginning of February by seven or eight armies, including three or four tank armies, would have enabled us to wreck the enemy's blow from the Stettin area and continue our westward advance;

that at the beginning of February, Hitler had not sufficient forces and materials to defend the capital, nor any properly engineered lines of defense; and

As a result, the road to Berlin lay open.⁶⁸

A vicious literary debate immediately ensued, primarily in the Soviet military press, which reflected a larger and more important political struggle that had already taken place at the highest levels of the Soviet State. Anger at Nikita Khrushchev, the Communist Party's First Secretary and leader of the Soviet Union, on the part of political and military leaders who despised his programs of de-Stalinization, historical *glasnost'* [publicity or openness], truncation of the Soviet Army's ground forces (by virtue of the so-called nuclear Revolution in Military Affairs), the so-called Virgin Lands program, and his diplomacy in the Cuban missile crisis, precipitated a successful conspiracy to replace him as Soviet leader in mid-October 1964. Apparently, Khrushchev's decision to allow Chuikov to publish such controversial views was a last vestige of his *glasnost'* program.

The response was immediate and predictable. Soviet censors ripped the chapter entitled "Some Miscalculations" from all future editions of Chuikov's book, and, led by Zhukov in April 1965, the famous marshals who participated in the battle for Berlin published articles strongly refuting Chuikov's charges.⁶⁹ Thereafter, the

⁶⁸ Marshal Vasili I. Chuikov, *The Fall of Berlin* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1967), 114-115. This is an English translation of the first edition of Chuikov's *End of the Third Reich*.

⁶⁹ See G. Zhukov, "Na berlinskom napravlenii" [On the Berlin axis], *Voенно-istoricheskii*

justifications they advanced for the two-month halt at the Oder River's western bank persisted for almost fifty years.

There was, however, another simple but even more cogent reason why Stalin postponed the advance on Berlin on 13 or 14 February. The reason was Yalta, and it was inherently political. The Yalta (or Crimean) Conference, at which the leaders of the Big-Three Allied powers, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt of the United States, General Secretary Josef Stalin of the Soviet Union, and Prime Minister Winston Churchill of Great Britain, conferred on the future progress of the war and the postwar world, took place from 4-11 February 1945. Among the most sensitive and politically-charged matters this conference addressed was the postwar configuration of Europe, especially the administration of Nazi controlled countries and regions and the occupation of defeated Nazi Germany itself. This involved determining the degree of influence each of the Big Three would exercise over territories and states liberated by their Armed Forces and the postwar administration of Germany.

Although much of the groundwork for the administration, that is, division of Germany into distinct sectors controlled by the United States, Great Britain, and the USSR, had already been determined by a Protocol signed at London on 12 September 1944, the conferees at Yalta gave their final approval to this protocol at Yalta.⁷⁰ The

zhurnal [Military-historical journal], No. 6 (June 1965), 12-22. Hereafter cited as *VIZh*. This article was preceded by N. Antipenko, "Ot visly do odera" [From the Vistula to the Oder], *VIZh*, No. 3 (March 1965), 74-76 and 80-81; K. Telegin, "Na zakliuchitel'nom etape voiny" [At the conclusive stage of the war] *VIZh*, No. 4 (April 1965), 55-70, especially 62-64; and in the same issue, I. Konev, "Berlin – Praga" [Berlin – Prague]. Interestingly enough, while substantiating Zhukov's and the *Stavka's* assertion that the threat to the 1st Belorussian Front's right flank necessitated a halt along the Berlin axis, in his article, S. Shtemenko, "Kak planirovalas' nosledniaia kampaniia po razgromu gitlerovskoi Germanii" [How the final campaign for destroying Hitlerite Germany was planned], *VIZh*, No. 5 (May 1965), 68-69, S. M. Shtemenko, then the chief of the General Staff's Operations Directorate, reveals the General Staff's opinion that an advance to Vienna would be not only feasible but also useful. He states:

Hitlerite resistance in Budapest was finally overcome on 13 February. This, in the General Staff's opinion, opened a favorable perspective to develop offensives along the Olomouc – Prague and Vienna – Pilsen axes – into the very belly of Fascist Germany – and permit attracting there as many enemy forces as possible, including from the critical central axis.

However, understandably, nowhere in his article does Shtemenko directly connect the developments at Yalta with the General Staff's subsequent planning.

⁷⁰ For the terms of the London Protocol of 12 September 1944 and the Yalta Conference from 7-11 February, see "Protocol on Zones of Occupation and the Administration of "Greater Berlin" " (September 12, 1944), *Volume 8, Occupation and the Emergence of Two States, 1945-1961, German History in Documents and Images* at http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/pdf/eng/Allied%20Policies%201_ENG.pdf; ; *The Yalta Conference, 1945, Milestones: 1937-1945*, Office of the Historian, US Department of State at <http://history.state.gov/milestones/1937-1945/YaltaConf>; and *The Yalta Conference, February*

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protocol itself divided Germany, together with Berlin, into three sectors to be occupied and administrated by the each of the Big Three powers (a fourth sector was added for the French by virtue of the Yalta conference). The problem was that, since this protocol pertained only to “traditional” Germany, it did not apply to *Ostmark*, specifically, the country of Austria, which Germany had invaded and annexed in March and April of 1938. An always-astute Stalin recognized this problem and immediately realized both its political implications and associated military opportunities.

The Yalta Conference adjourned late on 11 February. Within days after returning to Moscow, Stalin issued his halt order to Zhukov. Simply stated, Stalin likely realized that the decisions reached at London on 12 September 1944 and confirmed at Yalta in February 1945 granted the Soviet Union what would become the Soviet occupation zone in eastern Germany, together with the city of Berlin. Why, he reasoned, should I use the bulk of February to capture the German capital, while a major offensive conducted during the same period of time could result in Soviet control over Vienna and the entire Danube Basin. Therefore, on 17 February Stalin directed his 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts to proceed with planning for an offensive on 15 March aimed at driving Axis forces from western Hungary and capturing Vienna and eastern Austria. The same day he also ordered the 4th Ukrainian Front to seize the vital Moravska-Ostrava industrial region in northern Slovakia. Thereafter, and through mid-March, while the 1st Belorussian and 2nd Ukrainian Fronts cleared their flanks in Pomerania and Silesia with relative ease, the bulk of the *Stavka's* available reserves, including in particular the powerful 9th Guards Army, flowed southward to the plains of Hungary.⁷¹

1945, *The Avalon Project*; Yalta (Crimea) Conference at <http://Avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/yalta.sp>.

⁷¹ The reinforcements the *Stavka* dispatched to the 1st and 2nd Belorussian and 1st Ukrainian Fronts in Poland, Pomerania, and Silesia and to the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Ukrainian Fronts in Czechoslovakia and Hungary from 17 February to 16 March 1945 included:

- *Stavka* Directive, number unknown (prior to 17 February) – 9th Guards Army (formed on 5 January 1945 from 7th Army and Separate Guards Airborne Army in accordance with an 18 December *Stavka* Directive), dispatched to the region Szolnok region northeast of Budapest.
- *Stavka* Directive No. 11028 (17 February) – transferred 27th Army from the 2nd to the 3rd Ukrainian Front, transferred 46th Army and 2nd Guards Mechanized Corps from the 3rd to the 2nd Ukrainian Front, and transferred 9th Guards Army, with 35th Gun Artillery Brigade, 319th, 321st, and 322nd Guards-Mortar and 1513th, 1523rd, and 1524th Self-Propelled Artillery Regiments, 15th Engineer-Sapper Brigade, and 15th Separate Flamethrower Battalion, from the RVGK to the 2nd Ukrainian Front.

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- *Stavka* Directive No. 102194 (19 February) – assigned 1st Polish Army to the 1st Belorussian Front.
 - *Stavka* Directive No. 12633 (19 February) – transferred the Danube Military Flotilla, less its 83rd Naval Infantry Brigade, from the 3rd to the 2nd Ukrainian Front.
 - *Stavka* Directive No. 102243 (21 February) – assigned 50th, 51st, and 52nd TDBs and 38th, 50th, and 318th Guards-Mortar Regiments to the 1st Belorussian Front, with 50th TDB diverted to the 3rd Belorussian Front on 24 February.
 - *Stavka* Directive No. 102371 (27 February) – assigned 25th Artillery Division to the 1st Belorussian Front.
 - *Stavka* Directive No. 12733 (28 February) – transferred 5th Guards Tank Army from the 3rd to the 2nd Belorussian Front.
 - *Stavka* Directive No. 102397 (28 February) – assigned 6th Guards Mortar Division to the 2nd Ukrainian Front.
 - *Stavka* Directive No. 102398 (28 February) – transferred 20th and 5th Guards Tank Corps to the 1st Ukrainian Front but kept them under direct *Stavka* control.
 - *Stavka* Directive No. 102417 (1 March) – assigned 387th Rifle Division to the 2nd Ukrainian Front's reserve.
 - *Stavka* Directive No. 102430 (1 March) – transferred 7th Guards Mechanized Corps from the 3rd to the 2nd Ukrainian Front.
 - *Stavka* Directive No. 102445 (2 March) – assigned 53rd TDB to the 1st Belorussian Front, but diverted it to the 1st Ukrainian Front on 7 March.
 - *Stavka* Directive No. 11034 (5 March) – temporarily transferred 1st Guards Tank Army (with the tank brigade from 1st Polish Army) from the 1st Belorussian to the 2nd Belorussian Front for the period 8-24 March.
 - *Stavka* Directive No. 102536 (7 March) – assigned 51st and 52nd TDBs to the 3rd Ukrainian Front.
 - *Stavka* Directive No. 12837 (8 March) – transferred 9th Guards Army and 207th and 209th Self-Propelled Artillery Brigades from the 2nd to the 3rd Ukrainian Front.
 - *Stavka* Directive No. 11038 (9 March) – directed the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts to repel the German counterstroke north of Lake Balaton (but forbid the 3rd Ukrainian Front from using 9th Guards Army in the defense) and ordered the 3rd and 2nd Ukrainian Fronts to conduct an offensive on 15-16 and 17-18 March, respectively, spearheaded by 9th Guards Army and 6th Guards Tank Army, respectively, to destroy German forces north of Lake Balaton and develop the offensive toward Papa and Sopron and Győr, respectively.

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Once it began on 16 March, after a difficult beginning, the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts' Vienna strategic offensive developed successfully and with relative ease. Soviet troops captured Vienna on 13 April and ended their Vienna offensive on 15 April. The very next day, on 16 April 1945, the 1st and 3rd Belorussian and 1st Ukrainian Fronts commenced their offensive along the Oder and Neisse Rivers to seize the prize of Berlin. During the two-month delay after mid-February, because the Allies granted the Soviet Union an occupation zone including Berlin, the Soviet Army succeeded in fulfilling Stalin's dream of capturing Vienna and the remainder of the Danube Basin. The *Stavka* considered the cost of just over 38,000 Soviet Army dead on the road to Vienna as minimal. However, as Chuikov well understood, the real cost of this strategic gain was the 352,000 casualties (including about 80,000 dead) which the 1st and 2nd Belorussian and 1st Ukrainian Fronts suffered when they finally conducted the Berlin offensive in April and May 1945.

Thus, while the Soviet Army conducted its final campaign in eastern and central Europe to defeat Germany and its Wehrmacht, Stalin manipulated his military strategy not only to ensure victory along the central axis by capturing Berlin but also by timing his strategic offensives so as to capture Vienna and secure control over the Danube Basin. By skillfully shifting the center of gravity of his operations and his forces to and fro along the central and southern axes, as he had done in 1944, he was able to secure victory along both. As a result, when the war ended on 26 May 1945, in addition to the Baltic region and those parts of Karelia the Soviet Union lost in 1941, the Soviet Army physically occupied not only Poland, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, and its occupation zone in about one-third of Germany granted to him

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- *Stavka* Directive No. 13653/org. (11 March) – assigned 113th Bomber Aviation Division RGK to the 1st Belorussian Front.
 - *Stavka* Directive No. 11040 (16 March) – transferred 6th Guards Tank Army from the 2nd to the 3rd Ukrainian Front to help destroy German forces north of Lake Balaton together with 27th Army.

One interesting but as yet not thoroughly investigated aspect of completing Soviet and Germany strategies in February and March 1945 is Hitler's 25 February decision to dispatch strong forces, including Sixth SS Panzer Army to Hungary, a measure General Wöhler, the commander-in-chief of Army Group South, recommended on 22 February. This offensive, code-named *Frühlingserwachen* (Awakening of Spring), was to begin on 5 and 6 March, ostensibly with the objective to advance toward Budapest to protect the Balaton oilfields.⁷¹ Although Hitler's decision was certainly conditioned by his concern for maintaining the Balaton oilfields and the apparent Soviet halt along the Oder River, no information exists which indicated that Hitler had any knowledge of the decisions the Allies reached on 12 September 1944 at London or from 7-11 February 1945 at Yalta in regard to zones of occupation in Germany.

by his Allies, but also Vienna and the Danube Basin. In the “baggage” of the Soviet Army were indigenous military forces for each country, as well as Communist governments “in waiting.” Anticipating the famous words Churchill would utter in a speech he gave at Fulton, Missouri on 5 March 1946, an “iron curtain” had indeed descended across the European continent “From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic.”⁷²

In short, the politically-motivated military strategy that Stalin and his *Stavka* embarked on during the winter campaign of 1944, specifically, the deliberate re-incorporation of the Baltic region into the Soviet Union and the extension of Soviet power and influence into the Balkans by direct military action, bore complete fruit by April 1945.

War in the Far East, August-September 1945

By virtue of the consultations between the Big-Three Allies at Teheran in November 1943, at Yalta in February 1945, and at Potsdam in July and August 1945, the Soviet Union agreed to invade Japanese-occupied Manchuria in August 1945. In addition to discussing the surrender and joint occupation of Germany by the three powers, similarly, these conferences addressed surrender procedures to be followed in regard to Japanese forces and the nature and scope of postwar occupations zones in Japan and the territories it conquered in the war.

⁷² See among many sources <http://history1900s.about.com/od/churchillwinston/a/Iron-Curtain.htm>. In addition to territories occupied by the Soviet Army, Tito's Communist government in Yugoslavia received direct assistance from the Soviet Union and its Red Army, Albania fell victim to a Communist movement, and the Soviets fostered and supported a Communist insurgency in Greece, which lived on until snuffed out in 1949 by assistance given by the West under the auspices of the Truman doctrine, which the United States enunciated in March 1947.

In addition, although a subject beyond the purview of this paper, the Soviets also raised, formed, and trained indigenous forces from the regions and countries they intended to liberate. Thus, by 1 April 1945, the Soviet Army included the 18th Estonian Rifle Corps (7th and 249th Estonian Rifle Divisions) and the 130th Latvian Rifle Corps (43rd Guards and 308th Latvian Rifle Divisions), the 16th Lithuanian Rifle Division, the 1st Polish Army, with the 1st Polish Tank Corps (subordinate to the 1st Belorussian Front), the 2nd Polish Army and 2nd Polish Artillery Division (operationally subordinated to the 1st Ukrainian Front), the 1st Czechoslovakian Army Corps, with 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Infantry, 2nd Airborne, and 4th Tank Brigades (subordinate to the 1st Ukrainian Front), the 1st and 2nd Romanian Armies (subordinate to the 2nd Ukrainian Front), the 1st Bulgarian Army, with 1st Bulgarian Tank Brigade (subordinated to the 3rd Ukrainian Front), and the 1st French Aviation Division (in the Moscow Military District). In addition, anticipating future combat in the Far East, the Soviets formed the 1st Korean Rifle Battalion, in the Far Eastern Front's 8th Rifle Brigade. For details on the subsequent creation of the North Korean Peoples Army, see Aleksandr Okorokov, *Sekretnye voina Sovetskogo soiuza: Pervaia polnaia entsiklopediia* [The secret wars of the Soviet Union: The first full encyclopedia] (Moscow: “Iauza” “Eksmo,” 2008), 460-475.

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Otherwise, Stalin's aim in joining the war against Japan was thoroughly consonant with his war aims in Europe. In short, by joining in the war against Japan, in addition to increased prestige generated by supporting the United States, the Soviet dictator hoped to expand Soviet power and influence in the Far East. He hoped to do this, first, by vanquishing the Japanese Kwantung Army in Manchuria and ultimately turning the region over the Chinese Communist rule; second, to participate in the liberation of Japanese-occupied Korea, as well as Japanese territories on Sakhalin Islands, the Kuril Islands, and elsewhere if opportunities arose; and, third, if possible, to occupy parts of the Japanese Home Islands so as to participate actively in the administration of occupied Japan after war's end. To this end, in addition to planning operations against Japanese forces in Manchuria, Korea, and on Sakhalin Island (Karafuto) and in the Kuril Islands, Stalin held out hope for an opportunity to participate in the conquest of at least part of Hokkaido Island. However, Stalin consistently concealed this third intention from his Allies until operations in Manchuria were nearing an end and also kept operations against Hokkaido planned but only on an "on order" basis.⁷³

Target Hokkaido Revisited

Detailed examination of the directives, orders, and reports issued by the Soviet *Stavka* RGVK, the High Command of Soviet Forces in the Far East, and headquarters subordinate to the latter, together with correspondence within each of and between the Big-Three powers, provides enough information to construct a general time-line in 1945 associated with Soviet planning for operations against Hokkaido (see Appendix 1 for the detailed time-line and sources).

At Stalin's direction, the *Stavka* began planning for operations in Manchuria on 26 March 1945, when it altered its long-standing defensive strategy in the Far East by directing the Coastal Group of Forces and the Far Eastern Front to undertake minimal offensive measures to protect rail communications in the region in the event of a Japanese offensive against Soviet forces in the Far East. Three months later, on 27-28 June, Stalin, the *Stavka*, and the Soviet State Defense Committee (GKO)

⁷³ For details about the Soviet planning and conduct of the Manchurian offensive, see David M. Glantz, *The Soviet Strategic Offensive in Manchuria, 1945 'August Storm'* (London: Frank Cass, 2003). This volume contains details about the planning for and postponement of the Soviet invasion of Hokkaido on pp. 301-307. This paper simply elaborates on the materials found in these pages based on Russian archival releases since the year 2000 and U.S. State Department records.

discarded any pretense of defensiveness by approving the General Staff's concept for operations for an offensive in the Far East and issuing directives to that effect to the Far Eastern Front, the Coastal Group of Forces, and the Trans-Baikal Fronts, although with no mention of Hokkaido.

Roughly a month later, on 30 July Stalin smoothed out command relationships in the region by creating a full theater command – The High Command of Soviet Forces in the Far East -- and appointing Marshal of the Soviet Union A. M. Vasilevsky as the High Commander of Soviet Forces in the Far East. This “unified” command included the Trans-Baikal and Far Eastern Fronts, the Coastal Group of Forces and the Pacific Fleet. Within days after Vasilevsky's arrival in the region, he recommended, and on 2 August the *Stavka* approved his request to transform the Coastal Group of Forces and the Far Eastern Front into the 1st and 2nd Far Eastern Fronts, respectively.

Less than a week later, almost certainly in reaction to the U.S. use of an atomic bomb against the city of Hiroshima on 6 August, in accordance with a directive the *Stavka* issued early in the day, on 7 August Vasilevsky ordered his three *fronts* and the Pacific Fleet to commence offensive operations at dawn on 9 August. To support this massive offensive, on the 8th the High Commander directed his air forces to precede the ground offensive with heavy bombing strikes against the Manchurian cities of Harbin and Changchung (Hsingking). This frenetic activity in early August culminated on the 9th with the full-scale invasion of Manchuria, which began just as the U.S. dropped its second atomic bomb on Nagasaki.

As the Soviet offensive developed at breakneck speed around the entire periphery of Manchuria, in the United States, the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC), which was responsible for coordinating diplomatic and military aspects of the war, issued a report (subsequently numbered SWNCC 21/5) on 11 August, which contained the so-called General Order No. 1. Among other things, this order indicated to whom Japanese forces in each and every region were to surrender. Unfortunately, this order inadvertently failed to mention surrender procedures pertaining to the Kuril Islands, a mistake that, by offering Stalin an opening to demand expanded Soviet influence in the Far East, unleashed a spate of disagreements between the United States and the Soviet Union.⁷⁴

When the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff reviewed this document on 14 August, they

⁷⁴ See, *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers 1945, Volume VI, The British Commonwealth, The Far East* (Washington: United States Printing Office, 1969), 634-637.

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recommended revising General Order No. 1 to include provisions for the surrender on the Kuril Islands. However, they left this matter up to “the President to inform the Allied Powers of our intentions,” adding, “On the matter of the Kuriles, the United States and Russian Chiefs of Staff have agreed to a boundary line between the areas of operations which pass through the Onnekotan Straits, with Admiral Nimitz receiving the surrender of the Kurile Islands south of this line.”⁷⁵ This left the Soviets with only the three northernmost islands, Shumshir [Shumshu], Paramoshiri [Paramushir], and Onnekotan [Onkotan], while the large islands of Simushir, Urup, Iturup, and Kunishir, together with many smaller islands, remained in the U.S. surrender zone.

Exploiting this obvious opening, on 16 August Stalin dispatched a message to President Truman recommending Order No. 1 be altered to grant the Soviet the rights to accept Japanese surrenders in the Kurils and the northern half of Hokkaido. This message read:

1. To include in the region of surrender of Japanese armed forces to Soviet troops all the Kuril Islands, which, in accordance with the decisions of the three powers in the Crimea, have to come into possession of the Soviet Union.

2. To include in the region of surrender of Japanese armed forces to Soviet troops the Northern part of the Island Hokkaido which adjoins in the north to the Le Pérouse Strait, which is between Karafuto and Hokkaido. The demarcation line between the Northern and Southern half of the Hokkaido Island should be on the line leading from the city Kushiro on the Eastern coast of the Island to the city Rumoe on the Western coast of the Island including the named cities into the Northern half of the Island....⁷⁶

The *Stavka* quickly notified General K. N. Derevienko, its representative at General MacArthur's headquarters, about this new development. In a directive it issued to Dereveinko at 1615 hours on 17 August, it informed him that the Soviet government had accepted the provisions of General Order 1, but:

[W]ith the proviso that it considers the Liaotung Peninsula with the ports of Darien and Port Arthur to be within the limits of Manchuria, and, in

⁷⁵ Ibid., 657-659.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 667-668.

addition, demands the following regions in which all ground, air, and auxiliary Japanese forces must be taken prisoner by Soviet forces – the Kuril Islands and the northern half of Hokkaido north of a line running from the city of Kushiro to the city of Rumai, while including both indicated cities in the Soviet region. You are obliged to insist on the fulfillment of this demand of the Soviet government before General MacArthur.⁷⁷

Adding fuel to the growing fire, the *Stavka* also insisted that Derevianko “present to General MacArthur the question of the Soviet Union’s government concerning any sort of stationing zone for Soviet troops in Tokyo.”⁷⁸

President Truman responded to Stalin’s note sharply but diplomatically on 17 August. While agreeing to Stalin’s request “to modify General Order No. 1 to include all the Kurile Islands to the area to be surrendered the Commander in Chief of the Soviet Forces in the Far East,” he added forcefully and categorically, “Regarding your suggestion as to the surrender of Japanese forces on the Island Hokkaido to Soviet forces, it is my intention and arrangements have been made for the surrender of Japanese forces on all of the islands of Japan proper, Hokkaido, Honshu, Shekoku, and Kyushu, to General MacArthur.”⁷⁹

Within the context of these exchanges of messages between Stalin and Truman, with Stalin’s obvious encouragement, the *Stavka* and Vasilevsky’s High Command set the wheels in motion for not only operations against the Kurils but also efforts to seize at least part of Hokkaido Island. Within the brief span of four days (18-21 August), Vasilevsky and the commander of the Pacific Fleet made arrangements to capture the northern half of Hokkaido Island with an amphibious operation conducted by 87th Rifle Corps and with strong air support. Once these preparations were nearing completion, Vasilevsky notified the *Stavka* at 0800 hours on 20 August, “With your approval, we can begin the naval operation here immediately after occupying the southern part of Sakhalin Island, on approximately 22 August 1945.” Then, taking care that he did not exceed his mandate, at 1115 hours on the 21st, Vasilevsky informed his subordinate headquarters that the Hokkaido operation, together with operations against the southern Kurils, could begin “only after the *Stavka* designates the time.”⁸⁰

⁷⁷ See, Zolotarev, “*Stavka* 1944-45,” 251-252.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 252.

⁷⁹ See, *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers 1945, Volume VI*, 670.

⁸⁰ See, V. A. Zolotarev, *Russkii arkhiv: Sovetsko-iaponskaia voina 1945goda: istoriia voenno-politicheskogo protivoborstva dvukh derzhav v 30-40-e gody. Dokumenty i materialy.*

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However, these bold military preparations came to an abrupt halt on 22 August, when diplomacy trumped military action. In the diplomatic sphere, Stalin responded to President Truman's letter of 18 August on the 22nd by expressing "understanding ... in the sense that you refuse to satisfy the request of the Soviet Union for the inclusion of the Northern part of the Island Hokkaido in the region of surrender of the Japanese armed forces to the Soviet troops." However, Stalin qualified his apparent "surrender" by adding, "I have to say that I and my colleagues did not expect such an answer from you" and quickly but spitefully refused Truman's request for an air base in the Kurils, first, because it contravened agreements reached in the Crimea (Yalta) and, second, because "demands of such a nature are usually laid before either a conquered state, or such an allied state which is in no position to defend with its own means certain part of its territory." Since Stalin did "not believe that the Soviet Union could be included among such states," he implied such a request was humiliating and not understandable.⁸¹

Despite Stalin's petulant diplomatic response, the military actions he took seem conciliatory. At 1455 hours on the 22nd, at Stalin's direction, Vasilevsky issued a directive order to the High Commander of the Pacific Fleet postponing (*otsrochka*) the amphibious operation against Hokkaido Island and the southern islands of the Kuril chain.⁸² However, although the Russian source revealing this directive terms the action a "postponement," the directive's actual wording was less definitive:

3. It is necessary to refrain [*vozhderzhat'sia*] from the amphibious operation from Sakhalin Island to Hokkaido Island until receipt of a special *Stavka* order. The transfer of 87th Rifle Corps to Sakhalin Island will continue.

4. In connection with the declarations of the Japanese about readiness to capitulate in the Kuril Islands, I request you think over the matter of the possibilities of transferring the lead divisions of 87th Rifle Corps from Sakhalin

V 1 T. T. 18 (7-1) [The Russian archives: The Soviet-Japanese War 1945: A history of the military-political struggle of two powers in the 30s and 40s. Documents and materials. In two volumes. Vol. 18 (7-1)] (Moscow: TERRA, 1997), 355-356, 363-365; V. A. Zolotarev, *Russkii arkhiv: Sovetsko-iaponskaia voina 1945 goda: istoriia voenno-politicheskogo protivoborstva dvukh derzhav v 30-40-e gody. Dokumenty i materialy. V 2 T. T. 18 (7-2)* [The Russian archives: The Soviet-Japanese War 1945: A history of the military-political struggle of two powers in the 30s and 40s. Documents and materials. In two volumes. Vol. 18 (7-2)] (Moscow: TERRA, 2000), 36-40, and 42.

⁸¹ See, *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers 1945, Volume VI*, 687-688.

⁸² See, Zolotarev, *Russkii arkhiv: Sovetsko-iaponskaia voina 1945. T 18 (7-2)*, 43.

Island to the southern Kuril Islands (Kunashir and Ituroop), while passing Hokkaido Island. I request you report your views on this matter to me no later than the morning of 23 August 1945.⁸³

In short, this wording implies that Vasilevsky, thinking that this “postponement” was distinctly temporary, was actually willing to “expand the envelope” of Soviet demands.

Although we do not know how the commander of the Pacific Fleet responded to Vasilevsky’s directive, on 23 August an obviously pleased Vasilevsky was able to inform the *Stavka*, “the massive capitulation of Japanese forces in the northern part of the Kuril Islands had begun,” with all of Shumshu and the northern part of Paramushir due to be occupied on 23 August, the southern half of Paramushir on 24 August, and the group of small islands south of Paramushir on 25 August. Indicating that the Hokkaido matter was still “on hold,” Vasilevsky added, “The operation on Hokkaido will be begun only after [receipt] of your additional order, and until then not a single boat will be sent there.”⁸⁴

By this time Stalin’s messages to Truman were clearly generating uncertainty in U.S. ranks concerning Soviet intentions. Attesting to this growing concern, at 1125 hours on 23 August, W. Averell Harriman, the U.S. Ambassador in the Soviet Union, notified the U.S. Secretary of State “I believe I should stay on [in Moscow] until the control machinery for Japan has been agreed upon” because “I have a feeling that we may have some trouble with the Soviets over the setup which I understand we intend to establish particularly in regard to Soviet forces used for occupation of Japan under General MacArthur as Supreme Commander.” Citing his own objection to having MacArthur share such responsibilities with Vasilevsky, which ultimately prompted the Soviets to withdraw the proposal, Harriman evidenced his suspicions, stating:

I feel that the Soviets will come up again with further proposals that the Soviets have a zone of occupation with independent command or in some other way obtain for themselves a position where they can block our program if it does not meet with their approval. I sincerely hope that we will stand firm on what I understand is our plan and if we do, I am confident the Soviets will accept it.

Tellingly, Harriman added:

⁸³ See, Zolotarev, *Russkii arkhiv: Sovetsko-iaponskaia voina 1945*. T 18 (7-2), 43.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.

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The Russian pattern set in Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania is a good precedent although I assume we would always consult them in advance on any questions of policy.... I expect also that we will have some difficulty in Korea as it is my impression the Russians want to dominate the country in spite of Stalin's agreement that it should develop its independence through a four-power trusteeship. I believe the Russians are feeling their way out with us to see how far they can go with their unilateral objectives in the Far East.”⁸⁵

Beginning on 27 August, Vasilevsky's High Command took measures that, at the same time, ameliorated and justified Harriman's concerns. On the one hand, at 2300 hours on the 27th Vasilevsky's chief of staff warned the commander of the Pacific Fleet, “In order to avoid creating conflicts and misunderstandings in relation to the Allies, the High Command orders: 1. Categorically forbid the dispatch of any ships and aircraft whatsoever to Hokkaido Island.”⁸⁶ On the other hand, on 28 August General Meretskov, the commander of the 1st Far Eastern Front, asked the commander of the Pacific Fleet to provide transports in the port of Otomari on Sakhalin Island by 3 September to carry 87th Rifle Corps' 355th Rifle Division to Iturup (two regiments) and Kunashir (one regiment) and the next day directed the commander of 87th Rifle Corps to speed up loading 113th Rifle Brigade and 355th Rifle Division at Otomari so that the former could occupy Kunashir and Shikotan Islands by 31 August and the latter Iturup and Urup Islands on 3 September. ⁸⁷

In a series of reports on 30 August, the commanders of the 2nd Far Eastern Front and the Pacific Fleet informed Vasilevsky that their forces had completed occupying the northern and central Kuril Islands, from Shumshu southward to Urup by 1200 hours, Iturup by 1430 hours, and the islands of Urup, Simushir, and Ketoi by day's end.⁸⁸ Completing this process, on 1 September 1945, the Pacific Fleet's chief of staff reported to the High Command's chief of staff that its 113th Rifle Brigade had landed on Kunashir Island at 0600 hours on 1 September against no resistance.⁸⁹ Four days later, the commander of the 2nd Far Eastern Front instructed the commander of the Kamchatka Defensive Region precisely how to dispose his forces

⁸⁵ See, *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers 1945, Volume VI*, 689-690.

⁸⁶ See, Zolotarev, *Russkii arkhiv: Sovetsko-iaponskaia voina 1945*. T 18 (7-2), 245.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 47-48.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 48.

throughout the Kuril Island chain.⁹⁰

Thus, President Truman's strong rejoinders compelled Stalin to abandon his hopes to gain territory on Hokkaido, by doing so also ending the Generalissimo's ardent desire to participate in the joint occupation of Japan. However, despite Truman's actions, by 1 September the Soviet Union firmly controlled the entire Kuril Island chain, including the islands of Iturup (Etorofu To), Kunashir (Kunashiri To), and Shikotan (Shikotan To), as well as the five small piles of rocks named the Habomai (Khaboman) Islands. This contradicted the comments the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff made on 14 August regarding responsibilities for accepting Japanese surrenders in the southern Kurils, and, then and now, Japanese sensibilities regarding who should possess the southern Kurils and Habomai Shoto, both of which they believed were not subject to Soviet seizure.

Regardless of the surrender and occupation policies that ultimately prevailed in the Far East and Japan, the discussion associated with this time line, together with other studies of the military and diplomatic facets of the Soviet Union's Manchurian campaign, highlight near constant Soviet demands for participation in the occupation of Japan and Japanese dominated territory.⁹¹ In this sense, like Harriman's 23 August remarks, they also reveal the close resemblance between Stalin's strategy for waging war in Europe and his strategy for doing so in the Far East. Simply stated, when Stalin perceived opportunities for expanding Soviet influence in the Far East, he exploited them to the hilt. In this case, the failure of the U.S. SWNCC's General Order No. 1 to mention the surrender of and occupation zones in the Kuril Islands provided the "opening" Stalin willingly exploited. Although history records that

⁹⁰ See, Zolotarev, *Russkii arkhiv: Sovetsko-iaponskaia voina 1945*. T 18 (7-2), 50.

⁹¹ In addition to the sources cited above, the most important study concerning the situation in the Far East in 1945 is, Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman, and the Surrender of Japan* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), with whose conclusions I generally agree. See also Geoffrey Roberts, *Stalin's War: From World War to Cold War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 294, who concludes, "Stalin evidently decided to back away from confrontation with the US over Hokkaido..." because "operations on Sakhalin and the Kurils had shown the Japanese could put up a hard fight and might do so again to stop the Red flag being planted on Hokkaido," but "the priority of maintaining good relations with the United States is likely to have been more important in Stalin's calculation...." Dmitrii Volkogonov, in his famous work, *Trumf i trageiia. I. V. Stalin. Politicheskii portret* [Triumph and tragedy. I. V. Stalin: A political portrait] (Moscow: Agentsva pechati Novosti, 1989), agrees, writing that, "Stalin reflected: what could this step produce? It appeared to the Generalissimo, and not without basis, that this "assault attack" could lead to further exacerbation of already noticeably damaged relations with the Allies." While both Roberts and Volkogonov are generally correct, given the violation of General Order 1, Stalin had already won a bit more than merely a symbolic victory.

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President Truman succeeded in closing that “opening” in regard to Hokkaido, far fewer acknowledge Stalin’s victory in the Kurils.

Conclusions and Summary Judgments

The thrust of this paper is two-fold. First and foremost, it argues that, in war, the planning, conduct and outcome of military operations serves as an important indicator of the motivations and aims, be they political, economic, social, or otherwise, of each country waging war. Second, and more germane to this investigation, whether successes or failures, the military operations the Soviet (Red) Army carried out during the Soviet-German War (1941-1945) and the short Soviet-Japanese War (August-September 1945) were critically important indicators of the military strategy Josef Stalin pursued as he waged war. As a result, from the perspective of Soviet strategic and operational military planning, to varying degrees and at differing times, Stalin’s military and political aims significantly influenced the course of combat operations.

Massive amounts of recently-released Soviet archival materials, together with existing U.S., German, and Japanese documentation related to the Soviet Army’s conduct of combat operations now make it possible to measure relatively accurately the degree to which political aims governed Stalin’s wartime strategy. Based on examination of this material, this study has investigated the extent to which the military operations the Soviet Army conducted during the Soviet-German and Soviet-Japanese Wars were indicative of Stalin’s and the Soviet Union’s postwar territorial ambitions and international influence.

This study concludes that, as early as February 1943, when he planned strategic operations, Stalin and his *Stavka* gave serious consideration to political factors. In this instance, after pursuing of necessity a strategy of defending against and then defeating Axis forces for the sake of securing and expanding existing Soviet territories during 1941 and 1942, in mid-February 1943 he began orchestrating operations designed to place Soviet Army forces in positions advantageous for the subsequent conquest of lost republics of the Soviet Union. Specifically, his capstone operation Polar Star was designed not only to destroy German Army Group North but also pave the way for invasion and “liberation” of the Baltic region. Further, the failure of this operation, together with a brief resurgence of German power in the spring and early summer of 1943, delayed Stalin’s further pursuit of political aims until the winter of 1944.

Thereafter, however, without losing focus on the main objective – the defeat of the Wehrmacht and westward advance along the Minsk-Warsaw-Berlin axis – to an ever-increasing degree, Stalin deliberately planned offensive operations to achieve largely political aims right up to war’s end. While he did so in much of 1944 and through January 1945 without significant delays along the main Berlin axis, beginning in February 1945, he consciously postponed operations along that axis so as to achieve major political ends in other regions. Finally, the decision by Stalin to enter the war against Japan in the Far East, as well as the manner in which Stalin conducted the war, militarily and diplomatically, were thoroughly consistent with the means and ends associated with his conduct of war in Europe.

Specifically, this study concludes:

- The “center of gravity” [or strategic focal point] of Stalin’s military strategy to defeat German operations Barbarossa and Blau in 1941 and 1942 was the destruction of German and other Axis forces and the preservation of the Soviet Union, with territorial acquisitions clearly secondary considerations.
- The spectacular victories the Soviet Army achieved at Stalingrad and in its ensuing winter offensive (November 1942–mid-February 1943) encouraged Stalin to implement a military strategy with vastly expanded territorial objectives (an advance to the Dnepr River and initiating the re-conquest of Belorussia, the Ukraine, and the Baltic region). However, German victories from mid-February through March 1943 forced Stalin to postpone further attempts to clear Axis forces from Soviet soil until the Soviet victory at Kursk in July 1943.
- Stalin’s military strategy during the summer-fall campaign of 1943 (July-December 1943), which focused once again on destroying German forces rather than acquiring territory, culminated in major Soviet victories at Kursk in early July, at Orel, Khar’kov, Briansk, and Smolensk in July and August, in a general advance to the Dnepr River in September, and in the piercing of German defenses along the Dnepr River from October through December 1943.
- During the latter stages of the winter campaign of 1943-1944 (January-April 1944), Stalin’s military strategy began pursuing both military and political ends. Although his strategy’s center of gravity was to defeat German forces and liberate the Leningrad region, Belorussia, and the Ukraine, during the intervals in between his priority offensives, Stalin orchestrated far weaker

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offensives with distinctly political aims. Consequently, after launching significant offensives from January through March 1944 to reconquer the Leningrad region and the Ukraine (as well as a failed offensive into Belorussia), Stalin mandated follow-on offensives with significant political implications into the Baltic region from February through April and into northern Romania in April and May. Although the latter failed to achieve its ambitious aims, it set the pattern for further offensives in the future.

- Likewise, during the summer-fall campaign of 1944 (June-December 1944), while Stalin's strategy focused on destroying German forces in Belorussia, eastern Poland, and Romania (the latter with strong political overtones), it included distinctly politically-motivated advances into Finland and the Baltic region in June and July and wholesale invasions of the Baltic and Balkan regions in October and November 1944.
- During the winter-spring campaign of 1945 (January-May 1945), the Soviet Army conducted its culminating campaign to defeat the Wehrmacht and its Axis allies in eastern and central Europe and end the war. For the first time in the war, Stalin's military strategy sought not only to achieve victory along the Berlin axis but also to seize Vienna and secure control over the Danube Basin. By skillfully exploiting diplomatic developments, Stalin proved able to shift the center of gravity of his operations to and fro between the central and southern axes in February and April 1945 so as to achieve strategic victory along both.
- By virtue of Stalin's military strategy, when the war ended on 26 May 1945, in addition to the Baltic region, Belorussia, the Ukraine, Moldavia, and those parts of Russia and Karelia the Soviet Union had lost in 1941 and 1942, the Soviet Army physically occupied not only Poland, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, and an occupation zone encompassing the roughly one-third of Germany and Berlin granted to him by his Allies, but also Vienna and the western half of the Danube Basin.
- By entering the war against Japan in response to Allied requests, Stalin was able not only to defeat Japanese forces in Manchuria and on Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands but also significantly expand Soviet territories and influence in the Far East. Although he failed to gain a foothold on the main islands of Japan (Hokkaido), he extended Soviet control and influence over Manchuria

and Sakhalin Island and, contrary to Allies hopes, also the northern half of Korea, the entire Kuril Island chain, and Japan's so-called "northern islands."

In short, despite the immeasurably terrible damage done to the Soviet Union economically as well as demographically by its participation in World War II, a country viewed by many as a colossal pariah before 1941 emerged from the war as one of the world's two dominant world powers.

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Appendix 1 -- A Detailed Time-Line Regarding Soviet Planning for Operations against Hokkaido.

- **26 March 1945** – *Stavka* Directives Nos. 11047 and 11048 to the Coastal Group of Forces and the Far Eastern Front describe actions to be taken in the event of a Japanese offensive against Soviet forces in the Far East. These measures involve both defense and offensive operations to secure rail communications to the Far East by seizing the Hutou, Misham, Fuchin (Fugdin), and Paoching (Baotsin) regions.
Source: Zolotarev, “*Stavka 1944-45*,” 214-216.
- **27 June 1945** – Stalin, the *Stavka*, and the Soviet State Defense Committee approve the General Staff’s concept for operations in the Far East but left the question of Hokkaido open. See, Glantz, *The Soviet Strategic Offensive in Manchuria*, 301. Although no decisions are reached about attempting to capture Hokkaido, reportedly, when asked by Stalin “How many divisions would be required to seize Hokkaido? Zhukov said four rifle divisions but Stalin said nothing more.”
Source: Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman, and the Surrender of Japan* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 115.
- **28 July 1945** – *Stavka* Directives Nos. 11112, 11113, and 11114 to the Far Eastern Front, the Coastal Group of Forces, and the Trans-Baikal Fronts, respectively, order them to prepare offensive operations along the Sungari River axis and into central Manchuria, with no mention made of Hokkaido.
Source: Zolotarev, “*Stavka 1944-45*,” 245-248.
- **30 July 1945** – *Stavka* Directive No. 11120 appoints Marshal of the Soviet Union A. M. Vasilevsky as High Commander of Soviet Forces in the Far East, with the Trans-Baikal and far Eastern Fronts, the Coastal Group of Forces and the Pacific Fleet subordinate to his Far East Command.
Source: Ibid., 248-249.
- **2 August 1945** – *Stavka* Directive No. 11121 to the High Commander of Soviet Forces in the Far East transforms the Coastal Group of Forces into the 1st Far Eastern Front and converts the Far Eastern Front into the 2nd Far Eastern Front as proposed by Vasilevsky on 1 August.
Source: Ibid.

- **7 August 1945** – *Stavka* Directive No. 11122 to the High Commander of Soviet Forces in the Far East orders the three *fronts* to commence offensive operations as mandated by Directives 11112-11114 at dawn on 9 August 1945 in response to a report by Vasilevsky on 3 August.
Source: Ibid., 249-250.
- **7 August 1945 (2235 to 2310 hours Trans-Baikal time)** – High Commander of Soviet Forces in the Far East Directives Nos. 80/nsh, 81/nsh, 82/nsh, and 83/nsh to the Trans-Baikal and 1st Far Eastern Fronts, the Pacific Fleet, and the 2nd Far Eastern Fronts order them to commence offensive operations against Japanese forces in Manchuria on the morning of 9 August 1945.
Source: V. A. Zolotarev, *Russkii arkhiv: Sovetsko-iaponskaia voina 1945 goda: istoriia voenno-politicheskogo protivoborstva dvukh derzhav v 30-40-e gody. Dokumenty i materialy. V 2 T. T. 18 (7-1)* [The Russian archives: The Soviet-Japanese War 1945: A history of the military-political struggle of two powers in the 30s and 40s. Documents and materials. In two volumes. Vol. 18 (7-1)] (Moscow: TERRA, 1997), 341-343.
- **8 August 1945** -- High Commander of Soviet Forces in the Far East Directive No. 84/nsh to the commander of the Air Forces mandates the bombing of Harbin and Changchung (Hsingking).
Source: Ibid., 343.
- **11 August 1945** – Revised General Order No. 1 issued by the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC 21/5), among other things, indicates to whom Japanese forces in each and every region are to surrender, but inadvertently leaves out mention of the Kuril Islands. The pertinent paragraph reads:
 - c. The senior Japanese commanders and all ground, air, and auxiliary forces within Manchuria, Korea north of 38° north latitude and Karafuto [Sakhalin Island] shall surrender to the Commander-in-Chief of Soviet Forces in the Far East.**Source:** *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers 1945, Volume VI, The British Commonwealth, The Far East* (Washington: United States Printing Office, 1969), 634-637.
- **14 August 1945** – The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend revising General Order No. 1 to include provisions for Japanese surrenders on the Kuril Islands

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but leaves it up to “the President to inform the Allied Powers of our intentions,” adding:

On the matter of the Kurils, the United States and Russian Chiefs of Staff have agreed to a boundary line between the areas of operations which pass through the Onnekotan Straits,” with Admiral Nimitz receiving the surrender of the Kuril Islands south of this line.

This would leave the Soviets with only the three northernmost islands, Shumshir [Shumshu], Paramoshiri [Paramushir], and Onnekotan [Onnekotan], while the large islands of Simushir, Urup, Iturup, and Kunishir, together with many smaller islands, would remain in the U.S. surrender zone.

Source: Ibid., 657-659.

- **16 August 1945** – Message from the Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars of the Soviet Union (Stalin) to President Truman concerning “General Order No. 1” in regard to the surrender of Japan and occupation zones in Japan. This message suggests that Order No. 1 contain the following provisions:

1. To include in the region of surrender of Japanese armed forces to Soviet troops all the Kuril Islands, which, in accordance with the decisions of the three powers in the Crimea, have to come into possession of the Soviet Union.

2. To include in the region of surrender of Japanese armed forces to Soviet troops the Northern part of the Island Hokkaido which adjoins in the north to the Le Pérouse Strait, which is between Karafuto and Hokkaido. The demarcation line between the Northern and Southern half of the Hokkaido Island should be on the line leading from the city Kushiro on the Eastern coast of the Island to the city Rumoe on the Western coast of the Island including the named cities into the Northern half of the Island....

Source: Ibid., 667-668.

- **17 August 1945 (1615 hours)** – *Stavka* Directive No. 11125 to the representative of the High Commander of Soviet Forces in the Far East at the High Command of American Forces in the Pacific Ocean TVD (Lieutenant General K. N. Derevianko) concerning additional occupation regions and the stationing of Soviet forces in Manchuria and Japan. This instructs Derevianko that:

‘The Soviet government accepts the above proposal [General Order 1],’ but ‘with the proviso that it considers the Liaotung Peninsula with the ports of Darien and Port Arthur to be within the limits of Manchuria, and, in addition, demands the following regions in which all ground, air, and auxiliary Japanese forces must be taken prisoner by Soviet forces – the Kuril Islands and the northern half of Hokkaido north of a line running from the city of Kushiro to the city of Rumai, while including both indicated cities in the Soviet region. You are obliged to insist on the fulfillment of this demand of the Soviet government before General MacArthur.’

In addition, the *Stavka* insists that Derevianko “present to General MacArthur the question of the Soviet Union’s government concerning any sort of stationing zone for Soviet troops in Tokyo.”

Source: Zolotarev, “*Stavka* 1944-45,” 251-252.

- **17 August 1945** – Message from President Truman to the Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars of the Soviet Union (Stalin) concerning Stalin’s message of 16 August, in which Truman agrees to Stalin’s request “to modify General Order No. 1 to include all the Kurile Islands to the area to be surrendered the Commander in Chief of the Soviet Forces in the Far East,” but Truman adds:

Regarding your suggestion as to the surrender of Japanese forces on the Island Hokkaido to Soviet forces, it is my intention and arrangements have been made for the surrender of Japanese forces on all of the islands of Japan proper, Hokkaido, Honshu, Shekoku, and Kyushu, to General MacArthur.

Source: *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers 1945, Volume VI*, 670.

- **17 August 1945 (2330 hours)** – *Stavka* Directive No. 11126 to the High Commander of Soviet Forces in the Far East to cease combat operations in those sectors of the front where Japanese forces had surrendered, to raise the Chinese flag designated by the administration of Chang-Kai-Shek in cities and cooperate with his administration, but to consider all captured Japanese arms and equipment as Soviet trophies not to be transferred to Chinese hands.

Source: Zolotarev, “*Stavka* 1944-45,” 252.

- **18 August 1945 (2200 hours)** – Report by A. M. Vasilevsky, High Commander of Soviet Forces in the Far East, about the situation at day’s end on 17 August,

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with a request for the *Stavka* to approve the seizure of the northern half of Hokkaido by two divisions of 87th Rifle Corps during the period from 19 August to 1 September 1945 and the establishment of the corps' headquarters on Hokkaido.

Source: Zolotarev, *Russkii arkhiv: Sovetsko-iaponskaia voina 1945*, 355-356.

- **19 August 1945 (1300 hours)** – Combat order issued by the commander of the Pacific Fleet on the conduct of an offensive operation to seize the northern part of Hokkaido Island with two rifle divisions of the 1st Far Eastern Front's 87th Rifle Corps in the period from 20 August to 1 September 1945.

Source: V. A. Zolotarev, *Russkii arkhiv: Sovetsko-iaponskaia voina 1945 goda: istoriia voenno-politicheskogo protivoborstva dvukh derzhav v 30-40-e gody. Dokumenty i materialy. V 2 T. T. 18 (7-2)* [The Russian archives: The Soviet-Japanese War 1945: A history of the military-political struggle of two powers in the 30s and 40s. Documents and materials. In two volumes. Vol. 18 (7-2)] (Moscow: TERRA, 2000), 36-37.

- **19 August 1945 (1400 hours)** – Organizational order issued by the commander of the Pacific Fleet on the conduct of an offensive operation to seize the northern part of Hokkaido Island.

Source: *Ibid.*, 37-38.

- **19 August 1945** – Report by the commander of the Pacific Fleet to the High Commander of Soviet Forces in the Far East with an account of the operational plan for transporting 87th Rifle Corps to Hokkaido Island and the southern islands of the Kuril chain.

Source: *Ibid.*, 39.

- **19 August 1945** – Order of the commander of the Air Forces (VVS) of the High Command of Soviet Forces in the Far East to the commander of the 9th Air Army concerning the protection of the amphibious assault operation against Hokkaido Island and the southern islands of the Kuril chain.

Source: *Ibid.*, 40.

- **20 August (0800 hours)** -- Report by A. M. Vasilevsky, High Commander of Soviet Forces in the Far East, about the situation at day's end on 19 August, informs Stalin:

I and the commander of the 1st Far Eastern Front are seriously occupied with preparing the amphibious operation on Hokkaido Island. We are now conducting naval reconnaissance and preparing air, artillery, infantry,

and transport means. With your approval, we can begin the naval operation here immediately after occupying the southern part of Sakhalin Island, on approximately 22 August 1945.

Source: Zolotarev, *Russkii arkhiv: Sovetsko-iaponskaia voina 1945. T 18 (7-1)*, 363-365.

- **21 August 1945 (0115 hours)** – Operational directive of the High Commander of Soviet Forces in the Far East on preparing an amphibious assault operation against Hokkaido Island and the southern islands of the Kuril chain, which directs the operation be conducted only after the *Stavka* designates the time.

Source: Zolotarev, *Russkii arkhiv: Sovetsko-iaponskaia voina 1945. T 18 (7-2)*, 42.

- **22 August 1945** – Stalin’s response to President Truman’s letter on 18 August expresses “understanding ... in the sense that you refuse to satisfy the request of the Soviet Union for the inclusion of the Northern part of the Island Hokkaido in the region of surrender of the Japanese armed forces to the Soviet troops” but qualifies this by adding, “I have to say that I and my colleagues did not expect such an answer from you.” Stalin then refuses Truman’s request for an air base in the Kurils, first, because it contravenes agreements reached in the Crimea (Yalta) and, second, because “demands of such a nature are usually laid before either a conquered state, or such an allied state which is in no position to defend with its own means certain part of its territory.” Since Stalin does “not believe that the Soviet Union could be included among such states,” he implies such a request is “humiliating and not understandable.”

Source: *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers 1945, Volume VI*, 687-688.

- **22 August 1945 (1455 hours)** – Directive order of the High Commander of Soviet Forces in the Far East to the High Commander of the Naval Fleet and the commander of the Pacific Fleet concerning the postponement of the amphibious operation against Hokkaido Island and the southern islands of the Kuril chain.

Source: Zolotarev, *Russkii arkhiv: Sovetsko-iaponskaia voina 1945. T 18 (7-2)*, 43.

- **23 August 1945** -- Report of the High Commander of Soviet Forces in the Far East to the *Stavka* of the Supreme High Command about the situation in the zone of the Kuril Islands and on Sakhalin Island, which states in regard to

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Hokkaido, "The operation on Hokkaido will be begun only after [receipt] of your additional order and until then not a single boat will be sent there." Otherwise Vasilevsky's report notes that "the massive capitulation of Japanese forces in the northern part of the Kuril Islands has begun," with all of Shumshu and the northern part of Paramushir due to be occupied on 23 August, the southern half of Paramushir on 24 August, and the group of small island south of Paramushir on 25 August.

Source: Ibid., 45.

- **23 August 1945 (received at 1225 hours)** – The Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Harriman) notifies the U.S. Secretary of State. "I believe I should stay on [in Moscow] until the control machinery for Japan has been agreed upon" because "I have a feeling that we may have some trouble with the Soviets over the setup which I understand we intend to establish particularly in regard to Soviet forces used for occupation of Japan under General MacArthur as Supreme Commander." Harriman cites his objection to having MacArthur share such responsibilities with Vasilevsky, which leads to a Soviet withdrawal of that proposal and adds tellingly:

I feel that the Soviets will come up again with further proposals that the Soviets have a zone of occupation with independent command or in some other way obtain for themselves a position where they can block our program if it does not meet with their approval. I sincerely hope that we will stand firm on what I understand is our plan, and, if we do, I am confident the Soviets will accept it. The Russian pattern set in Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania is a good precedent although I assume we would always consult them in advance on any questions of policy.

Harriman adds:

I expect also that we will have some difficulty in Korea as it is my impression the Russians want to dominate the country in spite of Stalin's agreement that it should develop its independence through a four-power trusteeship. I believe the Russians are feeling their way out with us to see how far they can go with their unilateral objectives in the Far East.

Source: *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers 1945, Volume VI*, 689-690.

- **27 August 1945 (2300 hours)** – Instructions from the chief of staff of the High Commander of Soviet Forces in the Far East to the commander of the Pacific Fleet concerning the forbidden ships and aircraft from landing on Hokkaido state:

In order to avoid the creation of conflicts and misunderstandings in relation to the Allies, the High Command orders: 1. Categorically forbids the dispatch of any ships and aircraft whatsoever to Hokkaido Island and 2. Report fulfillment.

Source: Zolotarev, *Russkii arkhiv: Sovetsko-iaponskaia voina 1945. T 18 (7-2)*, 245.

- **28 August 1945** – Telegram from the commander of the 1st Far Eastern Front (General Meretskov) to the commander of the Pacific Fleet asks the Fleet to provide transports in the port of Otomari on Sakhalin Island by 3 September to carry 87th Rifle Corps' 355th Rifle Division to Iturup (two regiments) and Kunashir (one regiment).

Source: Ibid., 46.

- **29 August 1945 (2230 hours)** – Order of the commander of the 1st Far Eastern Front to the commander of 87th Rifle Corps directs the latter to speed up the loading of 113th Rifle Brigade and 355th Rifle Division at Otomari so that the former can occupy Kunashir and Shikotan Islands by 31 August and the latter Iturup and Urup Islands on 3 September. **Source:** Ibid.

- **30 August 1945** – Report of the commander of the 2nd Far Eastern Front (Purkaev) to the High Commander of Soviet Forces in the Far East that the 2nd Far Eastern Front's forces had completed the occupation of the northern and central Kuril Islands from Shumshu southward to Urup by 1200 hours on 30 August.

Source: Ibid., 47.

- **30 August 1945** – Report of the commander of the Pacific Fleet to the High Commander of Soviet Forces in the Far East that its forces occupied Iturup by 1430 hours on 30 August.

Source: Ibid.

- **30 August 1945** – Combat report of the 2nd Far Eastern Front's Military Council to the High Commander of Soviet Forces in the Far East that its forces (the Kuril Operational Group's 255th Rifle Division) finished landing on the islands of Urup, Simushir, and Kotoi against no resistance on 30 August 1945,

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capturing 608 Japanese officers and men with a loss of 1 killed and 4 wounded. Therefore, the *front's* forces had completed their operations to capture the Kuril Islands.

Source: Ibid., 47-48.

- **1 September 1945** – Report of the Pacific Fleet's chief of staff to the chief of staff of the High Commander of Soviet Forces in the Far East that its 113th Rifle Brigade had landed on Kunashir Island at 0600 hours on 1 September against no resistance.
Source: Ibid., 48.
- **5 September 1945** – Instructions of the commander of the 2nd Far Eastern Front to the commander of the Kamchatka Defensive Region concerning the dispositions of Soviet forces on the Kuril Islands, which is to be as follows:
 - a) 302nd Rifle Regiment (less 2nd Battalion), with 2nd Battalion, 279th Artillery Regiment – Matsuba [Matua] Island.
 - b) Rifle company, 2nd Battalion, 302nd Rifle Regiment – Siasikotan [Shiashkotan] Island.
 - c) Rifle platoon, 302nd Rifle Regiment – Kharumukotan [Kharimkotan] Island.
 - d) 2nd Battalion, 302nd Rifle Regiment (less one RCo), with one battery, 279th Artillery Regiment – Onekotan Island.
 - e) 373rd Rifle Regiment and 279th Artillery Regiment (less 2nd Battalion) – the southwestern part of Paramushir Island.
 - f) 968th Rifle Regiment, 367th Separate Artillery Battalion, and 183rd Separate Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion – the northeastern part of Paramushir Island.
 - g) Headquarters, 101st Rifle Division, with training and specialized units – Kasivabara [on Paramushir Island].
 - h) 133rd Rifle Regiment, 32nd Tank Brigade, 428th Gun Artillery Regiment, 169th Tank Destroyer Artillery Battalion, 123rd Separate Artillery Battalion, and 1589th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion – Siumisiu [Shumshu] Island.
 - i) 7th Separate Rifle Battalion – Cape Loptaka [on Kamchatka].
 - j) 5th Separate Rifle Battalion and 362nd Separate Artillery Battalion – Ust'-Kamchatsk [on Kamchatka].
 - k) 198th Separate Rifle Regiment – Ust'-Bol'sheretsk [on Kamchatka].

Source: Ibid., 50.

- **10 September 1945** – *Stavka* Directive No. 11128 to the High Commander of Soviet Forces in the Far East orders the transformation of the 2nd and 1st Far Eastern and Trans-Baikal Fronts into the Far Eastern, Coastal, and Trans-Baikal Military Districts, effective 30 September for the Trans-Baikal and 1st Far Eastern Front and 15 October for the 2nd Far Eastern Front.

Source: Zolotarev, “*Stavka* 1944-45,” 252-254.

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