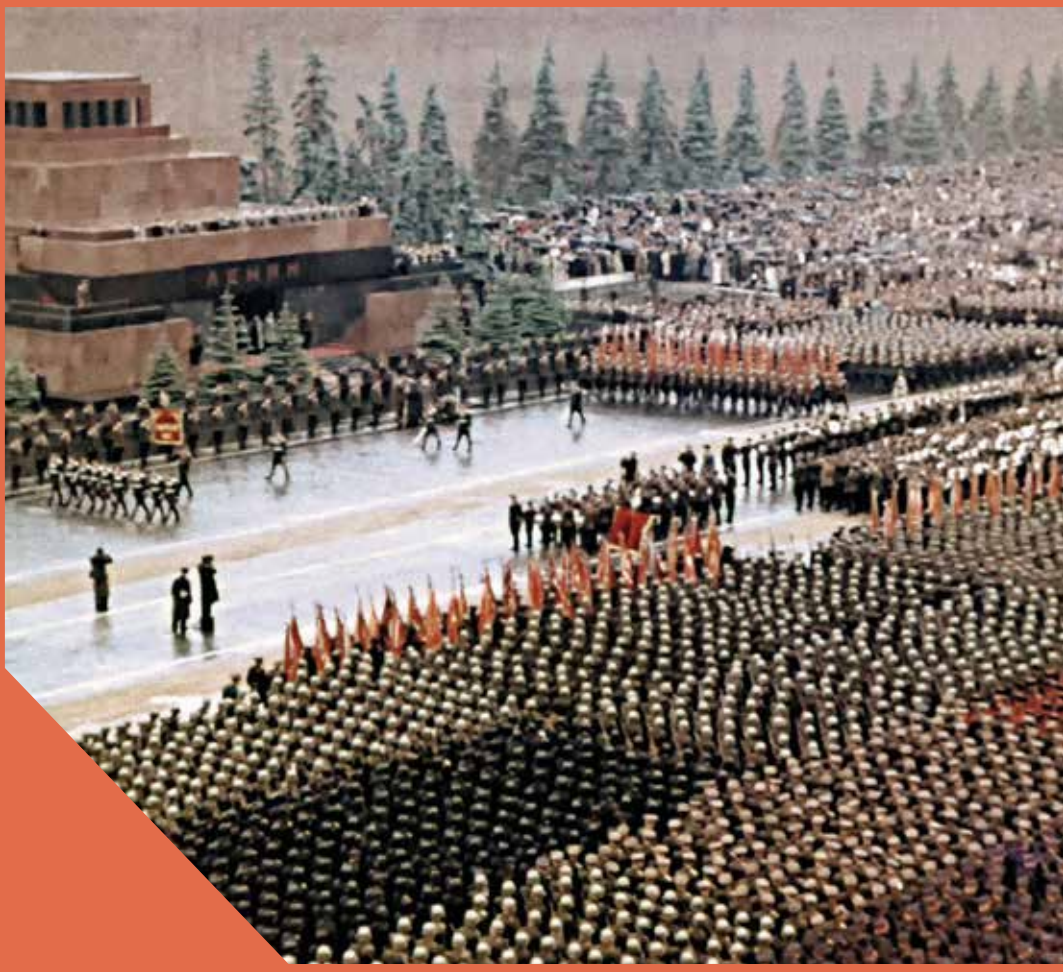
E. Guriev
and Y. Kondratenko

The Soviet Union in the Second World War



РОССИЙСКОЕ ИСТОРИЧЕСКОЕ ОБЩЕСТВО

Фонд ИСТОРИЯ ОТЕЧЕСТВА

E. Guriev
and Y. Kondratenko

The Soviet Union in the Second World War

A Textbook

2nd edition

Edited by R. G. Gagkuev

Moscow **2025**

Dear readers,

The memory of the Second World War has shaped perceptions of what is right and wrong in international politics for over half a century. However, as time has shown, overseas elites failed to draw lessons from that tragedy. Short-sightedly supporting Ukrainian neo-Nazism and using it in their struggle against Russia, they have been compelled to falsify history, dooming their strategy to failure.

In these circumstances, the memory of the Second World War has become a 'battlefield' of sorts. To gain the upper hand in this struggle and protect historical truth, one must take a firm footing in the facts, gain a deep understanding of the cause-and-effect relationships between them, and cite verified sources.

This book written by experts of the Russian Historical Society aims, first and foremost, to describe the essential facts for people who teach foreign citizens and our compatriots abroad about Russian history. At the same time, I hope that this concise yet informative guide will be interesting to a wide range of history buffs.

S. Naryshkin
Chairman
Russian Historical Society

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Introduction

The Great Patriotic War was the most terrible military conflict in Russian history. It left tragic recollections among generations of people not only in Russia but also in the states of the former Soviet Union. Victory Day is an essential part of the historical knowledge of contemporary Russian citizens. One of the key tasks of historians is to preserve the collective memory of these fateful events. Unfortunately, this memory has become increasingly subject to political speculation in recent years. Thus, it is extremely important to study the history of the war in an objective and unbiased fashion. In this book, we will try to give a concise overview of the key events of the history of the Great Patriotic War.

The Great Patriotic War is a constitutive part of World War II, which was a consequence of the dramatic rise in global tensions in the first half of the 20th century. In this book, we will speak not only about the causes of the Second World War and the policies of different states that led to its outbreak but also about military operations in the key theatres of conflict. World War II was a clash between the aggressor states headed by Germany and the anti-Hitler coalition. The unity and cohesiveness of different states in the joint struggle against a common threat — Nazism and militarism — allowed them to get the upper hand.

At the same time, a key role in the victory over Germany was played by the Soviet Union. The foundations of this historical victory were cast during the pre-war period by the foreign policy of the Soviet state and the growth of its military and economic potential. In this book, this aspect receives no less attention than military operations. Victory was achieved not only in heavy combat on the front lines but also through the selfless labour of Soviet citizens in the rear. The heroic activities of partisans and resistance movements in occupied territories also made an important contribution. One could say that the real victor in the war was the multiethnic Soviet nation, which rallied together in the face of mortal danger and defeated the enemy.

As Russian history shows, every war in which the country has fought is full of examples of the heroism and courage of ordinary citizens. The Great Patriotic War has become a symbol not just of Soviet history but of Russian history as a whole. The Soviet people had to win the war to avoid being annihilated and enslaved by the Fascists — the adepts of the most terrible ideology in the history of mankind. Victory in the war required enormous sacrifices, which must never be forgotten.

The signature of the German Instrument of Surrender on 9 May 1945 marked the military defeat of the Nazi regime. This was not enough, however: it was also necessary to condemn and destroy the practice and ideology of Nazism, which was accomplished by the Nuremberg trials of 1945–1946.

The authors of this book have tried to convey essential information about the events of those tragic and heroic years. We hope our readers will appreciate the result.

The Causes of World War II

The main cause of World War II was the First World War of 1914–1918 and the system of international relations that arose in its wake. All the key participants of World War I, whether the Entente Powers (France, Russia and Great Britain) and their allies or the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria), had wanted to resolve their contradictions with the use of force. However, the Paris (Versailles) Peace Conference of 1919 that concluded World War I put the blame for the war exclusively on the defeated side — first and foremost, Germany. The League of Nations was established to monitor the respect of the peace treaty by the aggressor nations and to prevent future wars. This led to the emergence of the Versailles system of international relations in the early 1920s. However, this system was unable to stave off a new world war.

The conditions of the Treaty of Versailles were very difficult for vanquished Germany and humiliating for its citizens. Germany ceased to be an empire and lost the status of a superpower that it had enjoyed at the start of the war. The country was stripped of all its overseas colonies and ceded a significant part of its territory to its neighbours — not only France but also newly formed Poland and Czechoslovakia. The Left Bank of the Rhine was declared a demilitarized zone where Germany was not allowed to deploy troops, and the unification ('Anschluss') of Germany and Austria was prohibited. This led to the splintering of the German nation and the appearance of German diasporas in other European countries, which subsequently laid the foundations for the diffusion of Nazi ideas: many ethnic Germans or 'Volksdeutsche' would serve in SS units during the Second World War. The German armed forces were greatly limited in their total size and in certain types of arms and could not have a general staff. Moreover, Germany was forced to pay enormous reparations (cash payments to the victors and, in particular, France), which despoiled the country. The Treaty of Versailles was perceived by Germans as profoundly unjust and led to the rise of revanchism. The Supreme Allied Commander, French Marshal F. Foch, prophetically said about Versailles: 'It's not a peace but a truce for twenty years.'

In the early 1920s, Germany suffered a major economic crisis as a result of the war, the German Revolution of 1918–1919 and reparations. This period was marked by rampant inflation, quasi-total

unemployment and the rapid impoverishment of the population. The democratic government of the Weimar Republic was incapable of dealing with the situation. This led to the radicalization of German public opinion, inspiring widespread sentiments of revanchism, nationalism, militarism, and antidemocracy. People sought to find scapegoats for the national catastrophe, sparking the rise of chauvinism and xenophobia. The struggle erupted into the streets of German towns, provoking numerous meetings, marches, and demonstrations which often grew into public unrest. Political parties headed by charismatic leaders and orators organized their own military units. The Communist Party of Germany (KPD) and the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP), whose members were called Nazis, were among the most popular political associations.

Founded in 1919, the NSDAP soon elected A. Hitler as its leader ('Führer'). On 9 November 1923, the Nazis tried to seize power in Bavaria ('Beer Hall Putsch') in imitation of B. Mussolini's 1922 'March on Rome' yet were stopped by the police. In 1925, Hitler published his book *Mein Kampf* ('My Struggle'), which became his party's programme. The NSDAP campaigned under the slogans of nationalism, anticommunism, racism, antisemitism, Slavophobia, the revival of German military power, the abrogation of the Treaty of Versailles and its reparations, revanchism, and expansionism towards the East (the conquest of 'Lebensraum'). The party's campaign promises included reunifying the German people, some of whom were now living in other countries, and raising the standard of living for the population at large. The Nazis proposed simple and easy-to-understand solutions for attaining their goals, which attracted an ever-greater number of supporters (including those who did not share their extreme racist views). After a short-term recovery, Germany began to feel the effects of the Great Depression, which broke out in 1929. This helped the NSDAP to win the German Parliamentary elections twice on 31 July and 6 November 1932 and form the biggest faction in the Reichstag (33%). On 30 January 1933, German president P. von Hindenburg appointed Hitler head of government ('Reichskanzler'). It should be noted that the Nazi victory in the elections was not only the democratic choice of the German people but also the result of the following factors:

- Nazi terror against Communists and their supporters with the connivance of the Weimar government and police
- Collusion with German financial, military and political elites who viewed Hitler and his party as a tool for fighting Communists, making money from military contracts, and regaining territories lost in World War I
- Nazi conspiracy theories, which accused Communists and Jews of trying to seize power

- Massive use of state-of-the-art information technologies like radio broadcasting and aerial advertising
- Lack of unity among anti-Nazi forces and the rivalry between Social Democrats and Communists — the latter followed the directives of the Comintern (the executive body of the International Communist Movement) that Nazism and Social Democracy presented an equal danger for the workers

(Fig. 1)

After coming to power, the Nazis staged the Reichstag fire on 27 January 1933 to launch severe repressions against Communists. They passed a series of emergency laws that quickly turned Germany into a totalitarian state with a one-party system. After Hindenburg's death on 19 August 1934, Hitler also became head of state — 'Führer und Reichskanzler', as his position was officially called. On 16 March 1935, Germany unilaterally declared that it would not respect the military clauses of the Treaty of Versailles and began to openly revive its armed forces and defence industry. The introduction of compulsory military service on 21 May 1935 paved the way for Germany's full-scale militarization and revanche for its defeat in World War I. The total subordination of the civil sphere to the military complex created an economy that could only be maintained through war. After the First World War and the collapse of the Russian, German, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires, numerous new states emerged in Europe: Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Austria and Yugoslavia (called the 'Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes' until 1929). The borders of the new states were drawn without taking the interests of many ethnic groups into account, which led to major conflicts in Eastern and Southern Europe both within countries (for example, friction with the German minority in Poland and Czechoslovakia) and internationally (conflicts between Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia; Romania and Hungary; etc.). An important feature of the interwar period was the emergence of authoritarian, nationalist and militarist regimes in most European countries.

There also persisted tensions between the Allies of World War I. Some of them were discontent with the outcome of the war, which France and Great Britain had entirely turned to their advantage. This was particularly the case with Italy and Japan. France was wary of letting Great Britain get too much power, and vice-versa. As a result, Great Britain supported Germany in opposition to France. Furthermore, the United States of America, the world's creditor, ceased to participate actively in international affairs and returned to its traditional policy of isolationism after the death of President Woodrow Wilson, one of the architects of the Treaty of Versailles. Finally, the League of Nations was unable to wield any real authority, and its decisions were often non-binding.

In Italy, the postwar economic crisis as well as public discontent with the outcome of the war and the politics of the government resulted in the rise of the Fascist movement. The head of the National Fascist Party and the founder of Fascist ideology B. Mussolini became prime minister on 29 October 1922. Intent on reviving the Roman Empire, the Fascists followed a policy of centralizing administration, militarizing society and the economy, and fighting Communism. Mussolini also planned to conquer territories in Africa and the Mediterranean region.

Japan was discontent with the outcome of the Washington Conference of 1922, considering its interests to have been disregarded by Great Britain and the US. Japanese military and industrial elites urged the government and Emperor Hirohito to make further territorial gains in the Asia-Pacific region, especially in China and among European and US colonies (the Philippines, Indochina and Indonesia).

Thus, the tensions between the Allies — Italy and France in the Mediterranean; France and Great Britain in Europe; Japan, Great Britain and the US in China and the Pacific; Italy and Great Britain in Africa — were aggravated rather than being resolved after WWI.

A. Hitler at a meeting of Nazi leaders
1937
RIA Novosti

Soviet Foreign Policy and International Relations in the 1920s and 1930s

After the Civil War of 1918–1922, Soviet Russia found itself internationally isolated. The Entente Powers, most of whom militarily intervened in Russia during the Civil War, did not want to deal with the Bolshevik regime. The USSR also had very tense relations with many neighbouring countries that had emerged after the dissolution of the Russian Empire (Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Poland). These tensions were cultivated by the Entente Powers, especially France and Great Britain. The French government spoke out in favour of establishing a *cordon sanitaire* along the western border of the Soviet state and encouraged anti-Soviet sentiments in Eastern European countries — in particular, Poland, Romania and Czechoslovakia. The signature of a separate peace treaty with Germany at Brest-Litovsk in March 1918 removed Soviet Russia from the list of victorious countries in World War I. This allowed the Entente Powers to ignore its stance on the postwar world order. Soviet delegates did not attend the Paris and Washington Conferences, nor did the new state join the League of Nations. At the same time, Soviet Russia was interested in normalizing relations with its neighbours and the world's superpowers. The revival of the Soviet economy required industrial equipment and technologies that the country lacked as well as hard currency that could only be obtained from foreign trade.

Soviet diplomats managed to pierce the international embargo at the Genoa Conference of 1922, at which the two 'pariahs' of international politics — Soviet Russia and Weimar Germany — signed the Treaty of Rapallo, reestablishing trade and diplomatic relations between themselves. In 1926, this treaty was supplemented with a Soviet-German non-aggression pact and military cooperation agreement.

In 1923–1925, Capitalist countries began to recognize the Soviet Union, gradually establishing trade and diplomatic ties. The US was among the last to establish relations in 1933. The following year, the USSR was admitted into the League of Nations, ending its international isolation.

The 1920s were a relatively peaceful period in international politics, as most countries were recovering after the First World

War. However, the situation greatly aggravated in the 1930s after the ascendancy of the Nazi Party in Germany and the rise of militaristic sentiments in Italy and Japan. The first blow to the Versailles-Washington System was inflicted by Japan which occupied Manchuria in September 1931 — February 1932 in the aftermath of the Mukden Incident. Despite protests by the League of Nations, Japan turned Manchuria into the puppet state of Manchukuo, headed by the last Chinese emperor Puyi. In 1933, Japan demonstratively left the League of Nations in objection to the latter's refusal to recognize the new state.

In 1925, France, Great Britain, Italy, Germany, Belgium, Poland and Czechoslovakia signed the Locarno Treaties that fixed Germany's borders. However, while all the parties to the treaties guaranteed the inviolability and permanence of Germany's western border, this was not the case for its eastern border with Poland and Czechoslovakia, which opened the door to future conflicts.

The growing international tensions after Hitler's rise to power and Germany's withdrawal from the League of Nations in October 1933 led French foreign minister L. Barthou to advance the idea of a collective security system in Europe. In particular, he proposed signing the 'Eastern Pact' — a mutual treaty between France, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Finland, the Baltic states and the USSR, who would guarantee each other's borders and provide assistance to other members if they were subject to aggression. The Soviet Union and particularly its foreign minister M. Litvinov supported the idea of a collective security system, yet Germany and Poland refused to participate in the Eastern Pact, and Finland also abstained from the talks. The assassination of Barthou and King Alexander I of Yugoslavia in Marseille on 9 October 1934 put an end to the idea once and for all. Nevertheless, Barthou's initiative led to the signature of treaties of mutual assistance by France and the USSR on 2 May 1935 and by Czechoslovakia and the USSR on 16 May 1935. These agreements stipulated that, if one of the parties was subject to aggression, then the other two would come to its aid.

Germany's rejection of the military articles of the Treaty of Versailles in March 1935, its rapid militarization, the aggressive utterances of Nazi leaders, and the rapprochement between Germany and Italy further escalated the international situation.

On 3 October 1935, Italian troops entered Ethiopia (Abyssinia) and annexed it in the face of determined resistance. Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie I made an appeal to the League of Nations, which issued a note of protest. The latter was ignored by the Italian government, and Italy withdrew from the League of Nations in 1937. (Fig. 2)

On 7 March 1936, German troops entered the Rhine Demilitarized Zone, controlled by the League of Nations, in violation of the Treaty

The Council of the League of Nations meets to discuss sanctions against Italy

1935

RIA Novosti

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of Versailles. The USSR filed diplomatic protests against the actions of Italy and Germany, yet the guarantors of post-war peace (London and Paris) did nothing to stop the aggressors.

In 1936–1939, the Spanish Civil War broke out between the lawful Republican government and the Nationalists, who rebelled on 16 July 1936 in Spanish Morocco. In September 1936, F. Franco took command of the Nationalist forces. The League of Nations adopted a policy of non-interference in Spanish affairs, yet this policy was respected only by France and Great Britain. Many Communists and anti-Fascists from Europe and other parts of the world joined international brigades to fight on the side of the Republican government. Italy and Germany openly participated in the conflict on Franco's side by sending troops (including the German 'Condor Legion'), military advisers, and arms. In all, over 25 thousand Germans and about 60–70 thousand Italians fought on the side of the rebels. The protests of the Soviet and Spanish governments notwithstanding, the overt participation of Italy and Germany in the conflict was not stopped by other European countries.

The USSR provided the Republican government with military equipment (tanks, planes, and motor torpedo boats), military instructors, pilots, tank drivers, and marines (about 4,000 people in all). The Spanish Civil War provided essential experience for many Soviet military commanders who subsequently made a name for themselves, including R. Malinovsky, K. Meretskov, P. Batov, the future minister of the navy N. Kuznetsov, and the pilots Y. Smushkevich and S. Gritsevets. The Soviet Union also provided diplomatic and financial assistance to the Republican government. The USSR agreed to take the Spanish gold reserve for storage and accepted Spanish refugees, especially children. However, the large-scale military assistance of Germany and Italy finally tipped the balance in the conflict. On 28 March 1939, Franco's units entered Madrid. The Republicans were defeated, and a Fascist dictatorship was established in Spain. (Fig. 3)

On 25 November 1936, Germany and Japan signed the Anti-Comintern Pact that was directed against the USSR and that divided the world into German and Japanese spheres of influence. The two countries also pledged to assist each other after the start of a new aggressive war.

In these conditions, British Prime Minister N. Chamberlain, French Prime Minister E. Daladier and US President F.D. Roosevelt continued to pursue a policy of appeasement by refusing to denounce the territorial conquests of Germany, Italy and Japan to avoid engaging in war and to direct these countries against the USSR. This policy gave the leadership of Germany, Italy and Japan a sense of impunity and provoked them to nourish new plans of expansion.

Soviet cinematographer R. Karmen (in the centre) with soldiers of the Spanish Republican Army
1936
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On 7 July 1937, Japan attacked China, starting the Sino-Japanese War of 1937–1945. In contemporary Chinese historiography, the beginning of World War II is officially dated to 1937. Japan occupied a major part of China in 1938–1939, yet the Chinese government continued to resist in the country's central and eastern provinces. The Soviet Union provided China with considerable military assistance in 1937–1941, sending planes, tanks and other weapons. Red Army military instructors (including V. Chuykov) and pilots (P. Rychagov, P. Zhigarev and others) came to China. Soviet specialists helped the Chinese to build an aircraft factory and petroleum refinery as well as the Sary-Ozek–Ürümqi–Lanzhou highway that was used for delivering arms to the Chinese army.

On 12–13 March 1938, Germany annexed Austria (the 'Anschluss') after massive propaganda among the Austrian people and military and diplomatic pressure. The unification of Austria and Germany had been prohibited by the Treaty of Versailles, yet France and Great Britain did nothing to stop it, continuing to follow a policy of appeasement.

In September 1938, Hitler issued an ultimatum to the Czechoslovak government to cede the Sudetenland, inhabited predominantly by Germans. This demand was motivated by allegations of repressions against Germans by the Czechs. Czechoslovakia turned to France and Great Britain for help. In the ensuing Sudeten Crisis, Germany stuck to its demands and declared its readiness to go to war ('Fall Grün') not only with Czechoslovakia but also with England and France if a diplomatic solution was not found.

The Soviet Union, which had signed mutual assistance treaties with Czechoslovakia and France in 1935, repeatedly appealed to the French government to defend Czech independence and proposed military assistance, yet Paris and Prague categorically refused to resolve the conflict in a military fashion. Moreover, British and French representatives were already holding secret talks with Germany on a 'peaceful' resolution of the crisis. These talks resulted in the signature of the Munich Agreement (subsequently dubbed the 'Munich Betrayal') by France, Italy, Great Britain and Germany in the night of 29–30 September 1938. As the agreement upheld Germany's claims to the Sudetenland, the Czechoslovak government had no choice but to cede the region. (Fig. 4)

On 1 October, German troops entered the Sudetenland. Immediately afterward, Czechoslovakia was invaded by Polish and Hungarian troops. Poland occupied Cieszyn Silesia, which had a significant percent of Polish inhabitants, while Hungary took the southern districts of Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia, which were partially settled by Hungarians. The Polish government, which had signed a non-aggression pact with Germany in 1934,

French Prime Minister E. Daladier signs the Munich Agreement

30 September 1938

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vociferously objected to any Soviet interference in Czechoslovak affairs and called for the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia. On 20 September 1938, Polish ambassador to Germany J. Lipski informed Polish foreign minister J. Beck about a conversation with Hitler in which the latter promised to support Poland if a conflict erupted between Poland and Czechoslovakia over Polish interests in Cieszyn. As a result, Cieszyn Silesia was occupied by Polish troops without any resistance, while Hungary received the annexed territories through the First Vienna Award of 2 November 1938.

The Munich Agreement made it clear to all, including the Soviet leadership, that the collective security system, if it had ever meant anything at all, had ceased to exist and that Western governments preferred dealing with Adolf Hitler rather than Joseph Stalin. Munich destroyed the few formal guarantees remaining in Europe and showed the uselessness of signing pacts. **The Munich Agreement triggered a chain of events that inevitably led to a pan-European war.**

Germany was encouraged to continue its expansion, as Hitler saw that he could act with impunity and that Western states were unable to counteract his plans. On 15 March 1939, German troops occupied the remaining part of Czechoslovakia without any formal pretext, creating the German Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia and the puppet Slovak Republic with J. Tiso as prime minister. During the Second World War, former Czechoslovakia with its developed industries and extensive raw materials became an important German production base of tanks, planes, artillery and firearms as well as supplying various civilian goods to Nazi Germany. (Fig. 5)

On 20 March 1939, Germany issued an ultimatum to Lithuania, demanding the cession of the city and territory of Memel (Klaipeda). The Lithuanian government did not receive any support from other European states (Lithuania did not have any common borders with the USSR at that time) and so was forced to yield. On 24 March, Germany occupied the Memel Territory.

On 7–12 April 1939, Italian troops invaded Albania, annexing it to the Kingdom of Italy on the basis of a personal union.

In the meantime, tensions were rapidly escalating between Japan and the USSR in the Far East. On 29 July 1938, Japanese troops penetrated into Soviet territory near Lake Khasan in the Primorsky Territory. The Japanese took the commanding Zaozernaya Hill after heavy fighting before being stopped and driven back behind the border by the Soviet Far Eastern Front commanded by Marshal of the Soviet Union V. Blyukher. A more serious conflict took place on 11 May — 31 August 1939 in the area of the river Khalkhin Gol in Mongolia. Japanese forces invaded the Mongolian People's Republic, which turned to the USSR for military assistance

Memel Railway Station
Photo: S. Baranov
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in accordance with the mutual assistance pact that had been signed by the two countries in 1936. Soviet-Mongolian troops (1st Army Group) led by Division Commander N. Feklenko and, from 16 June, by Corps Commander G. Zhukov used tanks to displace the Japanese from the commanding Bain Tsagan Hill and force them to the western bank of the river Khalkhin Gol. There the Japanese forces were surrounded and destroyed. On 31 August, the Japanese military command proposed a ceasefire, which was followed by the signature of a peace treaty on 15 September. The victory of Soviet troops at Khalkhin Gol had major diplomatic repercussions: the Japanese leadership understood the futility of fighting the USSR in open combat and turned its attention to the Pacific region. As a result, the threat of war on two fronts was lifted for the Soviet Union. (Fig. 6)

Soon after occupying Czechoslovakia, Hitler issued an ultimatum to Poland on 21 March 1939, demanding the cession of the Danzig Corridor (Polish territory between the bulk of Germany and East Prussia). The Polish government refused, as this would have deprived the country of its access to the sea. France and Britain, realizing that the Munich policy had proven ineffective in appeasing the aggressor, issued security guarantees to Poland and pledged to declare war on Germany if the latter invaded Poland. The tense Soviet-Polish relations notwithstanding, the USSR also spoke out in Poland's favour and offered aid, including military assistance. However, the Polish government rejected the proposal, and the Soviet initiative was not supported by other countries, either. On 7 June 1939, Berlin signed non-aggression pacts with Latvia and Estonia ('Munters-Ribbentrop Pact' and 'Selter-Ribbentrop Pact'), supplemented with secret agreements that, despite their formal neutrality, Riga and Tallinn would join Germany if it invaded the USSR. Continuing its aggressive foreign policy, Berlin also threatened Poland with war.

Under the new circumstances, the USSR had no choice but to look for allies. Moreover, it was vital for the country to delay entering the war for as long as possible. On 3 May 1939, Soviet People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs M. Litvinov was dismissed after the failure of the collective security policy and replaced by V. Molotov, Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars.

Although France and Great Britain rejected most Soviet initiatives in Spanish, Czechoslovak and Polish affairs, Soviet diplomats intermittently continued to negotiate with these states in April–August 1939 about a military alliance against Germany. On 11–22 August 1939, talks were held in Moscow between a Soviet delegation led by People's Commissar of Defence Marshal K. Voroshilov, a British delegation led by Rear Admiral R. Drax, and a French delegation headed by General A. Doumenc. The Western diplomats did not have any real power to make decisions and only engaged in preliminary

Fighting at Kalkhin Gol
Photo: V. Temin
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talks. In particular, the British military mission was instructed that the UK government was not ready to make detailed commitments that would limit its freedom of action in any way. Moreover, all talk of joint operations was rendered impossible by Poland's categorical refusal to cooperate with the Red Army and allow Soviet troops to pass through its territory to attack Germany. Western countries did not put any pressure on Warsaw to change its mind.

It soon became clear that all attempts to form a coalition with Western powers were futile due to the unwillingness of France and Britain to make any commitments to the USSR. As a result, the Soviet Union faced the prospect of fighting Germany by itself. Moreover, it soon became clear that Western states were hoping to benefit from a war between Germany and the USSR, which would weaken both countries. There also remained the threat of Britain and Germany signing a pact against the Soviet Union. Thus, the USSR could have found itself alone against a bloc of aggressive powers.

In the meantime, German diplomats were testing the waters for opening talks with the Soviet side. German ambassador to the USSR W. von Schulenburg was particularly active in this respect. Hitler had not abandoned his plans of conquering territories in the East and destroying the Communist regime. However, in view of the looming confrontation with Britain and France, Germany wanted to avoid fighting a war on two fronts, as it had done in 1914. As to the USSR, it wanted to postpone its entry into the war to complete the preparations of its armed forces and industry. The Soviet leadership was also eager to get state-of-the-art technologies and industrial equipment from Germany.

When it became clear in the summer of 1939 that talks with Britain and France had fallen through, Soviet-German diplomatic contacts began at the ambassadorial level. On 23 August 1939, German foreign minister J. von Ribbentrop arrived in Moscow to hold talks with V. Molotov in the presence of J. Stalin in the Kremlin. The result of the negotiations was the signature of a Soviet-German non-aggression pact (the so-called 'Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact'), in which the two countries pledged to refrain from military hostilities for 10 years and engage in economic cooperation (the USSR promised to send strategic natural resources to Germany in exchange for industrial equipment and technical documentation). (Fig. 7)

The non-aggression pact was supplemented by a secret protocol on the division of spheres of influence in Eastern Europe, including Poland. The Soviet sphere of influence comprised Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Bessarabia and Eastern Poland, which was mostly populated by Ukrainians and Byelorussians; the German sphere consisted of Western Poland and Lithuania.

Even after signing the non-aggression pact, Germany continued to make plans for invading the Soviet Union. As to the latter, it managed to win strategically valuable time for improving its defences. The USSR did quite a lot in this direction from 1939 to the first half of 1941, albeit a lot still remained to be done. The pact traced a line beyond which Germany could not openly deploy its forces. Moreover, the union between Germany and Japan was ruptured (at this time, fighting was still continuing at Khalkhin Gol). All in all, the pact thwarted **French and British attempts to appease Hitler in order to stop Germany's westward movement and turn it against the USSR**.

Signature of the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact. Standing (in the centre, from left to right): Chief of the Red Army General Staff B. Shaposhnikov, J. von Ribbentrop, and J. Stalin. V. Molotov is signing the pact

23 August 1939

Lori

Military Operations and Soviet Foreign Policy during the Initial Phase of World War II (1939–1941)

The German High Command began to prepare for a war against Poland ('Fall Weiss') as early as 3 April 1939. In May, German troops were put in a state of combat readiness. The German plan was to use Army Groups North and South to destroy the enemy's forces along the border, allowing armoured divisions to advance into the heart of the country so as to surround and take Warsaw. At 4:40 a. m. on 1 September 1939, German troops crossed the German-Polish border without any preliminary declaration of war. This marked the start of World War II in Europe. On 3 September, the British and French governments declared war on Germany as they had promised. The German blitzkrieg offensive proceeded quickly: the Polish army had been routed by 7 September, forcing the government to flee from Warsaw to Lublin and then to Romania. The battle for Warsaw began on 8 September, the city capitulated on 28 September, and the Polish army abandoned all resistance on 6 October. (Fig. 8)

Anglo-French troops did not provide any real assistance to Poland. The limited French offensive in the Saar on 7–12 September was called off after the Polish armies had been routed on the German-Polish border. No more active combat with German troops took place on the Western front until the spring of 1940; this period has come down in history as the 'Phoney War'.

On 17 September 1939, Soviet troops crossed the Polish frontier. The main forces of the Polish army had already been destroyed, and the government left the country the same evening. In view of the disintegration of the Polish state and the abandonment of the country by its government, the Soviet leadership decided to take measures to protect the security of Ukrainians and Byelorussians living in Poland's eastern provinces. The commander-in-chief of the Polish army ordered his troops not to offer any resistance to the Red Army. As a result of the Soviet offensive, parts of the Byelorussian front were annexed to Western Byelorussia and parts of the Ukrainian front to Western Ukraine. The overwhelming majority of the 13 million inhabitants of Western Byelorussia and Western Ukraine

The Wehrmacht invades Poland
September 1939
RIA Novosti

viewed the changes with cautious hope, and many with enthusiasm. In some places, Red Army units encountered advancing subdivisions of the German Wehrmacht. There were even clashes in Brest until a Soviet-German protocol on a line of demarcation between German and Soviet troops was signed on 21 September.

Western countries largely agreed with the Soviet actions at the time and recognized the country's right to ensure its security. As the well-known British politician and statesman D. Lloyd George noted, 'Russian armies have occupied territories that are not Polish and that Poland took away by force after the First World War… It would be criminal folly to compare the Russian advance with the advance of the Germans.'

On 28 September 1939, the German–Soviet Boundary and Friendship Treaty was signed in Berlin, dividing Poland between Germany and the USSR. The border between the two countries passed along the rivers Narew and Western Bug. A new secret protocol assigned Polish territories to the east of the Vistula to the German sphere of interests. The Soviet sphere of interests included Lithuania, to which the USSR ceded the city and district of Vilna (Vilnius) that had been occupied by the Poles in 1920–1922.

After the war began in Europe on 1 September, the Soviet Union signed mutual assistance agreements with the Baltic states of Estonia on 28 September 1939, Latvia on 5 October, and Lithuania on 10 October. In the 1930s, Nazi-type nationalist dictatorships, closely connected with Germany and hostile towards the USSR, had emerged in all these countries. In the event of war, these countries could have served as bases for attacking Leningrad. The mutual assistance agreements stipulated the creation of major Soviet military and naval bases in the Baltic states, making them militarily and politically dependent on the USSR.

On 5 October 1939, the Soviet Union invited Finland to sign an analogous mutual assistance agreement. The Finnish government refused, fearing that such an agreement could pose a threat to its independence. The Soviet side requested that Finland shift its border 90 km further away from Leningrad by giving the Karelian Isthmus to the Soviet Union as well as ceding Hogland and other islands in the central part of the Gulf of Finland and leasing the Hanko Naval Base to the USSR for a period of 30 years. In exchange, the latter offered to give Finland a territory in Karelia of a much larger area. The talks stalled, as neither side was willing to compromise. The Soviet side needed to move the border as far as possible from Leningrad for security reasons (the Soviet-Finnish border passed only 30 km away from the city at the time) and was also wary of the close contacts between Finnish and German military representatives.

After a military incident next to the village of Mainila on the Soviet-Finish border, the Soviet government decided to ensure the strategic security of Leningrad by military means. On 30 November 1939, Red Army units from four armies of the Leningrad Military District commanded by K. Meretskov crossed the Soviet-Finish border along its entire length from the Gulf of Finland to the Barents Sea, starting the Winter War that would last until 13 March 1940. The Soviet military command underestimated the fighting capacity and size of the Finnish Army as well as the poor state of the roads, the marshy and forested terrain, and the bad weather conditions (deep snow and bitter cold). Some Soviet units lacked warm clothing and winter shoes, and the system for supplying ammunition and food, especially hot meals, was inadequate. Moreover, Soviet intelligence misjudged the strength of the Finnish fortification line on the Karelian Isthmus (Mannerheim Line). While the Finnish Army was smaller in size and less well equipped than the Red Army, its soldiers had an excellent knowledge of the terrain that they used to their advantage. (Fig. 9)

The first battles in December 1939 were unsuccessful: the storm of the Mannerheim Line was repelled despite the Soviet use of tanks and heavy artillery, resulting in major Soviet casualties. After receiving reinforcements, the Soviet troops of the Northwestern Front (headed by Army Commander 1st rank S. Timoshenko) managed to breach the Mannerheim Line and take Vyborg. Finland capitulated, and a peace treaty was signed in Moscow on 12 March 1940. According to the treaty, Finland ceded the Karelian Isthmus with Vyborg and part of Ladoga Karelia to the USSR as well as leasing the Hanko Peninsula to it. The Soviet-Finnish border was moved 100 km away from Leningrad, largely returning to the line set down by the Treaty of Nystad of 1721 between Russia and Sweden.

During the Winter War, over 333,000 Soviet soldiers were killed, wounded or missing in action in comparison to over 100,000 soldiers for Finland. The war showed everyone — and, in particular, Joseph Stalin and the Soviet leadership — that the Red Army and its military commanders were not prepared for modern warfare. The pictures of the Winter War evoked euphoria in Berlin, confirming its poor opinion of the fighting capacity of the Red Army. The Winter War resulted in the launch of military reforms in 1940 and the replacement of K. Voroshilov by S. Timoshenko as People's Commissar of Defence in the spring of the same year.

The temporary lull in the European war came to an end in spring 1940. The German High Command decided to invade Denmark and Norway to get access to the Atlantic Ocean so as to attack British

Red Army artillerists on the march during the Winter War
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trade routes and prevent a naval blockade of its coastline. This operation, codenamed 'Weserübung', began on 9 April 1940 with a combined attack of the German fleet, ground troops and aviation. Supported by airplanes, German marines disembarked from ships at key points of the Danish and Norwegian coasts. While Denmark was quickly occupied, heavy fighting took place in Norway after the disembarkation of an Anglo-French-Polish marine contingent. Finally, the Allies and the Norwegian government left the country in June 1940.

In February 1940, the German High Command worked out a plan for attacking France ('Fall Gelb') with the participation of three army groups. One army group would use tanks and aviation to penetrate into Belgium and Luxembourg, bypassing the powerful French fortifications (Maginot Line) on the French-German border, where the second group would engage in trench warfare. The third army would make a feint attack towards the Low Countries to lure the main French and British forces there.

At 5:35 a. m. on 10 May 1940, German troops went on the offensive on the Western front. The main thrust of the German tank group was directed at the Ardennes Mountains, which the Allies had believed to be impenetrable for tanks. The Germans advanced rapidly, forcing Holland to capitulate, occupying most of Belgium and breaching the French defences in the area of Sedan by 15 May. By 23 May, German tanks had reached the English Channel, cutting off a major Allied army group stationed at Dunkirk. Belgium surrendered on 28 May. By 1 June, British and some French troops were evacuated from Dunkirk to England, suffering major casualties and the loss of virtually all their materiel.

After a short lull, fighting resumed in France on 5 June. German troops launched an offensive to conquer the rest of the country ('Fall Rot'), entering Paris on 14 June and forcing France to capitulate on 22 June by signing an armistice in Compiegne. Half of French territory was occupied, while the other half became a puppet state with its capital at Vichy. The evacuated French troops in Great Britain were organized into the Fighting France movement by General C. de Gaulle.

After defeating France, Hitler made plans to conquer England. To this end, the German High Command decided to first establish air supremacy and then make an amphibious landing on the British coast ('Operation Sea Lion'). The aerial battle that came to be known as the 'Battle for Britain' began on 10 July 1940. It was a close contest at first, yet the British air force seized the initiative in September. In November 1940, the German High Command realized the impossibility of establishing air supremacy and abandoned its disembarkation plans.

The Soviet leadership had hoped that the war in Western Europe would be drawn out. However, the quick defeat of France greatly increased the threat of war between Germany and the USSR. This made the Soviet Union take additional foreign policy measures. To strengthen the country's Western frontiers, the Soviet government demanded on 14 and 16 June 1940 that Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia sign mutual assistance agreements with the Soviet Union. These nationalistic dictatorships had engaged in secret military and intelligence ties with Berlin while feigning a friendly stance towards the USSR. On 15 and 17 June, the USSR sent additional troops to these countries to bring them under control. The troops met with no resistance, and local authorities helped to quarter them.

The new pro-Soviet governments of the Baltic states implemented comprehensive democratic reforms, liberating political prisoners, lifting bans on political demonstrations and the activities of left-wing parties (including Communists), outlawing Fascist organizations and scheduling parliamentary elections for July 1940. The latter resulted in the victory of pro-Communist Labour Blocs. On 21–22 June 1940, the new parliaments announced the creation of the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian SSR and their incorporation into the USSR. On 3–6 August, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR ratified the incorporation of the new republics into the Soviet Union. The old republican armies were transformed into territorial Red Army rifle corps. These activities largely conformed to the norms of state and international law of the time.

In June 1940, the Soviet Union demanded that Romania cede Bessarabia (whose occupation by Romania in 1918 was considered unlawful by Moscow) and northern Bukovina, populated by Ukrainians, to the USSR. The Romanian government initially refused yet was forced to acquiesce under German pressure (Germany assured Romania that it would soon get the territories back). On 28–30 June 1940, the Soviet Southern Front (commanded by General of the Army G. Zhukov) occupied these territories, encountering little resistance from the Romanian Army. The greater part of Bessarabia was transformed into the Moldavian SSR, while southern Bessarabia and northern Bukovina were annexed to the Ukrainian SSR.

On 12–13 November 1940, Soviet foreign minister V. Molotov held talks with the German leadership in Berlin on demarcating spheres of interest in the Balkans. However, the negotiations gave no results, as Hitler had already decided to invade the Soviet Union in the spring and summer of 1941.

Germany's military successes led to the growth of its alliance. On 27 September 1940, Germany, Japan and Italy signed the Tripartite

Pact, creating the Rome–Berlin–Tokyo axis. The European and Atlantic spheres of influence were assigned to Germany; Asia and the Pacific to Japan; and Africa and the Mediterranean to Italy. Romania, Hungary and Slovakia joined the Anti-Comintern Pact in November 1940, followed by Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Finland in March 1941. The bloc's main opponents were considered to be Great Britain, the US and the USSR.

In December 1940, Italian troops went on the offensive in North and East Africa yet were soon stopped by British forces. The British counter-offensive resulted in the destruction of Italian troops in Libya. In February 1941, Germany sent the German Africa Corps commanded by E. Rommel to the aid of its ally. These events marked the start of war in North Africa and the Mediterranean.

On 28 October 1940, Italian troops invaded Greece, which received assistance from the British Army and Navy. The Greeks rapidly managed to stop the Italian offensive and throw the enemy back to Albania. The Italian government turned to Germany for help.

On 27 March 1941, a coup-d'état in Yugoslavia overthrew the pro-German government of the regent Prince Paul and brought to power General D. Simovic, who was oriented at Great Britain and the USSR. In response, the German High Command launched Operation Marita, in which German, Hungarian and Bulgarian troops invaded Yugoslavia, while German troops penetrated into Greece. German troops entered Belgrade on 13 April, leading to the capitulation of the Yugoslavian Army on 17 April. Greece surrendered on 23 April, with German troops entering Athens on 27 April. The British forces evacuated to Crete, where they were defeated by German paratroopers after heavy fighting on 20–31 May 1941. In Yugoslavia, Germany created the puppet State of Croatia led by A. Pavelic, leader of the Fascist organization Ustashe. (Fig. 10)

Relations between Germany and the USSR had greatly deteriorated by early 1941. The German government disregarded all Soviet diplomatic initiatives, deliveries to the USSR were reduced to a minimum, and German engineers and technical personnel were called back home from the Soviet Union. At the same time, Germany began shifting its troops eastward. The Soviet leadership understood that war with Germany was imminent. Nevertheless, Stalin believed that Germany would not attack the USSR while it was still engaged in the Battle of Britain. Soviet diplomats began taking measures to strengthen the country's security. On 13 April 1941, Soviet People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs V. Molotov and Japanese Foreign Minister I. Matsuoka signed the Soviet–Japanese Neutrality Pact for a period of 5 years, protecting the USSR from Japanese attack.

Field Marshal W. Keitel, Lieutenant General W. von Brauchitsch, A. Hitler and Lieutenant General F. Halder (from left to right in the foreground) study a map at a meeting of the General Staff. In 1940, Hitler signed Directive No. 21 codenamed 'Barbarossa'

1940

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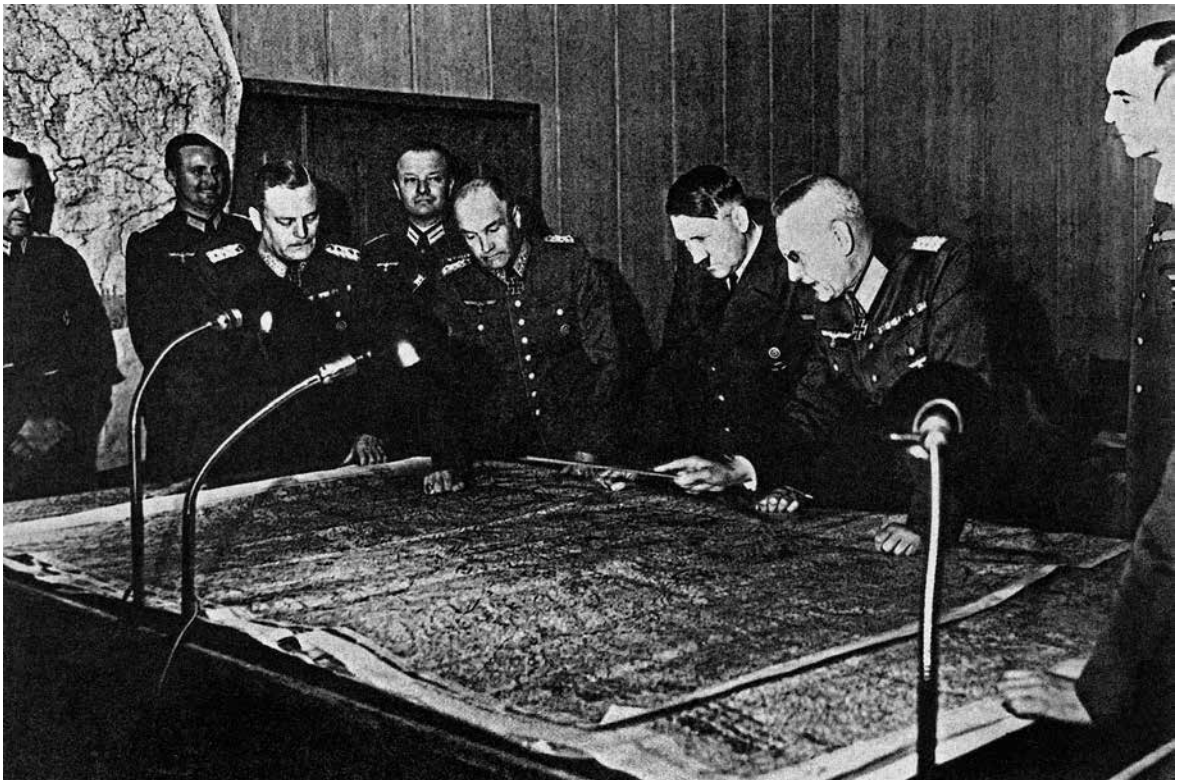

The Soviet Union conducted a proactive foreign policy before the war so as to defer in time and space the threats to the country's security along its European and Far Eastern borders. Notably, most of the lands annexed by the Soviet Union were former territories of the Russian Empire that had been lost during the Civil War and Foreign Intervention. They were adjoined peacefully, often with the consultation of local inhabitants. In the conditions of an inevitable war with Nazi Germany, these measures for shifting the Soviet border westward served the country's national security interests.

German Preparations for Invading the USSR. Operation Barbarossa. Soviet Measures for Resisting Aggression

On 21 July 1940, immediately after the defeat of France, Hitler ordered the German High Command to develop an operational plan ('Fall Barbarossa') for invading the USSR. The plan was approved on 18 December 1940.

In additional to developing military strategy, the German leadership made plans for exterminating the peoples of the USSR and economically exploiting the conquered territories. Germany intended to colonize the European part of the Soviet Union to extend its 'Lebensraum'. The Soviet leadership, the Communist Party and its ideology were to be destroyed, while the eastern districts of the USSR beyond the Urals were to be ceded to Germany's ally Japan. The main cultural and political centres of the Soviet Union — the cities of Moscow and Leningrad — would be razed, and the greater part of Soviet citizens would be killed or resettled into uninhabitable areas. The remaining inhabitants would serve the needs of German colonists, while being deprived of education, culture and medical assistance. There would be no Russian state in the occupied territories.

The plan for the economic exploitation of the occupied Soviet territory was codenamed 'Oldenburg'. Germany intended to use the natural resources and economic opportunities of the USSR in its own interests. Special attention was given to the despoliation of cultural valuables, for which a special office was established under the direction of Reichsleiter A. Rosenberg, and the export of food products from the European part of the USSR to Germany to feed German soldiers and civilians, while dooming Russians to starvation ('Hunger Plan'). The predatory intentions of the German leadership and its plans to annihilate 20–30 million Russians through a man-made famine can be called an act of genocide. Without doubt, this term also applies to the planned mass killing of ethnic and political groups by specially created SS Einsatzgruppen.

The occupied Soviet territory was to be divided into five Reichskomissariats: Ostland, Ukraine, Muscovy, Caucasus, and Turkestan. Ostland included Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania

and Byelorussia. Reichskomissariat Ukraine comprised the entire territory of Soviet Ukraine and Kuban, while the Crimea and Northern Taurida were to be annexed directly to Germany. Thus, it was not a question of giving Russia independence or simply ridding it of Communists. Instead, Germany planned to give all senior administrative positions to German officials who would implement a rapacious occupational policy, while annexing some Soviet territories to Germany.

To administer the occupied territories, Hitler promulgated the decree 'On civil administration in the occupied eastern regions' of 17 July 1941, which established the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories headed by A. Rosenberg, one of the chief ideologists of National Socialism.

Initially, Germany envisaged invading the USSR in May 1941, yet this date was postponed several times due to the situation in Greece and Yugoslavia. Finally, the invasion was scheduled for 22 June 1941. Hitler believed the Soviet Union to be a 'giant with feet of clay', viewing the multiethnic state as unstable and the Socialist regime as lacking popular support. For this reason, only four months were set aside for Operation Barbarossa. Weakened by the repressions of 1937–1938 and its prestige undermined by the Winter War of 1939–1940, the Red Army did not appear a worthy opponent to the Germans. German intelligence services, blinded by racist views and anti-Soviet dogmas, could not fully evaluate the Soviet military and industrial potential in the Urals and other remote parts of the country. Operation Barbarossa simply focused on surrounding and destroying the main Soviet forces in the border districts.

At that time, Germany possessed the world's strongest and most capable army, which had been seasoned in a series of campaigns. The German strategy of blitzkrieg ('lightning warfare') was designed to gain victory by inflicting one or more rapid, powerful blows against the opponent. The main tactic was to pierce the front line by armoured divisions with the massive support of aviation and then send in the infantry to encircle and destroy the enemy. Military intelligence and radio communication played an important role in detecting enemy forces and effectively commanding troops.

The main strategic goal of Operation Barbarossa was the destruction of the Soviet armed forces, the occupation of the European part of the Soviet Union, and the seizure of its main economic and political centres. It was planned to destroy the Red Army with the help of the first invasion echelon during the summer campaign. The second echelon would then occupy the European part of the USSR and reach the line 'Arkhangelsk — Astrakhan' by the autumn of 1941.

On the far northern flank, the troops of the Leningrad Military District would be attacked by Army Norway stationed in Finland, a country favourably disposed towards Germany. This army would advance in the directions of Murmansk and Kandalaksha to capture Murmansk and Karelia and cut off the Murmansk Railway.

The German Army Group North was directed against the Soviet Baltic Special Military District. Its goals included destroying the Red Army in the Baltic states, occupying Leningrad, annihilating the Baltic Fleet, and reuniting with two Finnish armies along the rivers Neva and Svir. In the main western direction, the German Army Group Centre was to engage the troops of the Soviet Western Special Military District. Its goals were to destroy the Red Army in Byelorussia and take Moscow.

On the southern flank of the future Soviet-German front, Army Group South was to engage the troops of the Kiev Special Military District. Tasked with occupying Ukraine, the army group was to drive the Soviet forces to the Dnieper, encircle and destroy them in the vicinity of Kiev, and then take Kharkov and Rostov before proceeding to the Caucasus and the oil reserves in Grozny and Baku. Army Group South included Hungarian and Slovak reserve troops.

The troops of the Odessa Military District were to be attacked by the 11th German Army in Moldavia, whose flanks would be covered by two Romanian armies. The main goal of the 11th Army was to occupy Moldavia, attain the Dnieper estuary, and take Odessa, Nikolaev and the Crimea.

In all, 4,329,500 soldiers and officers, 4,364 tanks, 42,601 guns and mortars, 4,795 planes, and up to 100 warships were mobilized for Operation Barbarossa. The determination of the German High Command and the importance assigned to the operation are attested by the fact that the first invasion echelon contained 77% of the infantry divisions, 90% of the armoured divisions and 100% of the aviation set aside for the operation, while the second echelon contained only 12% of the total forces of Germany and its allies. The *Drang nach Osten* ('Drive to the East'), as the German leadership called it, was more than a military campaign aimed at destroying the Soviet armed forces, as it is sometimes portrayed today. Rather, it was a combined military and political undertaking — a war against the Soviet state, army and people. The Wehrmacht fully participated in this endeavour, played both military and political roles. This is evident from a series of essentially criminal orders issued by military commanders, including the orders by Head of the Wehrmacht High Command (OKW) Field Marshal W. Keitel 'Decree on the Jurisdiction of Martial Law and on Special Measures of the Troops' ('Barbarossa Decree') of 13 May 1941, 'Guidelines for

the Treatment of Political Commissars' ('Commissar Order') of 6 June 1941, and the 'Directive on the Treatment of Soviet Prisoners of War' of 8 September 1941. The first liberated German soldiers and officers from prosecution for any crimes against Soviet civilians and prisoners of war. The second called for the summary execution of Red Army political commissars and, more generally, all Communist prisoners of war. The Directive on Prisoners of War not only violated the Geneva Convention but also explicitly created the conditions for the mass extermination of Soviet war prisoners by depriving them of medical assistance and adequate food and subjecting them to cold, starvation, and overwork.

Thus, the Wehrmacht was the instrument of this policy calling for the deliberate extermination of Soviet soldiers and officers along ethnic and political lines. The Soviet leadership was all too well aware of the threat posed by Nazi Germany and worked hard to improve the country's defences. On 1 September 1939, a law on compulsory military service was passed. The Winter War had identified major problems in the Red Army. It was essential to train new military commanders and engineers, reequip the army with the latest weapons and equipment, and develop and introduce new tactical manoeuvres. A military reform was launched in the spring of 1940 with the aim of increasing the combat effectiveness of the Red Army by 1942. In the framework of this reform, new tanks (T-34, KV), planes (Yak-1, MiG-3, Pe-2, Il-2) and artillery guns were tested and put into production in 1940–1941.

In the spring of 1941, mobilizational measures were taken in the Soviet western military districts. On 8 March 1941, reservists were called up for military training, and the graduation ceremony for military cadets was conducted ahead of time on 14 May. The same day, the General Staff ordered the western military districts to develop a 'plan for protecting the state border' by 25 May. On 15 June 1941, troops began moving forward from their home stations to the border in accordance with this plan.

The deployment plan envisaged that armies of the first echelon would counter German aggression by first using rifle divisions based in the fortified districts of the Molotov Line to stop or pin down Wehrmacht units and then bringing in armoured divisions and tactical reserves from the rear to launch a counterattack that would drive the enemy back behind the state border with the massive support of aviation. The second strategic echelon would then begin a counteroffensive that would penetrate into the enemy's rear. Thus, while the bulk of German forces were situated in the first echelon, only 43% of Russian divisions were in the first echelon, 25% in the second, and 32% in the reserve in remote parts of the country.

Balance of Forces of the Two Sides on 22 June 1941

	Germany and Its Allies	USSR	Ratio
Personnel	4 329 500	3 262 851	1.3: 1
Tanks	4364	15 667	1: 3.6
Guns and mortars	42 601	59 787	1: 1.4
Planes	4795	10 743	1: 2.2

After receiving intelligence reports, the General Staff of the Red Army sent Directive No. 1 to borderline military districts at 11:30 p. m. on 21 June 1941, ordering them to bring troops to full combat readiness. A similar order was issued by the People's Commissar of the Navy.

Periodization of the Great Patriotic War

The Great Patriotic War of the USSR against Nazi Germany and its allies lasting from 22 June 1941 to 9 May 1945 was a constitutive part of World War II (1 September 1939–2 September 1945). Its main battleline during all 1,412 days was the Soviet-German front.

For the Soviet Union, the Great Patriotic War was a national struggle for restoring fairness and liberating the country from the aggressor.

The Great Patriotic War is divided into three periods by Soviet and Russian historians.

The first (defensive) period (22 June 1941–18 November 1942) includes all military operations from the start of the Great Patriotic War to the end of the defensive stage of the Battle of Stalingrad. This period was primarily marked by the defence and retreat of the Red Army.

The second period (turning point) of the Great Patriotic War (19 November 1942–31 December 1943) goes from the beginning of the Soviet offensive in Stalingrad to the end of the Battle of the Dnieper. During this period, the initiative passed from the Wehrmacht to the Red Army, which began to liberate the territory of the country.

The third (offensive) period of the Great Patriotic War (1 January 1944–9 May 1945) was marked by the full liberation of the territory of the USSR and Eastern European countries and the defeat of Germany.

Historians put the Soviet-Japanese War (8 August — 2 September 1945) apart. A constitutive part of the Great Patriotic War, it was fought against the Far Eastern ally of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy.

Border Defensive Battles, June–July 1941

At 3:15 a. m. on 22 June 1941, German troops went on the offensive along the entire state border of the Soviet Union without advance warning. The invasion was accompanied by the bombing of Soviet airfields, key railway stations and cities. Only at 5:30 a. m. did the German ambassador to the USSR W. von der Schulenburg notify Soviet People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs V. Molotov that Germany had declared war on the USSR. At noon on 22 June, Molotov made a radio address about Germany's invasion of the USSR. The Great Patriotic War had begun. Germany's allies also declared war on the Soviet Union: Italy, Romania and Croatia on 22 June, Slovakia on 23 June, Finland on 25 June, and Hungary on 27 June. (Fig. 11)

The outbreak of the war necessitated taking urgent measures for organizing resistance to the enemy. On 22 June 1941, martial law and general conscription was declared on all Soviet territory by the Council of People's Commissars and the Communist Party Central Committee. The same day, the borderline military districts were transformed into fronts: the Baltic Special Military District into the Northwestern Front, the Western Special Military District into the Western Front, and the Kiev Special Military District into the Southwestern Front. Two days later on 24 June, the Leningrad Military District became the Northern Front, and the Odessa Military District the Southern Front.

On 23 June, the Headquarters of the High Command of the Armed Forces (chaired by Soviet People's Commissar of Defence Marshal S. Timoshenko) was established for directing the war. Its members included J. Stalin, V. Molotov, and Chief of the General Staff G. Zhukov, among others. The Headquarters of the Main Command was transformed on 10 July into the Headquarters of the Supreme Command chaired by J. Stalin and on 8 August into the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command.

On 29 June, the Communist Party Central Committee issued the 'Directive to Soviet and Party Organizations', ordering them to offer active resistance to the enemy along the border and in the enemy's rear, organize partisan units and covert groups, and strengthen the Red Army's rear. In the event of the forced retreat of Soviet troops, party organizations were to evacuate all valuable property or, if this proved impossible, destroy it. In territories occupied by the Germans, underground party organizations were to be created

for directing the partisan movement and engaging in ideological and covert military combat.

Special attention was given to political work in the army. On 16 July, military commissars were reintroduced into the Red Army for the first time since the Russian Civil War. They organized political and educational work among the troops and shared the responsibility for decisions with commanders. Military political organizations in all units from the company to the army were subordinated to the Main Political Directorate of the Red Army (headed by L. Mekhlis) and the Main Political Directorate of the Navy (headed by I. Rogov).

On 30 June, the extraordinary State Defence Committee (chaired by J. Stalin) was established to administer the country in wartime. Stalin was also appointed Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars (on 6 May), People's Commissar of Defence (on 19 July), and Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet Armed Forces (on 8 August). The State Defence Committee also included V. Molotov (deputy chairman), K. Voroshilov, G. Malenkov, L. Beria, and others. The State Defence Committee was responsible for the military, political and economic administration of the country, and its decisions had the force of emergency laws.

On 24 June 1941, the Soviet Information Bureau (headed by A. Shcherbakov) was established as the country's chief information agency and main tool of ideological struggle.

On 3 July, for the first time after the outbreak of the war, Stalin made a radio address to the Soviet people and the Red Army, in which he spoke directly of the mortal danger threatening the country and called upon his 'brothers and sisters' — i. e., all the country's citizens — to save the fatherland.

The People's Militia began to form as soon as the war broke out. Many individuals who were not subject to conscription joined it. During the war, the People's Militia included about 60 divisions as well as numerous regiments and battalions with a total manpower of approx. 2 million. On 17 September 1941, the State Defence Committee made it compulsory from 1 October 1941 for all men aged between 16 and 50 years to undergo general military training to prepare for the Red Army reserve. (Fig. 12)

Another key task was to create a war economy in the country. On 26 June, the Praesidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR ordered the mobilization of all industry. The workday was extended, vacations and non-working days were suspended, and other limitations were announced. Ration cards were introduced to ensure the sufficient supply of food and other goods.

On 24 June 1941, the Communist Party Central Committee and the Council of People's Commissars established the Evacuation

Civilians leaving with retreating Soviet troops

1 July 1941

Photo: M. Melnik

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Council (chaired first by L. Kaganovich and then, from 3 July, by N. Shvernik) for organizing the transfer of production facilities and valuables from the European part of the USSR to the east. In July — November 1941, 1,523 major enterprises were evacuated and quickly brought back into operation so as to supply the Red Army with arms and military equipment. In addition, 30–40% of workers and specialists were evacuated, along with food, agricultural machinery, and material and cultural valuables (including books and artworks).

Titanic work was conducted for creating a network of industrial facilities in the east of the country. Factories were built virtually from scratch and often began to manufacture military goods before being fully complete. However, the colossal evacuation of people and industrial enterprises led to falling production rates. This particularly affected the output of military equipment (planes, tanks, vehicles, artillery, firearms), which was fully restored only in early 1943. (Fig. 13)

In the meantime, the Border Defensive Battles were being fought on the Soviet-German front. In the northwest direction, the sudden attack of the German Army Group North split the front in two, separating the forces of the Northwestern and Western Fronts. The attempt of the Soviet command to launch a counteroffensive at Alytus and Raseiniai (Lithuanian SSR) was unsuccessful, resulting in major losses. German troops made rapid progress in the directions of Pskov and Tallinn. They occupied Vilnius on 24 June, crossed the river Western Dvina (Daugava) on 25 June, took Riga on 30 June, and entered Pskov on 9 July, threatening to attain Leningrad in a short period of time.

Pitted against superior enemy forces, the Soviet Western Front suffered heavy losses. The Front's military command headed by General D. Pavlov lost control of the troops and was unable to organize their retreat. Major Soviet forces were surrounded in the Belastok Salient on 23–30 June. The counterattack by the 6th Motorized Corps in the direction of Grodno on 24–25 June failed to stop the enemy's advance.

The garrison of Brest Fortress, led by Major P. Gavrilov and Regimental Commissar Y. Fomin, held out heroically for over a month. The resistance of individual Soviet units notwithstanding, the German Army Group Centre closed the circle around Minsk on 29 June, and the city fell on 30 June. Soviet losses included 341,073 dead, imprisoned, and missing in action and 76,717 wounded.

The commanders of the Western Front were dismissed and brought before a military tribunal, which sentenced D. Pavlov and some other generals to death. Marshal of the Soviet Union

Volunteers of the People's Militia leaving for the front at the beginning of the war
September 1941
Photo: N. Maksimov
RIA Novosti

Evacuation of industrial equipment
1941
RIA Novosti

13

S. Timoshenko was appointed the Front's commander on 1 July. In early July, heavy defensive fighting broke out on the river Berezina, where Soviet forces managed to hold up the enemy near Borisov and Lepel at the expense of heavy losses.

On 10 July began the two-month-long Battle of Smolensk. The enemy was engaged by the Soviet Western, Central and Bryansk Fronts. After heavy combat, German tanks penetrated into the Soviet rear and took Smolensk, yet Soviet counterstrikes made the German command delay its advance towards Moscow.

The most powerful Soviet counterattack was made from 30 August to 6 September by the Reserve Front under the command of General of the Army G. Zhukov near Yelnya, leading to the liberation of the town. This was the Red Army's first successful offensive during the Great Patriotic War. During the Battle of Smolensk, the first 'guards units' were created in the Red Army: on 18 September, the Soviet People's Commissar of Defence awarded this title to the 100th and 127th Rifle Divisions for their valour in the Yelnya Operation, renaming them the 1st and 2nd Guards Rifle Divisions.

In the southwest, invading German and allied armies encountered the determined resistance of Soviet troops. The battlegroups and units of the Red Army receded from the border in an attempt to avoid encirclement. On 23–30 June 1941, a battle involving 2,800 Soviet and 800 German tanks and assault guns took place along the line Dubno — Lutsk — Brody in Western Ukraine. The Soviet counterattack was unsuccessful due to its hasty organization, poor coordination, and insufficient combat training of tank crews. Nevertheless, the Soviet Southwestern Front under the command of Colonel General M. Kirponos managed to avoid encirclement near Lvov and delayed the enemy's advance towards Kiev. As to the Soviet Southern Front, it successfully contained the German and Romanian offensive during the first days of the war. In early July, the Soviet troops retreated to avoid encirclement. In mid-July, the enemy continued its offensive, breaching the Soviet defences and surrounding the 6th and 12th Armies near Uman.

What were the reasons for the Soviet failures during the initial period of the war?

A major factor in the success of German operations was their unexpectedness. While the Soviet leadership had understood the inevitability of war, it believed that Germany was unlikely to attack while the Battle of Britain was still raging. Information about the dates of the invasion (from April to July) gathered by the Soviet intelligence appeared contradictory. One of these dates (22 June 1941) evoked doubts, as it seemed impossible to begin an offensive

against such a large country as the USSR with only two summer months ahead.

The order on bringing troops in the border military districts into full combat readiness came too late — in the evening of 21 June 1941 — and most units did not have enough time to implement it. The troops that had been brought to the border in mid-June remained in peacetime deterrence posture, and many of them were in training camps.

When the war began, many Red Army battlegroups were still lacking personnel and materiel. For example, half of 198 rifle divisions had only 10,300 men (in comparison to the norm of 12,000), and 78 (about 40%) only 5,900 men. The other 23 divisions were just beginning to be manned. At the time of the invasion, the Red Army was undergoing reorganization and rearmament. Deploying the army and bringing it into combat readiness required a lot of time, which the Soviet leadership did not have at its disposal.

Another reason for Germany's fulgurant success was the Red Army's lack of combat experience. The number of units and groups participating in the military conflicts of the 1930s and the Winter War was relatively small. The bulk of soldiers and officers had only engaged in military exercises and field training. Commanding officers were poorly skilled on the whole, as many more experienced officers had perished during the pre-war purges. The rapid growth of the army after the introduction of compulsory military service made the lack of commanding officers particularly apparent. There was insufficient experience in organizing cooperation between different types of forces, a lack of qualified technical personnel for maintaining military equipment (especially new machinery), and a shortage of spare parts, fuel, ammunition, and radio communication devices. The situation at the start of the war was aggravated by the contradictory orders of military commanders. Many of them were afraid to take the initiative, while the High Command of the Red Army had inadequate knowledge of the situation in the field.

Soviet and Russian historians had previously believed that the success of the German forces was due to their overwhelming numerical superiority. Contemporary studies show that this was not entirely the case. During Operation Barbarossa, Germany surpassed the USSR only in manpower, while the USSR enjoyed numerical superiority in military equipment. Nevertheless, this equipment was spread out over the country's enormous territory, lacked sufficient expendables, and could not be committed into battle simultaneously. Moreover, some of it was outdated, as the Soviet Union had launched industrialization relatively late and had not improved its defence capacities sufficiently.

Some recent publications have argued that the failures of the Red Army were caused by a pre-emptive strike by Germany against the USSR to stave off a Soviet attack. There exist several major arguments against this theory.

First of all, as we have already said, the Red Army was undergoing large-scale reform and rearmament at the time, and the Soviet forces were not ready to engage in major operations before the completion of this process, which was scheduled for 1942.

Secondly, Stalin had no desire of being seen as an aggressor by the rest of the world if he started the war first, even against such an opponent as Hitler. While the Red Army Doctrine of 1939 envisaged combat activities 'with few casualties on enemy territory', this was permitted only in response to an invasion of Soviet territory. Generally speaking, Soviet foreign policy promoted the peaceful resolution of conflicts, as shown by a note sent by the Soviet People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs to Germany on 14 June 1941.

Thirdly, the Winter War had shown that the Red Army was insufficiently experienced in contemporary warfare, which totally precluded the possibility of a pre-emptive offensive before the completion of intensive combat training and military education of newly formed battle units and groups.

Finally, in June 1941, Soviet border forces were deployed in a deterrence posture designed to repel an enemy invasion. Their dislocation to the country's western border was a response to the transfer of German troops to Poland from early 1941 on.

The main advantage of the German Army was its excellent military strategy and tactics and extensive experience in contemporary warfare. The central element of German strategy was the blitzkrieg approach that was marked by the extensive use of tanks and airplanes and the close coordination between all forces. Moreover, the Wehrmacht was completely mobilized, fully equipped, and concentrated in the main directions of attack, where it enjoyed numerical superiority. The Germans had already achieved a series of victories in Europe with excellently trained senior and junior officers. Their army was led by skilled military commanders with a lot of combat experience: W. Keitel, F. Halder, F. von Bock, H. Guderian, H. Hoth, G. von Kluge, E. von Manstein, and others. Germany had conquered Poland in 36 days, Norway in 62, Denmark in 2, the Netherlands in 5, Belgium in 18, France in 42, Yugoslavia in 11, and Greece in 16. By the time Germany invaded the USSR, Britain was its only remaining opponent in Europe. The Reich disposed of the industries, raw materials, and human resources of almost all Europe.

The Border Defensive Battles were a terrible ordeal for the Red Army, which suffered extensive losses and was driven into the depths

of the country by the enemy's superior forces. German troops advanced 450 km in the direction of Leningrad, 600 km in the direction of Moscow, and 350 km in the direction of Kiev.

Comparative Losses of the Two Sides in the Border Defensive Battles

Losses	USSR	Germany and Its Allies
Soldiers (thousand)	600	100 (dead)
Tanks (thousand)	11. 7	1.6
Planes (thousand)	4	1
Guns and mortars (thousand)	18. 8	1.6

First (Defensive) Period of the Great Patriotic War

By mid-July, German troops had taken Pskov in the northwest, Smolensk in the west and reached the Dnieper in the southwest. Having occupied the Baltic states, Byelorussia, and Right-bank Ukraine, they were now threatening Moscow and Leningrad. On 19 July, Hitler ordered German commanders to postpone their advance towards Moscow and relocate tank divisions to the Leningrad and Kiev fronts. In the Baltic region, the last Soviet pocket of resistance was Tallinn — the main naval base of the Baltic Fleet. All of August, heavy fighting took place in the outskirts of the city. On 28 August, the Soviet Supreme High Command ordered the evacuation of the army and navy from Tallinn. This task was entrusted to the Baltic Fleet. It managed to reach Kronstadt through minefields and under fire from enemy planes while suffering major casualties, especially among transport ships.

The German advance on Leningrad began on 12 July 1941. From the southwest, the attack targeted the Luga Defence Line that had been built by Leningrad inhabitants over a very short period of time. Units of the Red Army and the People's Militia engaged in intense combat for a month, delaying the enemy advance at the expense of heavy losses and foiling German plans of a lightning conquest of Leningrad.

Wehrmacht units launched a new offensive from their bridgehead on the river Luga towards Krasnogvardeysk (present-day Gatchina) on 8 August, breaching the flanks of the Luga Defence Line on 15 August. Soviet troops retreated towards Leningrad. At the same time, German troops received reinforcements from Army Group Centre and began to advance towards Leningrad from the south. Piercing the Soviet defences on 12 August, they occupied Novgorod on 16 August. The Finnish Army simultaneously attacked Leningrad from the north.

On 8 September, the Wehrmacht reached Lake Ladoga, completely surrounding Leningrad. On 9 September, German troops and planes began to attack the city from the southeast and the west. The Baltic Fleet played a key role in the city's defence by bombarding German troops from ships and delaying their advance. On 13 September, Marshal K. Voroshilov was replaced by General of the Army G. Zhukov as the commander of the Leningrad Front.

After nine days of fighting, the enemy was stopped on the Ligovo–Uritsk–Pulkovo–Kolpino line. To avert a new German

storm of Leningrad, scheduled for 23 September, the Red Army launched the First Sinyavino Operation — a counteroffensive on the Shlisselburg-Sinyavino Bulge (or 'Bottleneck', as the Germans called it). Although the Soviet offensive did not succeed, the Germans had to shift their troops southeast of the city and abandon their scheduled attack. On 23 September, German airplanes heavily bombed Leningrad and Kronstadt, causing widespread destruction and sinking numerous ships of the Baltic Fleet (including the battleship Marat). On 19 September 1941, the Leningrad Front landed troops on the south bank of the Neva. Fighting around the 'Neva Pyatachok', as this bridgehead was called, lasted all of autumn and winter until 29 April 1942.

On 26 September, the German High Command ordered Army Group North to assume a defensive posture so as to force the city into submission through a blockade. The transfer of German tank units in the direction of Moscow precluded further attempts to storm the city.

On 16 October 1941, German forces launched an offensive south of Lake Ladoga in an attempt to take the town of Tikhvin and reunite with Finnish troops on the river Svir in order to tighten the blockade of Leningrad. German troops occupied Tikhvin on 7 November, cutting off the railway leading to the south shore of Lake Ladoga, through which supplies were being sent to Leningrad. The Soviet Supreme High Command spared no effort to liberate Tikhvin. The Volkhov Front commanded by General of the Army K. Meretskov managed to take the town, while the heroic defence of Volkhov (Volkhovstroy Railway Station) put an end to German plans of tightening the Leningrad Blockade.

On the southern front, the German command undertook a flank manoeuvre in an attempt to surround Soviet troops near Kiev. On 25–30 August, the Wehrmacht reached the Dnieper, made a forced crossing at Kremenchug, and, splitting the troops of the Soviet South and Southwest Fronts, penetrated into the rear of Red Army units defending Kiev. The panzer divisions transferred from the Moscow front to Kiev played a major role in the encirclement of Soviet forces. The order of the Soviet Supreme High Command to abandon Kiev came too late, leading the Soviet troops to be fully encircled by 13 September and completely destroyed by 27 September.

The Front's commander M. Kirponos was killed in action. In all, over 600,000 Soviet soldiers died or were taken prisoner.

On 5 August, Odessa was besieged by the 4th Romanian Army. The city was defended by the Soviet Separate Coastal Army and the Black Sea Fleet. After almost three months of fighting, the Red Army abandoned Odessa and evacuated to the Crimea, which was being threatened by the enemy. (Fig. 14)

Odessa during the siege
Photo: G. Zelma
RIA Novosti

On 18 October, the 11th German Army crossed the Isthmus of Perekop, occupied the majority of the Crimean Peninsula, and besieged Sevastopol, the main base of the Black Sea Fleet. The Wehrmacht was unable to take the city at once. On 30 October 1941 began the 250-day heroic defence of Sevastopol.

Germans took Stalino (present-day Donetsk) on 20 October, Kharkov on 24 October, and Rostov-on-Don on 21 November, leading to the occupation of the Donbass.

Leningrad Blockade

The 900-day Leningrad Blockade began on 8 September 1941. The rapid approach of the Wehrmacht did not give the city an opportunity to prepare for the long siege. There was not enough food to feed three million inhabitants for a long time or fuel to generate heat and electricity. After the failure of the German attack, Hitler decided to 'strangle' Leningrad with a blockade, expecting that hunger and bombs would force it to surrender. German troops besieging the city were ordered not to let anyone out but rather to make them return or kill them, even if they tried to surrender. The Germans planned to raze the city, exterminate all of its inhabitants and cede its territory to Finland.

By the autumn of 1941, Leningrad had begun to experience a severe food shortage. Heat, water and electricity were no longer delivered to residents. There were barely enough resources to assure the work of defence plants and supply the Leningrad Front and the Baltic Fleet. The unusually cold weather further aggravated the situation. Trams stopped circulating in late December, followed by the rest of urban transport in January 1942. Nevertheless, Leningrad continued to hold out even in such dire conditions.

Food rationing had already been introduced in July. During the first period of the blockade, the daily bread allowance was cut back on several occasions. It attained its nadir during the period from 20 November to 25 December 1941: 250 g for workers and 125 g for children and dependents. Virtually no other food was available. Most of the inhabitants received the smaller bread allowance. The long-term hunger and lack of vitamins led to a mass epidemic of scurvy and a growing mortality rate. In late December 1941, hospitals for dystrophy patients began to be set up. These 109 alimentary in-patient facilities saved the lives of thousands of Leningrad inhabitants.

Links with the rest of the country were key to the city's survival. A shipping line was set up in autumn that managed to bring

food to the city despite continuous enemy bombing. However, Lake Ladoga froze in November, stopping navigation and greatly aggravating the situation in the city. On 22 November 1941, Military Highway 101 was traced over the ice of Lake Ladoga, allowing food and ammunition to be brought into Leningrad and city inhabitants and wounded persons to be evacuated out of it. This highway, called the 'Road of Life', allowed the city to survive the terrible winter of 1941–1942. Later, in the summer of 1942, a petroleum pipeline was laid over the lake bed, along with an electric cable that delivered power to the city from the Volkhov Hydroelectric Plant.

The German invaders believed that the city would either surrender or perish, yet Leningrad held out. In the spring of 1942, the piles of sewage and corpses lying in the streets threatened to provoke epidemics in the city. The Germans hoped that the city would be overcome by diseases, yet its haggard inhabitants performed a real feat: going out into streets, they cleaned up the city in just a few days from 27 March to 8 April. A decree instructing inhabitants to make potager gardens was promulgated on 19 March, and trams began to run once again on 31 March. Many of these achievements were the work of the city administration headed by A. Zhdanov, A. Kuznetsov, Y. Popkov, and others. (Fig. 15)

During the first blockade winter, about 300,000 city inhabitants died by the most conservative estimates. As the old cemeteries lacked room, it was decided to bury the bodies in the northern part of the city along the old Piskaryovka Road (the present-day Piskaryovskoye Memorial Cemetery). In all, from 1.2 to 2 million people died, by different estimates, in the course of the Leningrad Blockade from hunger, cold, air bombs and artillery shells. The actions of the enemy can only be labelled as genocide.

Battle of Moscow

Historians usually divide the Battle of Moscow into two periods: defensive (30 September — 5 December 1941) and offensive (5 December 1941–20 April 1942).

The commander of the German Army Group Centre, Field Marshal F. von Bock, wanted to launch an offensive against Moscow in mid-July, immediately after the conquest of Smolensk. However, Hitler decided to take Kiev and Leningrad first to protect the Wehrmacht's flanks while it was advancing towards Moscow. As a result of the dislocation of German tank units to the north and south, Soviet troops stationed around Smolensk managed to hold the enemy back until late September.

Inhabitants of besieged Leningrad take water from shell holes in the asphalt of Nevsky Prospect
Photo: V. Tselik
RIA Novosti

The German offensive against Moscow finally began on 30 September (Operation Typhoon). According to German plans, Army Group Centre was to encircle and destroy Soviet forces around Vyazma and Bryansk. The German troops were engaged by the Soviet Western Front commanded by Colonel General I. Konev, the Bryansk Front commanded by Colonel General A. Yeryomenko (from 14 October, by Major General G. Zakharov), and the Reserve Front led by Marshal S. Budyonny. The Soviet command failed to predict the direction of the enemy's main thrust and concentrated its forces in the Smolensk direction, while the Germans attacked the weakened flanks.

German panzer divisions breached the Soviet defences, entered the Red Army's rear, and surrounded the main forces of the three Fronts. The Germans took Oryol on 3 October, Bryansk on 6 October, and Vyazma on 7 October. Seven Soviet armies were encircled. In all, over 500,000 Soviet soldiers were killed, imprisoned or missing in action, and over 140,000 were wounded during the defensive period of the Battle of Moscow.

Things began to look as if the Wehrmacht would reach Moscow unimpeded. In this situation, the Soviet Supreme High Command appointed G. Zhukov as the commander of the Western Front, recalling him from Leningrad. He was put in charge of all the Soviet forces around Moscow. On 16 October, the Wehrmacht was only 38 km away from the city. Government agencies and foreign diplomats were hastily evacuated to Kuybyshev (present-day Samara). The factories that still remained in the capital were mined, ready to be exploded at a moment's notice. In an effort to avoid panic, First Secretary of the Moscow City Party Committee A. Shcherbakov made a radio address on 17 October, calling upon inhabitants to pay no attention to rumours and assuring them of the Red Army's resolution to defend the capital. Order was restored in the city by local party organizations and the police. On 20 October, a state of siege was declared in Moscow.

People's Militia divisions, military cadets, and newly formed army units were mobilized to defend the capital. City inhabitants were directed to build fortifications. The heaviest fighting took place in the areas of Volokolamsk and Maroyaroslavets, where Kremlin and Podolsk cadets were stationed. In the south, the enemy made its way toward Tula on 29 October — 2 November yet was stopped before entering the city. By late October, the Red Army had managed to stall the German advance at the expense of heavy losses. The Soviet leadership demonstrated its resolve to defend Moscow by holding the traditional Red Square parade on 7 November 1941 on the occasion of the 24th anniversary of the October Revolution. (Fig. 16)

Soldiers leave the military parade of 7 November 1941 directly for the front lines

Photo: A. Garanin

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In the second half of October, the determined resistance of Soviet troops and the torrential rains that disrupted German supply lines forced the commanders of Army Group Centre to halt the offensive.

The Germans went on the attack again on 15 November after the cold had made the roads passable. The German High Command planned to encircle Moscow from the north and south. German forces in the northwest took Klin on 23 November, Solnechnogorsk on 24 November, and Khimki on 2 December. At this point, the Wehrmacht was only 30 km from the centre of the city. The actions of the 316th Rifle Division commanded by Major General I. Panfilov became a symbol of the courage and heroism of Soviet troops, who were ready to lay down their lives to defend the country's capital.

Between 15 November and 5 December, Soviet forces eroded the enemy's troops in heavy defensive combat, foiling German plans of taking Moscow. The German soldiers were depleted, and the Wehrmacht's offensive stopped. In the meanwhile, the Soviet Supreme High Command brought in reserve troops, including divisions from Siberia and the Far East. A lot of materiel arrived in Moscow from factories evacuated to Siberia and lend-lease deliveries.

Balance of Forces Around Moscow as of 5 December 1941

Personnel and equipment	Red Army	Wehrmacht	Ratio
Personnel	1 100 000	1 708 000	1: 1.5
Guns and mortars	7 652	13 500	1: 1.8
Tanks	774	1 170	1: 1.5
Planes	1 000	615	1.6: 1

(Source: encyclopedia.mil.ru)

These reinforcements allowed the Red Army to launch a counteroffensive around Moscow on 5–6 December. This grew into a general counteroffensive along a wide front on 7–10 January 1942 with the participation of the Western, Kalinin, Northwestern and Bryansk Fronts. Particular heroism was shown by the 2nd Guards Cavalry Company of Major General L. Dovator, the 1st Guards Tank Brigade of Colonel M. Katukov, the 5th Army of Major General L. Govorov, and others. Hitler's strict orders notwithstanding, the German troops were unable to hold their positions and began to retreat.

The Soviet counteroffensive lasted until 20 April 1942, leading to the Wehrmacht's first serious defeat. The Germans were thrown back by 100–350 km from the capital.

The defeat of the German Army in the Battle of Moscow marked the first failure of the German blitzkrieg strategy and debunked the myth of the Wehrmacht's invincibility. The first major victory of the Red Army in the war was instrumental for raising morale among troops and in the country as a whole. One may say that the road of the Red Army to Berlin began in the outskirts of Moscow.

From 23 November to 2 December, the Soviet Southern and Transcaucasian Fronts conducted the Rostov Offensive Operation, liberating Rostov-on-Don on 29 November and driving the German Army Group South behind the river Mius. This stopped the German offensive towards the Caucasus.

The German failures on the Eastern Front led to massive rotations in the Wehrmacht command. In the winter of 1941–42, the following senior commanders were dismissed, among others: Commander-in-Chief of the German Army Field Marshal W. von Brauchitsch; Commanders of Army Groups North, Centre and South Field Marshals W. von Leeb, W. von Bock, and G. von Rundstedt; and Commander of the 2nd Panzer Group Colonel General H. Guderian.

Red Army Offensive Operations in the Spring of 1942

In early 1942, the Soviet leadership, spurred on by the Red Army's victory around Moscow, began to plan strategic offensives to drive the enemy out of the country. While the Battle of Moscow was still raging, the forces of the Western and Kalinin Fronts launched the Rzhev–Vyazma Offensive Operation in an attempt to encircle and destroy part of the German Army Group Centre and liberate Rzhev.

The operation began without sufficient preparation and without the mobilization of additional forces and resources. The Wehrmacht managed to retain its key positions before counterattacking on the flanks to encircle the Soviet forces in the vicinity of Vyazma and Rzhev. In the summer of 1942, the Kalinin and Western Fronts launched a new assault on Rzhev. During the First Rzhev–Sychyovka Offensive Operation on 30 July — 1 October 1942, the Red Army encountered the determined resistance of the enemy. The offensive ultimately failed.

In the spring of 1942, the Soviet command tried to breach the Leningrad Blockade. Between 7 January and 30 April 1942,

the Leningrad and Volkhov Fronts conducted the Lyuban Operation. The offensive of the Volkhov Front was unsuccessful, as the Leningrad Front had been unable to come to its encounter. The Germans used a series of flank counterattacks to surround the 2nd Shock Army of the Volkhov Front near Myasnoy Bor. Although scattered remains of the army managed to break out between 12 May and 28 June 1942, most of the soldiers and officers were killed or taken prisoner. Among the latter was the army's commander A. Vlasov, who soon became the main participant of an anti-Soviet German military and propaganda campaign and a symbol of treason and Nazi collaborationism.

To help besieged Sevastopol, the Soviet command decided to carry out an amphibious landing in the Crimea. During the Kerch-Feodosiya Operation (25 December 1941–2 January 1942), troops of the Transcaucasian Front commanded by Lieutenant General D. Kozlov were disembarked by the Black Sea Fleet. The landing took place during a major storm and encountered the determined resistance of the enemy. Soviet forces took Kerch on 30 December and liberated the whole Kerch Peninsula in January 1942. However, the offensive gradually bogged down before stopping altogether in March 1942.

On the southern flank of the Soviet-German front, the Soviet Southwestern and Southern Fronts launched an offensive in the Donbass. During the Barvenkovo–Lozovaya Operation (18–31 January 1942), the Red Army created the Barvenkovo salient, which was meant to serve as a bridgehead for an offensive against Kharkov. However, the Germans managed to retain several key pockets of resistance on the flanks of the salient. Fighting stopped due to the spring thaw.

None of the offensive operations of the Red Army in the winter–spring of 1942 attained the goals set by the Soviet Supreme High Command due to insufficient forces, complicated winter-spring conditions, poor military preparation, lack of large mobile battlegroups in the Red Army, and the successful German strategy of defending key points with massive counterattacks.

German Offensives in the Summer of 1942

The German High Command was preparing for a new operation in its turn. In 1942, Hitler decided to launch an offensive against Stalingrad and the Caucasus ('Operation Blau'). The Wehrmacht was no longer able to attack along the whole Soviet-German front, and so the southern direction was chosen for making a decisive thrust.

The loss of the Caucasus would have deprived the USSR of petroleum in Baku and Grozny, while allowing the Wehrmacht to replenish its reserves. At the same time, the conquest of Stalingrad would have given Germany control over the Volga, a key Soviet transport artery along which Baku petroleum was delivered to the country's industrial centres. All of this would have expedited the German victory. Operation Blau involved 97 German divisions, 900,000 soldiers, 1,200 tanks and assault guns, 17,000 guns and mortars, and over 1,600 planes. Italian, Romanian and Hungarian armies also participated on the German side.

On 12 May 1942, the Soviet Southwestern and Southern Fronts launched an offensive against Kharkov. On 17 May, the German Army Group South counterattacked on the flanks. By 19 May, the threat of encirclement had begun to loom over the Soviet forces. No order of retreat was given, and the Soviet troops were surrounded on 23 May and destroyed by the end of the month. Losses amounted to over 270,000 men, of whom 170,000 were killed, disabled or missing in action; 2,100 guns and mortars; and 1,200 tanks. This defeat made a breach in the front lines, into which the German troops surged.

At the same time, the situation greatly aggravated in the Crimea. On 19 May, the 11th Army commanded by Colonel General E. von Manstein took Kerch, destroying the Soviet Crimean Front (Operation Bustard Hunt). The evacuation over the Kerch Strait was not properly organized, leading to major losses.

The ensuing Defence of Sevastopol was even more heroic than in the 19th century. The soldiers and officers of the Separate Coastal Army and other Soviet battlegroups and units were assisted by the ships of the Black Sea Fleet, which repeatedly made their way into the besieged city under fire from coastal batteries and enemy planes, delivering reinforcements and military cargos and evacuating civilians and wounded soldiers. The ships fired on enemy positions, supported Soviet counterattacks, provided anti-aircraft defences, and participated in amphibious landings. Sailors and marines also took part in combat on land, inspiring terror in German and Romanian soldiers, who called them 'Black Death'. However, after the arrival of heavy artillery, the 11th German Army managed to take the city on 4 July. The Crimea was now fully occupied. (Fig. 17)

The failures in Crimea and Kharkov had a demoralizing effect on Soviet troops. Soldiers began to desert, panic, abandon their positions without authorization, and violate army discipline. All of this could have resulted in a catastrophe for the country. On 28 July, the People's Commissariat of Defence issued Order No. 227, which came to be known as 'Not a Step Back!'. It forbade Soviet soldiers

Soviet marines attack German positions during the Siege of Sevastopol

November 1941

Photo: Y. Khaldey

RIA Novosti

to abandon their positions and retreat without authorization on pain of immediate execution. This order played an important role in mobilizing resistance to the Nazi occupants.

Order No. 227 also created penal battalions and companies for soldiers and officers sentenced to death or imprisonment. An individual who served his term or was wounded in a penal battalion was reinstated in his former rank and returned to the regular armed forces. Penal troops experienced extremely high casualties, as they were often sent to the most dangerous areas of the front.

The defeat of the Soviet forces at Kharkov created a very difficult situation in the southern part of the Soviet-German front. The German High Command planned to attack Voronezh from the north by Army Group B and Rostov from the south by Army Group A to surround the Red Army in the Don River bend before advancing towards the Volga and the Caucasus. The Voronezh offensive began on 28 June. The forces of the Soviet Bryansk Front were unable to stop the Germans, and on 2 July German tanks entered the city. The front line would pass along the river Don through Voronezh for a long time to come.

On 30 June, the 6th German Army commanded by General of the Armoured Forces F. Paulus began an offensive against the Soviet Southwestern Front stationed on the Don. On 15 July, the Germans breached the Soviet defences near Millerovo and reached the Don River bend, posing a direct threat to Stalingrad.

On 24 July, the Soviet Southern Front abandoned Rostov.

The Soviet territory occupied by Germany and its allies by mid-1942 had housed 88 million people before the war, manufactured 33% of the country's industrial output, mined 60% of its coal, produced almost 60% of its steel, and contained 47% of all its farmlands.

Defensive Period of the Battle of Stalingrad

The Battle of Stalingrad, a key operation of the Great Patriotic War, began on 17 July 1942. Its history is divided into two periods: defensive (17 July — 18 November 1942) and offensive (19 November 1942–2 February 1943).

The Soviet Supreme High Command reorganized the Southwestern Front into the Stalingrad Front on 12 July and the Southeastern Front on 5 August. Subsequently, on 28 September, it converted the Stalingrad Front into the Don Front and the Southeastern Front into the Stalingrad Front. The activities of these

Fronts were coordinated by Chief of the General Staff of the Soviet Armed Forces, General of the Army A. Vasilevsky, who acted as a representative of the Soviet Supreme High Command.

Balance of Forces at the Start of the Battle of Stalingrad

Personnel and equipment	USSR	Germany and Its Allies
Personnel	386 000	430 000
Guns and mortars	2 200	3 000
Tanks	230	250 (including assault guns)
Planes	884	1 200

(Source: A. Isayev, 'Stalingrad. Trudnoye nachalo' [Stalingrad: The Difficult Beginning] in Rodina, 2013, 1, pp. 3–5.

The 6th Army commanded by F. Paulus began its offensive on Stalingrad on 17 July. The Germans attained the Don on 25 July and reached the Volga in the north of Stalingrad on 23 August. The same day, the Luftwaffe heavily bombed Stalingrad, almost totally destroying the city and killing over 90,000 people. Attempts to evacuate civilians failed. Combat began in the outskirts of the city and continued in the city streets.

Stalingrad was defended by the 62nd Army commanded by Lieutenant General V. Chuykov, the 64th Army led by Lieutenant General M. Shumilov, NKVD troops and the People's Militia. The greater part of Stalingrad inhabitants remained in the city, sharing all the troubles and adversities of the Red Army troops. (Fig. 18)

The Soviet command kept bringing new reserves into battle and attacking the flanks of the advancing enemy in a desperate effort to defend the city. Heavy fighting took place on Mamayev Kurgan and in the buildings of the Stalingrad Tractor, Barrikady and Krasny Oktyabr Factories. Soldiers fought for every house, and every basement became an impregnable fortress. The positions of the opposing sides resembled a layered cake: Soviet and German units could occupy different stories of the same building. As a result, Red Army soldiers were sometimes targeted by their own artillery, which fired from the east bank of the Volga.

On the Soviet side, remarkable feats were performed by a small group of soldiers led by Senior Sergeant Y. Pavlov, who managed to defend a four-storey building ('Pavlov's House') for two months; the sniper V. Zaytsev, who killed 225 German soldiers; the soldiers of the 13th Guards Rifle Division commanded

Fighting in Stalingrad
1 November 1942
Photo: G. Zelma
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by Major General A. Rodimtsev and the 138th Rifle Division commanded by Lieutenant General I. Lyudnikov; and many others. On 15 October, the Germans took the Stalingrad Tractor Factory and reached the Volga in a second place, splitting the Soviet forces in two. Nevertheless, the troops, pushed to the river and isolated from each other, continued to control several city neighbourhoods. On 11 November, the Wehrmacht made a final attempt to occupy the city and push the Soviet forces into the Volga; the attack was countered with great difficulty. The Germans did not try again to take the city as a whole, parts of which remained in the hands of the Red Army.

While the Battle of Stalingrad was still raging, the Wehrmacht launched the Battle of the Caucasus (25 July 1942–9 October 1943). Army Group A was directed to seize the oilfields in the North Caucasus and Baku. At first, the Soviet North Caucasian and Transcaucasian Fronts managed to hold off the German offensive yet then began retreating under enemy pressure. The Germans took Voroshilovsk (Stavropol) on 3 August, Maykop on 9 August, Krasnodar on 12 August, and almost all of Novorossiysk on 11 September. On 21 August, German mountain troops raised the German flag on the summit of Elbrus. The enemy offensive nevertheless faltered at a few points in late September 1942: at Mozdok on the river Terek and at the passes of the Great Caucasus Range near Malgobek and Elkhotovo.

The heroic 125-day defence of Stalingrad marked the end of the first (defensive) period of the Great Patriotic War. This was one of the most difficult episodes of the war, which put the very existence of the Soviet state into question. Only the heroism of the Soviet people managed to foil the enemy's plans.

Military Operations in the Other Theatres of World War II (1941–1942)

Combat continued on the Mediterranean Sea in the spring and summer of 1941. On 28–29 March 1941, British and Italian fleets fought a major naval battle along the Greek coast near Cape Matapan. The battle ended in the total defeat of the Italians, who suffered heavy losses. The Italian Navy never strove to command the sea again, limiting itself to supporting Italian and German forces in North Africa.

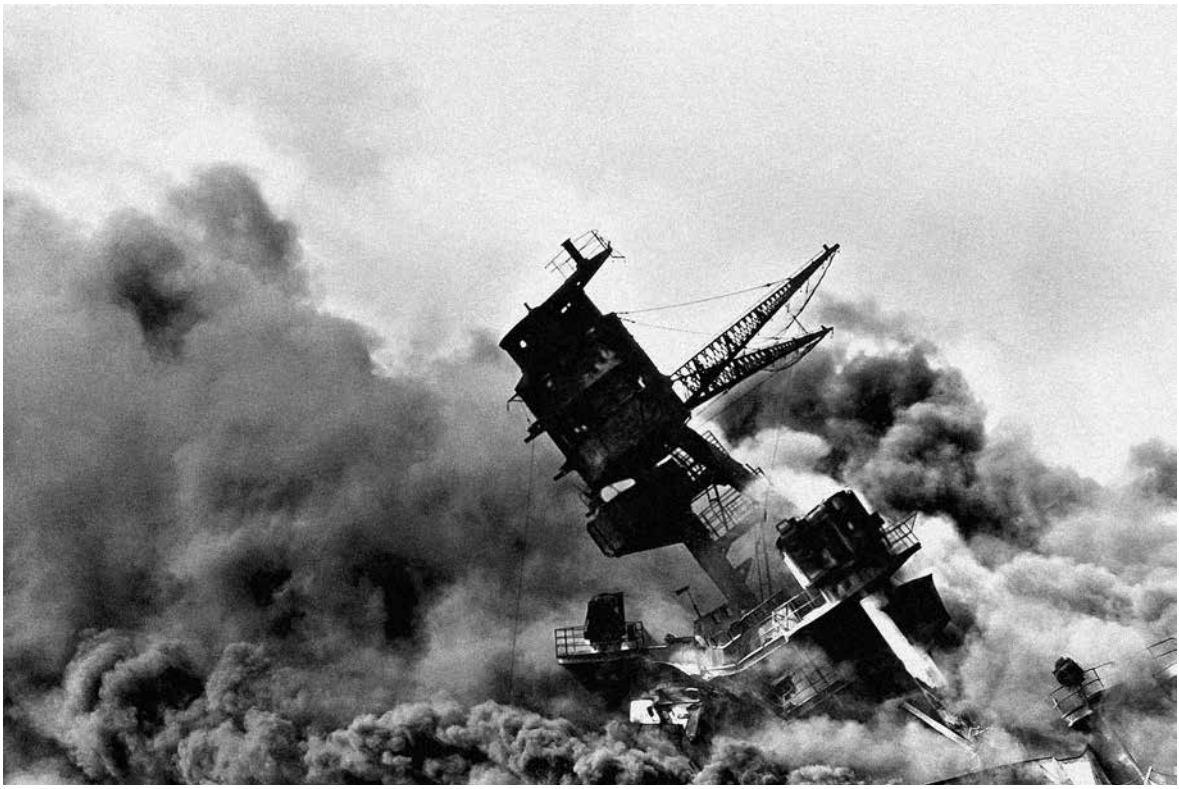
In the meantime, Italian and German troops fought the 8th British Army in North Africa. The core of the Italian and German forces

was the German Africa Corps commanded by Lieutenant General E. Rommel, one of the most outstanding German generals of the Second World War. Launching an offensive in the spring of 1941, he soon seized Libya from the British and besieged the English fortress of Tobruk. In June and December 1941, the British made two attempts to relieve Tobruk (Operation Battleaxe and Operation Crusader) yet failed both times despite their superiority in men and materiel. In January 1942, Rommel's forces went on the offensive, defeating the British at the Battle of Gazala — Bir Hakeim in May–June. Tobruk capitulated on 21 June, leading Hitler to promote Rommel to Field Marshal.

In July, the Germans launched an offensive against Egypt, a British foothold in North Africa. However, the shortage of ammunition, fuel and tanks made them dig in next to El Alamein. During the First Battle of El Alamein in July, Rommel was unable to breach the British defences and went on the defensive after a British counterattack. In August–September, Italian and German troops made another attempt to penetrate into Egypt yet were stopped once again by British forces commanded by General B. L. Montgomery. On 23 October 1942, the British launched a counteroffensive after getting significant reinforcements (Second Battle of El Alamein, 23 October — 5 November 1942). Performing a flanking manoeuvre against the weaker Italian units, they drove the German–Italian armies from Egypt into Tunisia. (Fig. 19)

At the same time, combat began in the Pacific. In the spring of 1941, Japanese forces occupied French Indochina without encountering any resistance. In the morning of 7 December 1941, planes from Japanese aircraft carriers launched a surprise attack against the US naval base of Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, inflicting considerable damage on the US Navy. The same day, US President F. D. Roosevelt officially declared war on Japan. In response, Germany and Italy declared war on the US on 11 December, drawing America into the Second World War. On 8 December 1941, the Japanese Navy conducted amphibious landing operations simultaneously in British Malaya (present-day Malaysia) and in the Philippines. By 1942, the Japanese had completely occupied the Philippines and Malaya as well as taking Singapore. The same year, Japanese troops disembarked in the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia). In March, the Dutch forces capitulated, and a combined US–British–Dutch–Australian squadron was destroyed. In April, the Japanese took Birma (present-day Myanmar), the northern part of New Guinea, and the Bismarck Archipelago, while a Japanese fleet attacked British bases on Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka). In May 1942, a Japanese attempt to land on the southern coast of New Guinea, just a stone's throw from Australia, led to a naval battle between the US and Japanese

Jap-anese planes attack
the US naval base of Pearl Harbor
7 December 1941
Lori



fleets in the Coral Sea. Here the Japanese suffered their first defeat in World War II. In early June 1942, the Japanese Supreme Command began to plan an operation for conquering Midway Atoll in the Pacific Ocean. Thanks to intelligence reports, the Americans were able to prepare for the attack, routing the Japanese at the Battle of Midway on 4–5 June 1942. During the Guadalcanal campaign that took place on sea, on land and in the air between 7 August 1942 and 7 February 1943, the Japanese suffered a strategic defeat that prevented them from launching any more offensive operations. In this way, the US seized the strategic initiative in the Pacific.

Second Period of the Great Patriotic War

Soviet Counteroffensive at Stalingrad

The Soviet Supreme High Command decided to launch an offensive on Stalingrad in the winter of 1942–43 ('Operation Uran'). By November 1942, German troops were experiencing weariness from protracted battles. The front line around Stalingrad was greatly deflected towards the Volga. The Soviets intended to attack the flanks of the 6th German Army besieging the city so as to surround and destroy it. The German flanks were protected by the weaker Romanian, Hungarian, and Italian forces incorporated into Army Group B. The Soviet forces consisted of the Southwestern Front commanded by Lieutenant General N. Vatutin, the Stalingrad Front commanded by Colonel General A. Yeryomenko, and the Don Front led by Lieutenant General K. Rokossovsky. These fronts were coordinated by the representative of the Soviet Supreme High Command A. Vasilevsky.

The Red Army counteroffensive began on 19 November 1942. The Soviets breached the enemy defences and reached the Don, cutting off the German lines of retreat. An outer ring was established on 23 November. At the same time, the troops of the Don Front drew an inner ring around the German forces in Stalingrad. Hitler prohibited Paulus from breaking out of the encirclement, ordering him to dig in and wait for relief. To this end, the German High Command established Army Group Don led by Field Marshal E. von Manstein, which launched an offensive near Kotelnikovo on 12 December in an effort to breach the ring ('Operation Winter Storm'). On 16 December, the Southwestern and Stalingrad Fronts launched a counterstrike against E. von Manstein's troops, pushing them 250 km back from Stalingrad by 19 December. The continuing Red Army offensive ('Operation Little Saturn') precluded any further German attempts of relieving the 6th Army. The German High Command ordered Paulus's army to remain in Stalingrad to pin down the opponent. However, an attempt at supplying the 6th Army from the air fell through, and hunger broke out. The Soviet Supreme High Command decided to use the Soviet Don Front to destroy the encircled German forces. Operation Koltso began on 9 January. By 26 January, the Red Army had split the opponent's

forces in two (northern and southern parts). Field Marshal F. Paulus surrendered to Soviet troops on 31 January, followed by the capitulation of the last German forces on 2 February. The Red Army captured 113,000 Germans and Romanians, including 24 German generals. (Fig. 20)

The Battle of Stalingrad resulted in the destruction of a German army numbering almost 800,000 men. This convinced Germany's allies Turkey and Japan to abandon their plans of entering the war against the USSR. The strategic initiative passed to the Red Army.

The Battle of Stalingrad had an immense impact on the outcome of World War II. After the victories at El Alamein and Stalingrad, the anti-Hitler coalition firmly seized the strategic initiative. However, these battles were fought at a very different scale.

Losses of the Axis Powers at Stalingrad and El Alamein

Axis Power Losses	Battle of Stalingrad (19 November 1942 — 2 February 1943)	Second Battle of El Alamein (23 October — 5 November 1942)
Killed and wounded	About 800 000 (including prisoners)	About 28 000
Tanks and assault guns	About 2 000	232
Guns and mortars	About 10 000	254
Planes	About 3 000	84

Red Army Offensives in the Winter and Spring of 1943. Piercing the Leningrad Blockade

The victory of the Red Army at Stalingrad also marked a turning point in the Battle of the Caucasus. The German Army Group A commanded by Field Marshal E. von Kleist was strategically encircled, leading the German High Command to order a retreat from the Caucasus in the hope of stalling Soviet troops on the Don. During the North Caucasian Offensive Operation ('Operation Don', 1 January — 4 February 1943), the Soviet North Caucasian and Southern Fronts drove the enemy out of the North Caucasus and liberated Rostov-on-Don on 14 February. The Germans managed to retain a foothold

Captured German soldiers in Stalingrad

Photo: M. Alpert

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only in the Taman Peninsula and to the east of Taganrog on the river Mius (the so-called 'Mius front').

In January–February 1943, Soviet forces went on the offensive along the entire Soviet-German front. The Southwestern, Voronezh and Bryansk Fronts routed Hungarian and Italian armies, liberating, among others, Voronezh on 25 January and Kursk on 8 February. The enemy's southern flank largely collapsed.

On 19 February — 19 March, an intense battle was fought for Kharkov. The Red Army took the city on 15 February, yet the enemy launched a counteroffensive on 4 March after receiving reinforcements. Threatened with encirclement, Soviet troops abandoned Kharkov on 16 March and Belgorod on 19 March. Fighting in the southern part of the Soviet-German front subsided in the summer.

One of the most important Red Army offensives in the winter of 1943 was Operation Iskra, conducted by the Leningrad and Volkhov Fronts on 12–30 January to break the Leningrad Blockade. Breaching the defences of the German Army Group North, the two Soviet Fronts reunited on 18 January next to Worker's Villages 3 and 5. A corridor 8–11 km wide arose along Lake Ladoga, putting an end to the Leningrad Blockade. A makeshift railway (known as the 'Road of Victory') was hastily constructed, with the first train arriving in Leningrad on 6 February.

Battle of Kursk

The main event of 1943 was the Battle of Kursk, which consisted of two periods: defensive (5–23 July 1943) and offensive (23 July — 23 August 1943).

The Soviet offensive in the spring had made the front line around Kursk protrude deeply into enemy territory (the so-called 'Kursk salient'). In April 1943, the German High Command worked out Operation Citadel, which aimed to attack the northern and southern flanks of the Kursk salient to surround and destroy the Red Army before launching a general offensive. Army Group South of Field Marshal E. von Manstein was to attack from the south, and Army Group Centre of Field Marshal G. von Kluge from the north. In all, over 50 German divisions were concentrated next to the Kursk salient. A key role in the offensive was played by German panzer divisions, in which the new Tiger heavy tank, Panther medium tank, and Ferdinand tank destroyer were deployed in large numbers. They were supported from the air by new types of combat planes: the Focke-Wulf Fw 190 fighter and the Henschel Hs 129 ground-attack aircraft. The German High Command delayed the start of the

operation several times to build up its panzer divisions. The Red Army command learned about the enemy's plans from its intelligence services and reports by partisans. It decided to create a powerful triple defensive line to deplete and exhaust the opponent before sending in the reserves to launch a strategic offensive. Soviet forces at the Battle of Kursk included the Central Front commanded by General of the Army K. Rokossovsky and the Voronezh Front commanded by General of the Army N. Vatutin. In their rear, the reserve forces of the Soviet Supreme High Command were turned into the Steppe Front commanded by Colonel General I. Konev. The representatives of the Soviet Supreme High Command were Marshals of the Soviet Union A. Vasilevsky and G. Zhukov.

The German offensive began on 5 July 1943. The Red Army put up a determined resistance. On the northern flank of the Kursk salient, the Soviet defences held firm. However, on the southern flank, the major tank forces concentrated by the enemy managed to breach the first Soviet line of defence and considerably penetrate into the second near the village of Prokhorovka, depleting the Soviet defences. The Red Army command launched a counterattack by the reserve forces — the 5th Guards Tank Army commanded by Lieutenant General P. Rotmistrov and the 5th Guards Army led by Lieutenant General A. Zhadov.

On 12 July, one of the biggest tank battles in history took place around the village of Prokhorovka. A total of 1,180 (767 Soviet and 413 German) tanks took part. (Fig. 21)

The massive resistance of the Voronezh Front made the enemy call off the offensive. From that moment on, the Wehrmacht stayed on the defensive in the battle. The same day, the Soviets launched a counteroffensive on the northern flank of the Kursk salient, followed by offensives of the Central Front on 15 July and of the Voronezh and Steppe Fronts on 18 July. On 16 July, the German High Command ordered a retreat to prevent its troops from being surrounded.

The Soviet pilot Captain A. Maresyev made a name for himself during the Battle of Kursk by continuing to fly after sustaining a heavy injury that resulted in the amputation of both his legs.

On 23 July, the Red Army launched a general strategic offensive in the vicinity of Kursk. In the Orel Offensive Operation from 12 July to 18 August ('Operation Kutuzov'), the Western Front of Colonel General M. Popov and the Central Front of K. Rokossovsky defeated the German Army Group Centre, liberating Orel on 5 August.

During the Belgorod-Kharkov Offensive Operation ('Operation Rumyantsev') on 2–23 August, the Voronezh and Steppe Fronts as well as the Southwestern Front commanded by R. Malinovsky liberated Belgorod on 5 August, Kharkov on 23 August, and Taganrog

Episode of the Battle of Kursk
Photo: I. Shagig
RIA Novosti

on 30 August. On 5 August 1943, the first gun salute took place in Moscow to celebrate the liberation of Orel and Belgorod.

Balance of Forces at the Start of the Battle of Kursk

Personnel and equipment	USSR	Germany and its allies
Personnel	About 1 300 000	Over 900 000
Guns and mortars	19 100	About 10 000
Tanks and self-propelled guns	3 444 + 1 500 in reserve	2 758 (including assault guns)
Planes	2 172	About 2 050

(Source: encyclopedia.mil.ru)

After the Battle of Kursk, the strategic initiative on the Soviet-German front wholly passed to the Red Army. From that moment on, the Wehrmacht was always on the defensive. Operation Citadel was the last German strategic offensive operation on the Eastern front. (Fig. 22)

After gaining victory in the Battle of Kursk, the Red Army continued its offensive. Between 7 August and 2 October, the Western, Bryansk and Kalinin Fronts conducted the Smolensk Offensive Operation ('Operation Suvorov'). The Soviet forces liberated Bryansk on 17 September and Smolensk on 25 September before crossing into Byelorussia in October.

The Red Army also remained on the offensive in the North Caucasus. The Krasnodar–Novorossiysk Offensive Operation by the North Caucasian Front (9 February — 24 May 1943) drove the Wehrmacht out of the Kuban region. The Red Army succeeded in liberating Krasnodar on 12 February 1943, with the German forces retreating to the Taman Peninsula. A battle for air supremacy took place in the sky over Kuban.

During the Novorossiysk–Taman Offensive Operation (10 September — 9 October 1943), the North Caucasian Front commanded by General of the Army I. Petrov liberated Novorossiysk on 16 September 1943. On 9 October 1943, Soviet troops reached the Kerch Strait after completely liberating the North Caucasus. The Kerch–Eltigen Amphibious Operation (31 October — 11 December) created an important bridgehead in the Crimea.

Another key operation at this time was the Battle for the Dnieper (the liberation of Left-bank Ukraine), which has been divided into three phases: the Chernigov–Poltava Operation

Red Army soldiers with the inhabitants of a liberated village near Kursk

1943

RIA Novosti

(16 August — 30 September 1943), the Lower Dnieper Operation (26 September — 20 December 1943), and the Kiev Operation (3–13 November 1943). The Soviet forces consisted of the Central, Voronezh, Steppe, Southwestern and Southern Fronts (renamed the Byelorussian, 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Ukrainian Fronts, respectively, in September 1943). The representative of the Soviet Supreme High Command was Marshal of the Soviet Union G. Zhukov. The German forces included Army Group South of E. von Manstein and Army Group A of E. von Kleist.

On 26 August, the Red Army went on the offensive in Left-bank Ukraine. On 21–22 September, Soviet troops reached the Dnieper after breaking the enemy's fierce resistance. Chernigov was liberated on 21 September and Poltava on 23 September. Between 22 and 30 September, Soviet troops breached the powerful German line of defence (Panther–Wotan Line) by making forced crossings of the Dnieper at different points and creating lodgments on its right bank. After consolidating and expanding these lodgments, the Red Army command launched an offensive on Kiev. On 15 November, the Germans made a counterattack near Zhitomir yet were stopped by Red Army counter-strikes. The Soviet offensive continued until 31 December 1943. (Fig. 23)

During the Battle of the Dnieper, the Southwestern and Southern Fronts also conducted the Donbass Offensive Operation from 13 August to 22 September 1943, liberating this important industrial region from the enemy.

The Soviet victory in the Battle of the Dnieper marked the end of the second period of the Great Patriotic War. After this turnaround, the strategic initiative completely passed to the Red Army.

Military Operations in the Other Theatres of World War II (1942–1943)

In the autumn of 1942, the war also reached a turning point in North Africa. On 8 November 1942, US–British troops commanded by US General D. D. Eisenhower disembarked in Algeria and Morocco ('Operation Torch'), pinching the German-Italian troops in Tunisia. The Axis Powers put up a fight after receiving reinforcements. In February 1943, E. Rommel defeated US forces at Kasserine Pass before being stopped by British troops at Medenine and retreating to Tunisia. In May 1943, the German–Italian troops blocked in Tunisia capitulated. Shortly before, Rommel was recalled to Germany.

Amphibious landing on the Dnieper near the village of Malinovka

22 September 1943

Photo: O. Lander

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On 10 July 1943, US–British troops, supported by ships and planes, landed in Sicily ('Operation Husky'), bringing the war to Italian territory. On 25 July, B. Mussolini was deposed and arrested, and the cabinet of Marshal P. Badoglio came to power. By August, the Allies had broken the resistance of Italian and German troops and established full control over the island.

The Sicilian operation of US–British forces coincided in time with the Battle of Kursk.

Axis Forces Deployed in the Battle of Kursk and the Battle of Sicily

Personnel and equipment	Battle of Sicily	Battle of Kursk
Personnel	350 000	Over 900 000
Tanks and self-propelled guns	260	2 758
Planes	1 400	About 2 050

On 9 September, US–British troops landed near Salerno and in Calabria in the south of Italy ('Operation Avalanche'). The same day, the government of Marshal P. Badoglio capitulated to the Allies. In response, German troops invaded Italy, occupying a significant part of the country ('Operation Alaric').

A turning point had also been reached in the Pacific: the Japanese Navy and Air Force had been contained, and the strategic initiative had passed to the Allies. Allied forces launched a general counter-offensive, using the American tactic of 'island hopping' to conquer territories between New Guinea and the Philippines. After heavy fighting, US troops took the strategically important isles of Markin and Tarawa in the Marshall Islands in November 1943.

Third (Offensive) Period of the Great Patriotic War (1944–1945)

In 1944, the Soviet Supreme High Command launched several successive offensive operations along the entire Soviet-German front to push the Wehrmacht back to the Soviet border. These operations have been unofficially called 'Stalin's ten blows' in Soviet and Russian historiography.

The Soviet forces engaged in liberating the USSR and Eastern Europe included the different Baltic, Byelorussian and Ukrainian Fronts. This has engendered the erroneous view among some Western authors that, during the last period of the war, the Red Army was composed predominantly of ethnic Byelorussians, Ukrainians and Balts. In actual fact, the Soviet Fronts were territorial tactical and operational units that were named after the sections of the front where they were being deployed. For example, the 1st Byelorussian Front was previously called the Central Front, the 2nd Ukrainian Front — the Steppe Front, and the 1st Baltic Front — the Kalinin Front.

Balance of Forces on the Soviet-German Front as of 1 January 1944

Personnel and equipment	USSR	Germany and its allies
Personnel (million)	6.2	4.8
Guns and mortars (thousand)	83.5	49.1
Tanks and self-propelled guns (thousand)	5.4	3.7
Planes (thousand)	8.5	3

The first operation of the 1944 campaign was the Leningrad–Novgorod Offensive (14 January — 1 March 1944) involving the Leningrad Front of Marshal of the Soviet Union L. Govorov, the Volkhov Front of Marshal of the Soviet Union K. Meretskov, and the 2nd Baltic Front of General of the Army M. Popov. The main thrust was made by troops of Leningrad Front from the Oranienbaum Bridgehead and Pulkovo, who approached each other in the direction of Ropsha and Krasnoye Selo. The Volkhov Front attacked from Sinyavino towards Mga, while the 2nd Baltic Front targeted Staraya Russa. The German Army Group North was

partially surrounded and driven back 200–250 km to the west and south of the city. On 27 January 1944, the 900-day Leningrad Blockade was fully lifted, which was marked by a gun salute in the city. In the course of the offensive, the Red Army liberated Novgorod (20 January), Chudovo (29 January), and Luga (12 February), unblocking the Moscow–Leningrad Railway. On 15 February, the Red Army entered Estonia.

In July 1944, the Leningrad and 3rd Baltic Fronts launched difficult offensives near Pskov (Pskov–Ostrov Operation, 11–31 July 1944) and Narva (Narva Operation, 24–30 July 1944) along the so-called 'Panther–Wotan Line'. The command of Army Group North threw Waffen-SS foreign units (manned by volunteers from Norway, Denmark, Holland and Belgium) and some Latvian and Estonian SS legions into the fighting, yet they failed to stop the Soviet offensive, which led to the liberation of Pskov on 23 July and Narva on 26 July.

In late December 1943, the 1st Ukrainian Front (commanded by N. Vatutin and, from 2 March 1944, by G. Zhukov), 2nd Ukrainian Front (commanded by I. Konev), 3rd Ukrainian Front (commanded by R. Malinovsky) and 4th Ukrainian Front (commanded by F. Tolbukhin) launched an offensive to liberate Right-bank Ukraine. The Zhitomir–Berdichev Offensive Operation (24 December 1943–14 January 1944) pushed German troops away from the Dnieper. A dangerous pocket arose for the Germans near the town of Cherkassy. During the Korsun–Shevchenkovsky Operation (24 January — 17 February 1944), Soviet troops encircled and destroyed a sizeable Wehrmacht contingent in this pocket. Only a small number of German soldiers managed to escape.

On 29 February, General N. Vatutin, commander of the 1st Ukrainian Front, was heavily wounded in a shootout with Banderites of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, who ambushed his car. He died on 15 April 1944 in the city of Kiev, occupied by his troops.

This and subsequent operations resulted in the liberation of Right-bank Ukraine (the cities of Zhitomir on 31 December, Krivoy Rog on 22 February, Nikolaev on 28 March and Odessa on 10 April). On 28 March, Soviet troops entered Romania. (Fig. 24)

The next Soviet offensive operation took place in the Crimea (8 April — 12 May 1944). The 4th Ukrainian Front and the Separate Coastal Army penetrated into the peninsula with support from the Black Sea Fleet and defeated the German and Romanian troops of the 17th Army with a two-pronged attack. On 9 May 1944, Sevastopol was liberated.

The Vyborg-Petrozavodsk Operation (10 June — 9 August 1944) was the concluding phase of the Battle of Leningrad. The Leningrad and Karelian Fronts with the support of the Baltic Fleet took

Liberated Odessa
25 April 1943
Photo: G. Zelma
RIA Novosti

Vyborg on 20 June and Petrozavodsk on 28 June. This removed the threat to Leningrad from the north and inflicted a crushing defeat on the Finnish Army, leading to the replacement of Finnish President R. Ryti by C. G. Mannerheim. Mannerheim immediately signed a ceasefire and began negotiations with the USSR. Finland stopped fighting on 19 September 1944 and declared war on Germany on 4 March 1945. Finland's withdrawal from the war against the USSR led to skirmishes between Finnish and German troops in Lapland.

One of the key Soviet offensives of the summer of 1944 took place in Byelorussia ('Operation Bagration') from 23 June to 29 August 1944. In the course of the operation, the 1st Byelorussian Front of Marshal of the Soviet Union K. Rokossovsky, the 2nd Byelorussian Front of General of the Army G. Zakharov, the 3rd Byelorussian Front of General of the Army I. Chernyakhovsky, and the 1st Baltic Front of General of the Army I. Bagramyan drove the German Army Group Centre out of Byelorussia.

Operation Bagration is justly viewed as one of the most brilliant Soviet offensives of the Great Patriotic War. Soviet troops made forced crossings of numerous rivers and marshes and engaged in tank warfare in forested areas to splinter and surround enemy forces. During the operation, the Germans were encircled in Bobruysk, Vitebsk, Mogilev and Minsk. Hitler's refusal to allow the Wehrmacht to retreat led to the biggest German military disaster on the Soviet–German front. By different estimates, between 17 and 30 German divisions were destroyed with a total of 350,000 men lost (including 150,000 taken prisoner).

The operation led to the liberation of all Byelorussia and parts of Lithuania: Minsk was taken on 3 July, Vilnius on 13 July, and Brest on 28 July. In late July, the Red Army entered Poland, occupying the city of Lublin on 24 July and creating a government of the Polish Committee of National Liberation, which had been established by Polish Communists in the USSR. By early August, Red Army units had approached West Prussia and Warsaw, seizing important bridgeheads on the Vistula on the way. (Fig. 25)

On 17 July 1944, a total of 57,600 German soldiers and officers (including 19 generals) that had been taken prisoner in Byelorussia were paraded under guard through the streets of Moscow. This parade vividly showcased the achievements of the Red Army and helped to raise the fighting spirit of Soviet citizens. On 16 August 1944, an analogous parade with 36,918 Germans took place in Kiev.

The Polish government-in-exile in London did not recognize the Lublin government, issuing a protest against the Soviet 'occupation' of Poland on 24 June 1944. Units of the partisan Polish Home Army engaged in terrorist attacks against the Red Army and the

Liberated Minsk
3 July 1944
Photo: V. Ivanov
RIA Novosti

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representatives of the new Polish government. To prevent Warsaw from being liberated by the Red Army, Home Army commanders led by General T. Bór-Komorowski organized an uprising against the city's German occupants without the Allies' approval ('Operation Tempest'). The Home Army was poorly armed, and the uprising was insufficiently planned. The surge towards Warsaw of the 2nd Soviet Tank Army, exhausted from combat in Byelorussia, was delayed by the enemy's counterattack at Radzymin on 26 July — 5 August. Soviet planes supplied the Home Army with food and ammunition. To quell the uprising, the Wehrmacht called in additional police and SS units, including B. Kaminski's Waffen-Sturm-Brigade RONA, a collaborationist formation composed of Russian nationals, and SS-Sturmbrigade Dirlewanger, made up of convicted criminals known for their cruelty. These forces allowed Germany to get the upper hand in the city, and T. Bór-Komorowski capitulated on 2 October. Warsaw was almost completely destroyed and rebuilt after the war with the assistance of the USSR.

On 13 July — 29 August, the 1st Ukrainian Front implemented the Lvov–Sandomierz Offensive Operation, destroying the German Army Group North Ukraine and liberating Western Ukraine, including the city of Lvov (27 July). The Red Army entered the southeastern provinces of Poland and seized a major bridgehead on the river Vistula near Sandomierz. This offensive was followed by the Jassy–Kishinev Operation (20–29 August 1944) involving the 2nd Ukrainian Front commanded by Marshal of the Soviet Union R. Malinovsky and the 3rd Ukrainian Front led by Marshal of the Soviet Union F. Tolbukhin. During the operation, the German Army Group South Ukraine was encircled in the vicinity of Jassy and Kishinev. The Red Army liberated Moldavia and its capital of Kishinev (24 August) before entering Romania and occupying its capital of Bucharest (31 August). As the Soviet forces were approaching, an uprising took place in Bucharest on 23 August, leading to the overthrow of the government of Marshal I. Antonescu, the withdrawal of Romania from the Axis alliance, and its declaration of war on Germany on 25 August 1944.

On 1–9 September 1944, the 3rd Ukrainian Front entered Bulgaria, which had been a member of the Anti-Comintern Pact. The Bulgarian government ordered its troops to offer no resistance to the Red Army. In the night of 8–9 September 1944, a coup d'état took place in Sofia, bringing a government of the Fatherland Front to power. On 28 September, Bulgaria joined the Allies and declared war on Germany. The Bulgarian people enthusiastically welcomed the Soviet troops, who liberated the capital city of Sofia on 16 September. (Fig. 26)

On 29 August 1944, an anti-German uprising broke out in Slovakia. To help the insurrectionists, the East Carpathian

Inhabitants of the Bulgarian city of Lovech greet Soviet liberators
Photo: Y. Khaldey
RIA Novosti

Offensive Operation (8 September — 28 October 1944) was implemented by the 1st and 4th Ukrainian Fronts. Red Army troops liberated Transcarpathia and entered Slovakia. However, poor weather conditions prevented them from crossing the Carpathian Mountains, allowing Germany to brutally suppress the Slovak Uprising by 28 October with the help of the 14th (Ukrainian) SS-Volunteer Division 'Galicia' and the SS-Sturmbrigade Dirlewanger.

The Baltic Offensive Operation was implemented from 14 September to 24 November 1944 by the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Baltic Fronts and the Leningrad Front. The Red Army defeated the German Army Group North and liberated Estonia, Latvia and the greater part of Lithuania, taking Tallinn on 22 September and Riga on 15 October. The remains of German and collaborationist forces were blocked in Courland, where they continued to resist until 9–12 May 1945.

During the Belgrade Offensive Operation (28 September — 20 October 1944), the 3rd Soviet Ukrainian Front and the Bulgarian Army defeated the German Army Group F, occupying the northeastern part of Yugoslavia and entering Hungary. On 20 October, they liberated Belgrade together with the Yugoslav partisans of the National Liberation Army led by J. Broz Tito.

The last Soviet offensive of the 1944 military campaign was the Petsamo–Kirkenes Operation (7–29 October 1944), in which the Karelian Front with the support of the Northern Fleet drove the Germans out of Northern Finland and liberated Northern Norway. Soviet marines helped to take the port cities of Petsamo on 15 October and Kirkenes on 24 October.

The 1944 offensive operations of the Red Army led to the liberation of almost all Soviet territory and the entry of Soviet troops into German-occupied Eastern European countries. The 1944 victories of the Red Army made the former Axis powers Finland, Romania and Bulgaria switch sides and declare war on Germany. Parts of Poland, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Norway were liberated.

During the 1945 military campaign, the Soviet Supreme High Command planned to complete the defeat of Nazi Germany and liberate all of occupied Eastern Europe.

In the autumn of 1944, the Hungarian government led by Admiral M. Horthy began secret negotiations with the Allies on withdrawing from the war. However, in the night of 15–16 October 1944, the German secret services organized a coup d'état in Budapest ('Operation Panzerfaust'). Horthy was arrested, and a government led by F. Szálasi, head of the pro-Fascist Arrow Cross Party, came to power, promising to fight for Germany to the bitter end.

The Budapest Offensive Operation (29 October 1944–13 February 1945) aimed to defeat the German Army Group South in Hungary.

The 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts and the Bulgarian and Yugoslavian Armies surrounded and destroyed a large enemy group and liberated the central part of Hungary, including the capital of Budapest (13 February 1945). Attempts by the German High Command to relieve the city were unsuccessful. (Fig. 28)

In January 1945, the Red Army launched an operation for liberating all of Poland. The Vistula-Oder Offensive (12 January — 3 February 1945) was conducted by the 1st Byelorussian Front of G. Zhukov and the 1st Ukrainian Front of I. Konev with the assistance of the Polish People's Army. This was one of the largest operations of the entire war. The Red Army breached the defences of Army Group A on the Vistula by attacking from its bridgeheads at Pulawy and Sandomierz. On 17 January 1945, Warsaw was liberated. The 1st Polish People's Army entered the city, followed by the Red Army. German troops were surrounded in Poznan between 24 January and 23 February 1945. Soviet forces liberated Western Poland, made a forced crossing of the Oder, and occupied several bridgeheads in Germany itself, notably an area near the town of Küstrin.

Simultaneously, the Red Army implemented the Western Carpathian Offensive (12 January — 18 February 1945). The 2nd and 4th Ukrainian Fronts and the Czechoslovak Army Corps led by General L. Svoboda defeated the forces of Army Group Centre, traversed the Carpathian Mountains, and liberated Slovakia and Southern Poland. The Slovakian capital of Bratislava was taken on 4 April 1945 during the Bratislava-Brno Offensive (25 March — 5 May 1945) by the 2nd Ukrainian Front and the Romanian Army. The pro-Fascist government of J. Tiso fled the city.

The East Prussian Offensive was conducted the same winter (13 January — 25 April 1945). During this operation, the 2nd Byelorussian Front led by K. Rokossovsky and the 3rd Byelorussian Front led by I. Chernyakhovsky breached the powerful defences of the German Army Group North and reached the Baltic Sea. The Red Army surrounded and destroyed major enemy forces on the Vistula Spit and occupied East Prussia. On 18 February 1945, the 37-year-old commander of the 3rd Byelorussian Front I. Chernyakhovsky was fatally wounded during a German artillery attack on the front's headquarters near the town of Mehlsack (present-day Pieniezno, Poland). On 20 February, A. Vasilevsky was appointed the Front's commander. The city of Königsberg was taken in three days, from 6 to 9 April 1945, despite its powerful fortifications and large garrison. German troops were blocked on the Samland Peninsula.

During the East Pomerian Offensive (10 February — 4 April 1945), the 2nd Byelorussian Front commanded by K. Rokossovsky destroyed the German Army Group Vistula commanded by SS Reichsführer H. Himmler. Northern Poland was liberated, neutralizing the threat

Red Army units in Budapest
13 February 1945
Photo: G. Zelma
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of a German attack from the north on Soviet forces advancing towards Berlin. Intense street combat took place in the city-fortress of Danzig on 25–31 March 1945. All of this prepared the ground for an offensive against Berlin from the north.

During the Balaton Operation (6–15 March 1945), the Soviet 3rd Ukrainian Front stopped an offensive by SS panzer units near Lake Balaton in Hungary, inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy.

This was followed by the Vienna Offensive (16 March — 15 April 1945) conducted by the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts. The Soviet forces destroyed the German Army Group South on Austrian territory and occupied Vienna on 13 April.

Still, the main operation of 1945 was the Berlin Offensive (16 April — 8 May 1945) that aimed to surround the German forces stationed around Berlin and take the city. The Red Army was opposed by the German Army Groups Vistula and Centre. The 1st and 2nd Byelorussian Fronts and the 1st Ukrainian Front went on the offensive on 16 April 1945. Soviet forces breached the German defences on the rivers Oder and Neisse and the main Berlin defensive line on the Seelow Heights on 16–19 April. On 24 April, large German forces were surrounded at Halbe to the south of Berlin. By 25 April, Berlin had been totally encircled. The 12th Army commanded by General of the Armoured Corps W. Wenck made an unsuccessful attempt to relieve the city from the north. On 25 April, Soviet and American troops met in Torgau on the Elbe ('Elbe Day'). (Fig. 28)

Combat in the outskirts of Berlin began on 24 April. The Red Army approached the centre of the city from different directions. The main obstacles on their way were factories, train stations, and city rivers and canals that were stubbornly defended by the German garrison. The city's key district with the Government Quarter and the Reich Chancellery were defended by SS units: the 11th SS Volunteer Division Nordland made up of Scandinavian volunteers and the 33rd SS (French) Division Charlemagne. On 30 April, the Red Army took the Reichstag, with Sergeant M. Yegorov and Junior Sergeant M. Kantaria from the 150th Idritsa–Berlin Order of Kutuzov 2nd Class Motor Rifle Division hoisting the Victory Banner from the building. In the night of 30 April — 1 May, Hitler committed suicide, transferring his powers as head of state to Commander-in-Chief of the Navy Grand Admiral K. Dönitz and head of government (chancellor) to Minister of Propaganda J. Goebbels. On 1 May, Chief of Staff of the German High Command H. Krebs informed the Red Army command of Berlin's willingness to capitulate. J. Goebbels and H. Krebs committed suicide soon afterward. On 2 May, the Berlin garrison led by General of the Artillery H. Weidling capitulated. (Fig. 29)

The last military operation of the Great Patriotic War was the Prague Offensive (6–11 May 1945). The 1st, 2nd and 4th Ukrainian

Soviet tanks in the streets of Berlin

Photo: V. Grebnev

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Elbe Day. Torgau. Soviet nurse Lyubov Kazichenko gives flowers to US soldier Carl Robinson

25 April 1945

Photo: A. Ustinov

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Fronts came to the assistance of the Prague Uprising, which had begun on 5 May. The Red Army drove the German Army Group Centre out of Prague on 9 May 1945. Czechoslovakia was completely liberated from the aggressor.

At 2:41 a. m. on 7 May 1945, the representative of the German High Command Colonel General A. Jodl and Commander-in-Chief of the Navy General Admiral H. G. von Friedeburg signed the German Instrument of Surrender for K. Dönitz's government. The document was countersigned by US Major General W. Bedell Smith for the US–British command, Major General I. Susloparov for the Soviet command, and General F. Sevez for France. The US and British governments announced Germany's capitulation during the day of 8 May. As the instrument of surrender, which took effect in the morning of 8 May 1945, was signed in Reims in the name of the Supreme Allied Command rather than the entire Anti-Hitler Coalition, it was considered a preliminary documentary by prior agreement with the Soviet side.

At 12:16 a. m. on 9 May 1945, representatives of the German High Command Field Marshal W. Keitel (Army), Lieutenant General H. J. Stumpff (Air Force) and General Admiral H. G. von Friedeburg (Navy) signed a second German Instrument of Surrender before the commanders of all the Allied Powers. It was countersigned by Marshal of the Soviet Union G. Zhukov for the USSR, Marshal of the Royal Air Force A. Tedder for Great Britain, Major General C. Spaatz for the US, and J. de Lattre de Tassigny for France. At 2:10 a. m. on 9 May, an official radio announcement informed Soviet citizens of Germany's unconditional capitulation.

This marked the end of the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945 and of all military action in Europe.

The Allied Powers did not recognize K. Dönitz's government to be the lawful government of Germany, and on 23 May 1945 its members were arrested in the town of Flensburg in Northern Germany. (Fig. 30)

On 24 June 1945, a victory parade celebrating the end of the Great Patriotic War and the victory over Germany took place on Red Square in Moscow. Its participants were selected from all the Red Army Fronts that had achieved the final victory, the Navy, the Moscow garrison, and military cadets. The victory parade also included a representative battalion of the 1st Polish People's Army and the Commander of the 1st Bulgarian Army V. Stoychev. At the end of the parade, trophy standards of Germany and its allies were thrown down before the Lenin Mausoleum. The parade was led by Marshal of the Soviet Union K. Rokossovsky and inspected by Marshal of the Soviet Union G. Zhukov. The same day, Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet Armed Forces J. Stalin was awarded the highest military rank of Generalissimus of the Soviet Union.

G. Zhukov at the ceremony for signing the German Instrument of Surrender

Photo: L. Korobov

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Military Operations in the Other Theatres of World War II (1944–1945)

In the autumn of 1943, the situation temporarily stabilized in Italy. The German Army Group C that occupied the greater part of the country dug in behind the Winter Line, a powerful series of fortifications in the south of Italy. In the north of the country, the puppet Italian Social Republic was established in the town of Salo on 23 September 1943 under the leadership of B. Mussolini, who had been liberated by German secret agents. The Italian government of Marshal P. Badoglio declared war on Germany on 13 October 1943. To turn the tide of the war in Italy, the Allied command led by British Field Marshal H. Alexander decided to disembark in the enemy's rear in the central part of the country. On 22 January 1944, the Allies made an amphibious landing near the town of Anzio ('Operation Shingle'). The Allied forces and, in particular, the Polish II Corps commanded by General W. Anders engaged in heavy fighting around the Monastery of Monte Cassino. In May, the 2nd French Army led by General A. Juin managed to circumvent the German forces from the flank and strike at the Winter Line from the rear. The Wehrmacht was forced to retreat behind the Gothic Line in northern Italy. On 4 June, US forces entered Rome. Subsequently, the German forces dug in behind the Gothic Line on the river Po and then behind the Genghis Khan Line in the Alps. Only in May 1945 did the Germans retreat into the Alps and leave Italy. Devoid of support, the Republic of Salo collapsed, while Mussolini was captured and executed by Italian partisans near Milan on 28 April 1945. The remaining Wehrmacht divisions in Italy capitulated on 8 May 1945.

Following the Tehran Conference of the Big Three in November 1943, the Allied Supreme Command began to make plans for opening a second front in Europe. Enormous numbers of troops, military equipment, warships and combat planes were gathered for the offensive. The Supreme Allied Commander in Europe was D. D. Eisenhower (who also commanded the US forces), the British forces were led by Field Marshal B. L. Montgomery, and the Free French forces by General P. Leclerc. The Allied landing in Normandy ('Operation Overlord') took place on 6 June 1944 ('D-Day'). In all, 1.5 million US, Canadian, British and French soldiers and officers participated in the operation. They were opposed by about 400,000 Wehrmacht soldiers from Army Group B led by E. Rommel in Northern France and from Army Group G led by Colonel General J. Blaskowitz in the south of the country. The German Supreme Commander in Western Europe was Field Marshal G. von Rundstedt.

While the Allies suffered considerable losses storming the German coastal defences ('Atlantic Wall'), they managed to create beachheads with the support of warships and then move inland. By 21 July, the Allied forces had breached the German defences and broke out into the open near the city of Caen. This led to the replacement of Wehrmacht commanders: after G. von Rundstedt's dismissal and Rommel's injury by a plane rafale, G. von Kluge was appointed Supreme Commander West and commander of Army Group B, while Army Group G was headed by Colonel General H. Balck. (Fig. 31)

On 20 July 1944, an attempt to assassinate Hitler in his East Prussian headquarters at Rastenburg was made by Colonel C. von Stauffenberg, followed by an unsuccessful coup d'état in Berlin by a group of generals and officers. Hitler survived and directed the fury of the SS and Gestapo at the opposition. Meanwhile, the Wehrmacht tried to launch a counterattack against the Allies near the town of Avranches in Normandy. This resulted in the encirclement and destruction of Army Group B at Falaise on 15 August. The remnants of the army retreated with difficulty towards the Rhine, abandoning all their military equipment. On 25 August, the Allied forces entered Paris. Ten days earlier, the Allies had also disembarked near Marseille in the south of France ('Operation Dragoon'). The German Army Group G was forced to retreat east to Alsace. This allowed the Americans to enter Bavaria in February 1945.

In December 1944, the German High Command made an attempt to turn the tide on the Western front by launching a powerful armoured attack against Belgium and taking the city of Antwerp, through which supplies were being sent to the Allied troops. The counteroffensive in the Ardennes ('Battle of the Bulge') lasted from 16 December 1944 to 29 January 1945. Army Group B led by W. Model managed to penetrate fairly deep into Allied positions, yet the narrow mountain roads and the powerful Allied aviation made the Germans stop at Bastogne and then retreat to their initial positions. During the Rhine-Maas Offensive (8 February — 24 March 1945), the Allied armies made a forced crossing of the Rhine at Remagen, breached the Siegfried Line on the German border, and entered Germany. During the Battle of the Ruhr (23 March — 18 April), Army Group B was surrounded and destroyed, and its commander W. Model committed suicide. The road to Berlin was now open for the Allies.

In the first half of 1944, Allied forces in the Pacific gradually approached the Philippines by seizing islands in the Central Pacific Ocean. In June 1944, they landed on the Mariana Islands to the east of the Philippines. On 19–20 June 1944, a naval battle on the Philippine Sea resulted in the defeat of the Japanese Navy

Story about the opening of a second front in France in the newspaper *Pravda*, 7 June 1944

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ПРАВДА

Вторжение в Европу началось

(Военный обзор)

На Британских островах сосредоточены весьма крупные английские и американские силы численностью в несколько миллионов бойцов. Эти войска непрерывно обучались и тренировались в специальных видах боевых действий, для которых они предназначались. Армии вторжения обеспечены полностью современной техникой всех типов и назначений. Мощная авиация, уже до начала вторжения осуществлявшая операции над Германией, в которых участвовало по нескольку тысяч самолётов, предназначена для прикрытия армий вторжения с воздуха. Созданы многочисленные парашютные и десантные войска. Могущество англо-американских военно-морских сил достаточно известно.

Названные премьер-министром Черчиллем две цифры: 4 тысячи кораблей, вместе с несколькими тысячами мелких судов, и 11 тысяч самолётов первой линии, участвующих на первом этапе вторжения, уже сами по себе дают представление о масштабах происходящих операций и их обеспеченности во всех отношениях.

То, что мы можем установить из отрывочных сообщений о ходе событий и течение всего лишь одного дня — 6 июня, дня, которому суждено стать знаменательной датой,— относится, понятно, лишь к началу первой стадии операций вторжения.

В течение периода, предшествовавшего вторжению, высказывалось много различных предположений о возможных районах высадки союзных войск на западном и северном побережье Европы. Теперь уже обозначился район десантных операций, происходивших и течение 6 июня,— район северного побережья Франции между военными портом Шербур и портом Гавр, в устье реки Сены. Здесь побережье, протяжением около 180 километров, отстоит от берегов Англии, по ту сторону Ла-Манша, на 150—

and the destruction of all the planes on its aircraft carriers. In October 1944, US troops landed on the Philippines. In the Battle of Leyte Gulf (23–26 October 1944), a Japanese fleet attempting to stop an Allied amphibious landing party suffered a resounding defeat, losing most of its ships. After this battle, Allied victory in the Pacific was only a matter of time.

By March 1945, US troops had brought the Philippines under control, while British, Australian and Indian forces pushed the Japanese out of Birma. US troops landed on the islands of Iwo Jima in February 1945 and Okinawa in April, in sight of Japanese shores. In the ensuing heavy fighting, Japanese kamikazes attacked Allied ships. In the spring and summer of 1945, Japanese cities were massively bombed by US planes. A particularly devastating attack targeted Tokyo in March 1945. The Allied Supreme Command began making preparations for landing in Japan itself.

The War between Japan and the USSR. The End of World War II

The USSR had promised its allies (in particular, at the Yalta Conference in February 1945) that the Red Army would enter the war against Japan three months after the end of fighting in Europe. By the summer of 1945, the initiative in the Pacific had passed to the Allies, yet Japan had not yet been defeated, and its ruling elites refused to capitulate.

On 5 April 1945, the Soviet Union withdrew from the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact of 1941, accusing the Japanese government of violating it by collaborating with Hitler. These accusations were founded on constant Japanese provocations against Lend-Lease convoys bound for Vladivostok. As recently declassified documents of the Russian Federal Security Service show, the Japanese Supreme Command was preparing to use weapons of mass destruction, including chemical and biological agents, against the Allied Powers. On 8 August 1945, the Soviet government declared war on Japan. The Red Army was opposed in Manchuria by the 900,000-strong Kwantung Army commanded by General O. Yamada as well as Manchukuo combat units. Marshal of the Soviet Union A. Vasilevsky was appointed Commander-in-Chief of Soviet Forces in the Far East.

During the Manchurian Offensive (9 August — 2 September 1945), the Soviet 1st Far Eastern and Transbaikal Fronts commanded by Marshal of the Soviet Union R. Malinovsky and supported by the Soviet Amur Fleet and Mongolian troops commanded by Marshal K. Choibalsan breached the Japanese defences along the Manchurian border, crossed the Greater Khingan Range and Gobi Desert, both of which were considered impregnable to tanks, and entered the enemy's rear, surrounding the main forces of the Kwantung Army at Mukden. The Kwantung Army capitulated on 16 August 1945. The same day, Soviet paratroopers took Emperor Puyi of Manchukuo prisoner at an airfield in Mukden. On 22 August 1945, Soviet marines and paratroopers liberated Port Arthur (present-day Lüshun). In addition, the 2nd Far Eastern Front with the support of the Pacific Fleet liberated South Sakhalin, the Kuril Islands, and the northern part of the Korean Peninsula. On Sakhalin, Soviet marines took the towns of Maoka (present-day Kholmsk) on 19 August and Otomari (present-day Korsakovsk) on 25 August. Heavy fighting took place on Shumushu (present-day Shumshu) in the Kuril Islands

on 18–22 August and in the northern Korean port of Seishin (present-day Chongjin) on 13–17 August. (Fig. 32)

On 6 and 9 August, US planes dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Rather than pursuing military objectives, these actions were the first step of US 'nuclear diplomacy' that was meant to intimidate not only Japan but also the Soviet leadership. As a result, the USSR speeded up its own work on creating nuclear weapons. A major role in this process was played by intelligence information about the US atomic project.

On 15 August, the Japanese government made a radio announcement that it was willing to accept the terms of surrender (Potsdam Declaration) and declare a ceasefire. On 16 August, Japanese Emperor Hirohito made an address to the Japanese people about the country's unconditional surrender.

On 2 September 1945, the Japanese instrument of surrender was signed on board the USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay by Foreign Minister M. Shigemitsu and Chief of the Army General Staff Y. Umezu for Japan, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers General D. MacArthur for the United Nations, Admiral C. Nimitz for the US, Admiral B. Fraser for Great Britain, General Hsu Yung-chang for China, Lieutenant General K. Derevyanko for the USSR, General P. Leclerc for France, as well as representatives of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the Netherlands, signifying the end of World War II. (Fig. 33) The next day, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR adopted a resolution announcing the conclusion of the Second World War. This day is celebrated as the Day of Military Glory in contemporary Russia.

Marines of the Soviet Pacific Fleet on their way to Port Arthur. In the foreground: marine of the Pacific Fleet Anna Yurchenko, veteran of the Siege of Sevastopol

Photo: Y. Khaldey

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Signature of the Japanese Instrument of Surrender on board the USS Missouri
2 September 1945
RIA Novosti

The Soviet Rear and the Occupied Territories during the Great Patriotic War

The Soviet Union and the Soviet government proved their viability during the war years. The foundations of many of the country's achievements were laid in the 1920s and 1930s during the periods of industrialization and collectivization, which created a stable economic and political system without which victory would have been impossible. A new powerful coal and metallurgical industry was created in Siberia and the Urals, and an oil industry between the Volga and the Urals. New industrial centres appeared in the Volga region, the Far East, the Northwest, Kazakhstan, Central Asian republics, and the North Caucasus.

The rear played an enormous role in the Soviet victory. During the war years, Soviet industry far surpassed the enemy in the volume of military production. By late 1942, for example, the Soviet production of military equipment exceeded prewar levels by 2–3 times. This allowed the Red Army to compensate for its losses of 1941 and surpass German armies in the amount of materiel. By mid-1944, Soviet troops had 7 times more planes and 3 times more guns and armoured vehicles than Germany. This superiority allowed the Red Army to conduct successful offensives during the final period of the war.

Output of Key Heavy Industrial Goods and Weapons by Germany and the USSR during the War

Goods	USSR	Germany
Coal (million tons)	441.1	2151.0
Electric power (billion kW·h)	147.3	334.0
Cast iron (million tons)	39.5	98.1
Steel (million tons)	45.4	153.7
Tanks and self-propelled (assault) guns (thousand)	95.1	53.8
Medium and large calibre guns (thousand)	188.1	102.1
Mortars (thousand)	347.9	68.8
War planes (thousand)	108.0	78.9

One of the key reasons for the Soviet victory in the war was that the Soviet economy outperformed the combined economies of Germany and German-occupied Europe.

A major role in these accomplishments was played by industrial leaders such as People's Commissar of Munitions B. Vannikov, People's Commissar of Arms D. Ustinov, People's Commissar of Heavy Industry I. Tevosyan, People's Commissar of the Tank Industry V. Malyshev, People's Commissar of the Aircraft Industry A. Shakhurin, People's Commissar of the Shipbuilding Industry I. Nosenko, People's Commissar of Light Industry A. Kosygin, and People's Commissar of the Tank Industry and Director of Tank Factories in Chelyabinsk and Nizhny Tagil I. Zaltsman. It should be said that these successes were attained during the very difficult war years marked by severe shortages and the lack of workers and qualified specialists. They were made possible by the extraordinary physical and moral efforts of all the country's citizens. During the war, labour productivity rose by 1/3 without any increase in the number of workers. Over 10 million workers left for the front, yet the vacant positions were filled by senior citizens, women and children. As a result, workers had to be retrained on a large scale. Over 6.5 million people took reskilling courses in 1941–1942 alone. (Fig. 34)

The economic victory over Germany was attained thanks to the participation of the whole country in the war effort. Socialist emulation was cultivated at all enterprises, while collective farmers sent cartloads of produce to the front. People donated money that was used to build tank brigades and air force squadrons in addition to sending smaller items like knitted mittens and tobacco pouches to the front.

Besides numerical superiority, the USSR attained a qualitative advantage over the enemy's military equipment by 1943–1944, especially in artillery and aviation. This was the merit of Soviet military science and the outstanding Soviet aircraft designers A. Tupolev, S. Ilyushin, S. Lavochkin, A. Mikoyan, V. Petlyakov, and A. Yakovlev, armoured vehicle designers M. Koshkin, Z. Kotin, N. Astrov, and A. Morozov, artillery designers V. Grabin and F. Petrov, and firearm designers V. Degtyarev, F. Tokarev, and G. Shpagin. The Soviet fighter planes Yak-3 and La-7 and bombers Tu-2 surpassed the corresponding planes of the enemy, while the Il-2 ground-attack plane was in a class of its own. The Soviet T-34 tank is considered to be the best medium tank of WWII in its overall characteristics (speed, cross-country mobility, maintainability, armour), while the IS-2 tank and the ISU-122 and ISU-152 self-propelled guns outperformed all international analogues in gun power. The Katyusha (BM-13) rocket launcher and its more powerful analogue BM-31 terrified German soldiers with their destructive salvos. (Fig. 35)

Pupil of the school of labour reserves working at a ball bearing plant

1942

Photo: Y. Khalip

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Repairing tanks at a Soviet factory
Photo: B. Kudoyarov
RIA Novosti

During the war, Soviet scientists made great strides in many areas besides military science. Chemists provided the front and rear with synthetic rubber, which was used to produce automobile tyres; metallurgists developed a technology for stamping and welding gun turrets, accelerating their production; and physicists came on the verge of developing nuclear energy and rocket and jet engines. Thanks to the broad use of penicillin and sulfonamides, doctors managed to save tens of thousands of lives. By the end of the war, Soviet medicine helped up to 75% of wounded soldiers to return to action. Thanks to new drugs and an improved public health system, mortality rates began to fall in the rear from 1943, especially among children. In 1945, mortality was less than half of its prewar values ('Soviet demographic miracle').

Agriculture also played a major role in the Soviet victory. The enormous difficulties notwithstanding, workers on collective and state-owned farms supplied the front and rear with food. The crop acreage was increased, new lands were brought under cultivation in Siberia and Kazakhstan, and crop yields grew, despite the fact that only children and women remained on the farms and often lacked machinery, which had been sent to the front.

Immediately after clearing occupied regions of the enemy, measures were taken to restore their economy and infrastructure in accordance with the Resolution of the Council of People's Commissars and the Communist Party Central Committee 'On Emergency Assistance Measures to Regions Affected by Fascist Occupation' of 21 August 1943. These measures included the conservation of cultural monuments; the restoration of destroyed industrial enterprises, roads and electric power facilities; mine clearance; and the removal of destroyed military equipment from fields.

Soviet cultural figures also made an important contribution to victory. Many well-known writers and poets became war correspondents: A. Tolstoy, I. Ehrenburg, V. Katayev, Y. Petrov, V. Vishnevsky, and M. Sholokhov, to name just a few. They wrote poems, short stories, essays and articles about the war. A. Tvardovsky's poem 'Vasily Tyorkin' became a real emblem of the fighting spirit of Soviet soldiers. The war poems of K. Simonov, A. Surkov, and M. Isakovsky and the music of V. Solovyov-Sedov, M. Blanter, and D. Shostakovich enjoyed great popularity. Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony, dedicated to the inhabitants and defenders of blockaded Leningrad, was premiered in the besieged city in August 1942. Cultural brigades performed before soldiers and officers on the front lines. The song 'Holy War' on a poem by V. Lebedev-Kumach and music by A. Alexandrov came to symbolize the Soviet people's fury and resolve to overcome the enemy. Biting caricatures by the Kukryniksy (M. Kupriyanov, P. Krylov and N. Sokolov) and B. Yefimov ridiculed

the Fascists and their leaders, while posters by I. Toidze and other artists inculcated enmity towards the occupants and the determination to fight for one's native country. Numerous movies were made during the war: 'Wait for Me', 'Two Soldiers', 'The Lad from Our Town', 'Heavenly Slug', 'At 6 P.M. after the War', and many others. Art gave people the strength to fight the enemy as well as hope for victory and a happy life after the war.

However, there was another 'rear' in the Great Patriotic War: the enemy's rear with the occupied territories.

From July 1941, the Nazis began to establish their own regime in these territories, which they called the 'New Order'. Front-line areas were administered by commanders of the rear districts of army groups, while regions in the rear were governed by Reichskommissars appointed by the Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories along with their subordinate SS and police directors. Local government was administered by burgomasters in towns and village heads in rural areas, who controlled the local police. It should be said that most of them were Soviet emigrants or citizens that chose to collaborate with the enemy for various reasons. (Fig. 36)

The German occupational regime was onerous. The Fascists systematically dispossessed civilians and sent many of them to Germany for forced labour in industry and agriculture (*Ostarbeiter* 'Eastern workers'). The occupants despoiled many cultural valuables and laid waste to the estates of L. Tolstoy in Yasnaya Polyana, P. Tchaikovsky in Klin, and A. Pushkin in Mikhailovskoye as well as the palaces of Pushkin, Pavlovsk, Peterhof and Gatchina in the environs of Leningrad.

The occupants brutally treated Communists, members of the Komsomol, soldiers and officers of the Red Army and the NKVD, and partisans. German collaborationists and punitive forces burned many villages to the ground, often together with their inhabitants, such as the Byelorussian village of Khatyn in 1943. Anyone who violated Nazi law or expressed sympathy for the Soviet regime was executed or sent to a concentration camp. As in the rest of Europe, many Jews were sent to be exterminated in German death camps (Holocaust), while others were killed on the spot. For example, from 150 to 220 thousand people were executed in the ravine of Babi Yar near Kiev between the autumn of 1941 and the autumn of 1943.

German officials were put in charge of all industrial enterprises. Local workers were paid several times less than Germans, and any suspicion of sabotage was punished by death. In 1941, many churches were reopened, as Nazi ideologists wanted to use the Church to split people apart and promote the 'New Order'. Nevertheless, many priests refused to collaborate with the enemy. In 1943, Nazi policy changed, and the Orthodox Church and its clergy became increasingly subject to repressions. At the same time, a massive

Kerch inhabitants killed by Germans

1941

Photo: M. Alpert

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propaganda campaign tried to alienate local inhabitants and Red Army soldiers from the Soviet regime.

During the war years, quite a few Soviet citizens helped Nazi Germany. This was due to the Red Army's failures at the beginning of the war, the preceding policies of the Soviet regime, and the brutal German occupation. In all, over 80 million people found themselves in temporarily occupied territories. To survive, most of them were forced to work at old or newly created factories, organizations and farms. However, there were also cases of intentional collaboration with the enemy. People became traitors for various reasons: some tried to save their own lives or the lives of their loved ones, others did it for ideological motives, and yet others pursued lucrative goals. Collaborationism was particularly widespread in the Baltic republics, Western Ukraine, Western Byelorussia, among certain ethnic groups in the Caucasus and Central Asia, and among Kazakhs, Kalmyks, Volga and Crimean Tatars, and Russians. These people served in different German army and police units, SS troops, punitive (anti-partisan) battalions, 'Jäger' divisions, and building teams.

In all, about 1.2 million Soviet citizens collaborated with the occupants in different ways. The largest pro-German paramilitary forces were the Russian Liberation Army (ROA) of General A. Vlasov ('Vlasovtsy'), the Ukrainian National Army (UNA) of P. Shandruk, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) of S. Bandera ('Banderites'), and the Lithuanian Liberation Army (LLA) of J. Zemaitis. The Banderites used totally inhuman methods for exterminating men, women and children that they branded as 'foreigners' or 'traitors'.

Nevertheless, the share of such collaborators, whom nothing can excuse, in the country's total population was quite low, and they were unable to undermine the heroic resistance of the Soviet people to the enemy. In 1944, certain Soviet ethnic groups were subject to unjust wholesale repressions for treasonous acts committed by some of their members. For example, Crimean Tatars, certain North Caucasian ethnic groups, Russian Germans (already in 1941) and other population groups were deported to Siberia, Kazakhstan, and Central Asia. After the end of war, A. Vlasov and the entire leadership of the ROA (in October 1946) and the Cossack troops of the Wehrmacht headed by P. Krasnov (in January 1947) were sentenced to death at trials in Moscow for collaboration with the occupants, treason, and crimes against humanity.

Nazi economic, social and ideological policies fell through in the Soviet occupied territories. The overwhelming majority of Soviet citizens believed in victory and engaged in active or passive resistance to the enemy. Some joined partisan brigades or underground organizations in towns and villages.

The partisan movement made a major contribution to the Soviet victory in the Great Patriotic War. It consisted of ordinary urban and rural inhabitants, local party and village leaders, runaway prisoners of war, and encircled Red Army soldiers and officers. The brigades were usually headed by local government leaders or military officers. Particularly powerful partisan movements existed in Byelorussia, Left-bank Ukraine, Donbass, and the Bryansk and Smolensk Regions. In July 1942, the Central Headquarters of the Partisan Movement was established under the direction of First Secretary of the Byelorussian Communist Party Central Committee P. Ponomarenko. In 1943, Marshal of the Soviet Union K. Voroshilov was appointed commander-in-chief of the partisan movement. Prominent partisan leaders included S. Kovpak and A. Fedorov in Ukraine and P. Masherov in Byelorussia. The experienced spy and diversionist I. Starinov coordinated the diversionary activities of partisan brigades.

Partisans gathered highly valuable information about the enemy, paralyzed automobile and rail transport, and immobilized large enemy formations. In some cases, they liberated whole districts from the Nazis and returned them to the USSR. Well-known partisans included A. German, K. Zaslonov, L. Chaykina, Z. Kosmodemyanskaya (the first woman to receive the title 'Hero of the Soviet Union' during the war), and many others. One of the biggest partisan operations of the Great Patriotic War was the so-called 'rail war'. Before the Battle of Kursk in the spring and summer of 1943, partisans largely paralyzed rail transport in the German rear, which greatly aided the Red Army. (Fig. 37)

Anti-fascist resistance movements consisting of Communists and Komsomol members arose in many occupied cities. They were headed by local Soviet government and party leaders. The biggest underground organizations were in Minsk, Smolensk and Krasnodon (Young Guard organization). Despite the German terror and total Gestapo and police surveillance, the resistance movements managed to organize diversions to slow down the production of goods at factories, sabotage railways, kill foreign occupants and collaborationists, and engage in ideological warfare by posting leaflets and publishing underground newspapers. These resistance movements provided considerable support to partisans and helped to obtain intelligence information about the enemy.

With over a million members, partisan brigades and resistance movements helped to bring about the Soviet victory in the war.

Commander of the Suma Partisan Unit S. Kovpak surveilling the enemy from his post. River Teterev, Kiev Region

Photo: L. Korobov

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Anti-Hitler Coalition

Immediately after the German invasion of the Soviet Union, British Prime Minister W. Churchill and US President F. D. Roosevelt expressed their support for the USSR in its struggle against Hitler. It should be said that this was no easy decision, as the West had long considered the Soviet Union as its main geopolitical and ideological opponent. In July 1941, US presidential envoy H. Hopkins came to the USSR to discuss cooperation and form an alliance. The Allies wanted to understand how long the Soviet Union would hold out and whether it was expedient to assist it at all, as many people believed at the time that a German victory was imminent. On 24 September 1941, Soviet People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs V. Molotov signed the Atlantic Charter, which had been adopted at Naval Base Argentia in Newfoundland on 14 August 1941. This officially made the USSR a member of the Allies. On 29 September — 1 October 1941, a conference of representatives of the three Allied Powers (V. Molotov for the Soviet Union, US Ambassador to the USSR A. Harriman for the US, and British Minister of Aircraft Production Lord W. Beaverbrook for the UK) was held in Moscow. It resulted in the development of a plan of US–British assistance to the USSR (the so-called 'First Moscow Protocol').

On 1 January 1942, the Arcadia Conference in Washington, D.C., adopted the Declaration by United Nations, which was signed by 26 states in affirmance of their unity in the struggle against the powers of the Berlin — Rome — Tokyo Axis. The declaration was signed for the USSR by Soviet Ambassador to the US M. Litvinov. During V. Molotov's visit to London and Washington on 26 May and 11 June 1942, agreements on wartime and post-war cooperation were signed by the US, USSR and Great Britain.

The main question discussed by the Allies was the opening of a second front in Europe — a key issue for the USSR. This question was first posed by J. Stalin in a letter to W. Churchill, in which he urged the Allies to land in Scandinavia. The Allied Supreme Command did not take up this proposal, citing its insufficient forces and limiting itself to a demonstratory attack on the Lofoten Archipelago. The US–British command reacted to all further Soviet requests in 1942 in a similar fashion. The second front was not opened in Western Europe in 1942 or 1943, although Stalin and the Soviet government repeatedly reminded the Allies that the USSR was bearing the brunt of the blow in the struggle against Nazi Germany and had to fight against the Wehrmacht's most powerful armies. The German High Command repeatedly used the Allies' passivity to transfer divisions

from Western Europe to the Eastern front. The British sphere of interests was concentrated in the Mediterranean Sea and the Balkans, while the US focused on the Pacific Ocean. Neither state wanted to engage in a struggle with Germany until the outcome of the war in Europe became clear. In the summer of 1943, after the successes of the Red Army in the Battles of Stalingrad and Kursk and the turnaround on the Soviet-German front, Churchill proposed to land Allied forces in the Balkans. He was hoping to use these forces to cut off the Red Army from Eastern Europe and protect the latter from Soviet influence. However, this idea was rejected by both Stalin and Roosevelt as being useless from the military standpoint.

Instead, the Allies decided to land forces in Italy to bring it out of the war and then disembark a much bigger force in Northern France, where the bulk of the German troops in Western Europe were concentrated. The latter operation needed a year of preparations. Only after the decisive successes of the Red Army in 1944 did the Allies land in Normandy on 6 June 1944, opening the second front in Europe. Nevertheless, the heaviest fighting continued to occur on the Soviet-German front, where the main German forces were concentrated and where the outcome of the war in Europe was being decided.

German forces	Operation Bagration in Byelorussia (23 June — 29 August 1944)	Operation Overlord in Normandy (6 June — 31 August 1944)
Soldiers and officers at the start of the operation	486 493	24 000
Soldiers and officers at the end of the operation	1 200 000	380 000
Killed, wounded or missing in action	350 000	250 000
Prisoners of war	150 000	200 000

Key issues of Allied relations and the postwar world order were discussed at conferences of the Big Three (J. Stalin, F. D. Roosevelt and W. Churchill). These meetings were preceded by the Moscow Conference between the foreign ministers of the United States (C. Hull), Great Britain (A. Eden) and the Soviet Union (V. Molotov), which took place on 19–30 September 1943. This meeting prepared the first Big Three conference as well as discussing key issues

of Allied relations. It formulated the notion of unconditional surrender as the only possible outcome of the war with Germany and the Axis Powers. It also adopted a declaration on the inclusion of China in the Allied Powers, on the post-war independence of Austria, on the democratization of Italy, on the responsibility of the German leadership for atrocities committed on Soviet territory, and on the importance of continuing international cooperation after the end of the war. (Fig. 38)

On 28 November — 1 December 1943, the first meeting of the Big Three took place in Teheran, the capital of Iran occupied by Soviet and British troops. The main issues on the agenda were the opening of a second front and the USSR's entry into the war against Japan. It was decided that Allied troops would land in Normandy in Northern France in May 1944. The USSR pledged to enter the war against Japan three months after the defeat of Germany. Another issue was the post-war division of Germany. Great Britain and the United States proposed different ways of dividing the country into five or more states, to which the Soviet Union objected. The leaders decided to make Iran independent after the war, put pressure on Turkey to enter the war against Germany, and recognize Free France as the legitimate French government. They also discussed the new Soviet-Polish border and the future Polish government, the creation of a new international organization to replace the League of Nations, and the annexation of East Prussia to the USSR in compensation for its war losses.

The Crimean (Yalta) Conference was held in Yalta on 4–13 February 1945. This was the last meeting between J. Stalin, W. Churchill and F. D. Roosevelt. The participants discussed two key issues: the new borders in Europe and the post-war settlement. It was decided that the Soviet-Polish border would largely follow the Curzon Line, i. e., return to its state of 1 October 1939. The leaders agreed to form a new Polish coalition government that would include representatives of the government in exile in London and the pro-Soviet Lublin government. Germany and its capital city of Berlin would be occupied by the four victorious powers (France was also given an occupation zone). Reparations were set down for war losses. The USSR was assigned half of them, including East Prussia (present-day Kaliningrad Region).

The Big Three also agreed that the principle of the 'Four Ds' would be applied to Germany: democratization, demilitarization, demonopolization, and denazification. This meant disbanding Germany's armed forces, shutting down its military industry, liquidating the Nazi Party and government, and organizing an international tribunal for its leaders. Austria and its capital city of Vienna would also be divided into four occupation zones, which would then

Teheran Conference
1 December 1943
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be reunited into a single state after the completion of denazification. Spheres of influence were also delineated in the Balkans with Yugoslavia assigned to the Soviet sphere, and Greece to the British sphere. The question of the Far East was also discussed at Yalta. In exchange for its entry into the war against Japan, the USSR would regain the Kuril Islands, South Sakhalin, Port Arthur and the Chinese Eastern Railway. Mongolia would become an independent state. The leaders also decided to create the United Nations headed by a security council and set down the main principles of the UN Charter.

On 24 April — 26 June 1945, an international conference took place in San Francisco with the participation of 50 states. The USSR was represented by People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs V. Molotov. The conference officially established the United Nations and adopted its charter. The latter stipulates that the UN consists of representatives of nations rather than governments, guaranteeing that no country can be stripped of its membership in the organization. The UN's main body is the General Assembly consisting of all states, and the organization is directed by the General Secretary. The decisions of the Security Council are binding for all UN states, and its permanent members (the leading Allied Powers: the Soviet Union, the United States, Great Britain, France and China) can veto the Council's decisions. This assures the balance of powers and the unanimity of decisions. The conference also adopted the charter of the International Criminal Court.

The last meeting of the Big Three was held in the Berlin suburb of Potsdam on 17 July — 2 August 1945 after the end of the war in Europe. It was attended by J. Stalin, the new US president H. Truman (F. D. Roosevelt had died on 12 April 1945), and W. Churchill, who was replaced by C. Attlee after being defeated in the British parliamentary elections of 28 July. Dissonances between the USSR and other Allied Powers began to appear at this conference, and relations gradually became cooler. 'Nuclear diplomacy' was also used for the first time: during the conference, Truman told Stalin about the successful US atomic bomb tests on 16 July 1945. (Fig. 39)

The conference reiterated the principle of the 'Four Ds' with respect to post-war Germany, fixed the German-Polish border along the rivers Oder and Neisse (i. e., 25% of German territory was annexed to Poland in compensation for Western Byelorussia and Western Ukraine, which had been given to the USSR), and declared its commitment to preserve German unity. Alsace and Lorraine, which had been occupied by Germany, were returned to France. The Soviet annexation of East Prussia and Memel (Klaipeda) was officially confirmed. The USSR reiterated its intention of entering the war against Japan in August, and the Allies demanded the unconditional surrender of Japan (Potsdam Declaration) and confirmed the return

Potsdam Conference
Photo: Y. Khaldey
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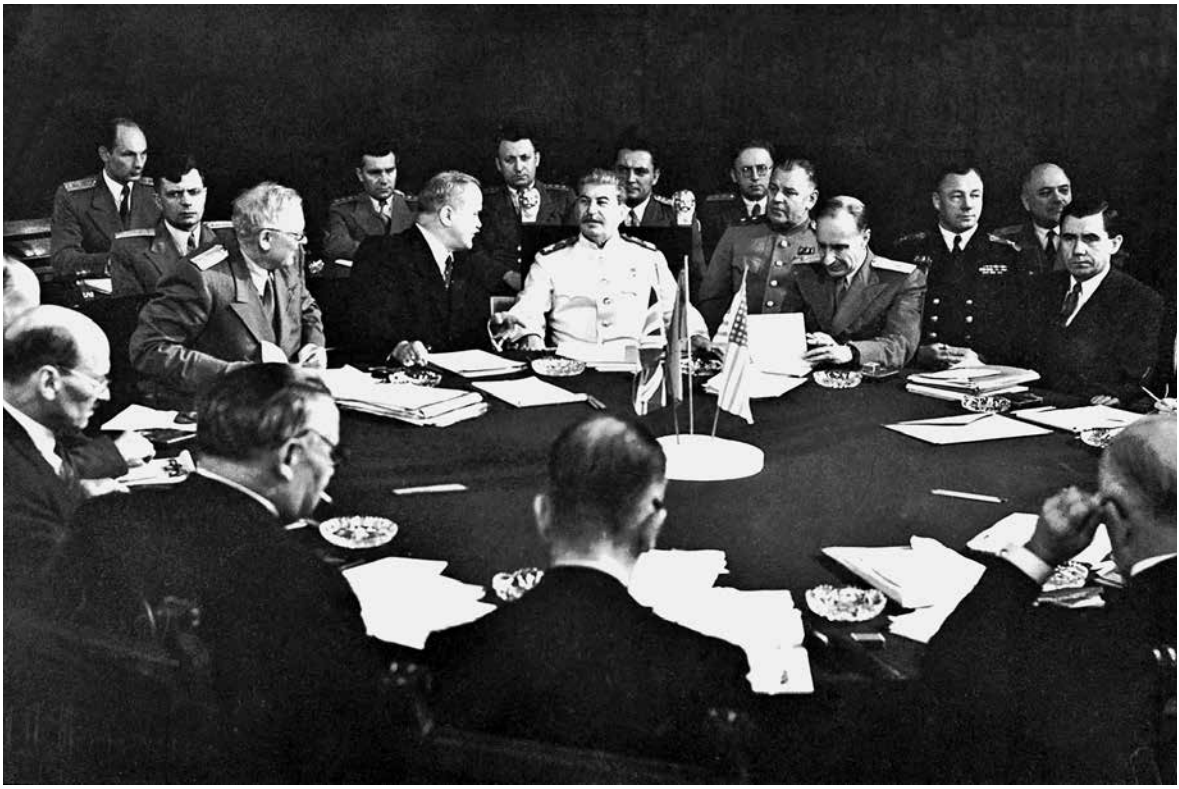

of the Kuril Islands and South Sakhalin to the USSR. It was decided to create a unified Polish government and conclude peace treaties with Germany's allies Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Finland and Italy, which were signed in July–October 1947. A heated discussion arose over the division of Germany's navy, as the USSR was accorded a smaller share than the others. The Potsdam Conference was the last meeting of the Big Three. The contours of the future Cold War already began to take shape.

The Big Three was a unique event in the history of international diplomacy. States with dissimilar political and socioeconomic systems and different geopolitical interests managed to unite against a mutual enemy and make compromises in the name of a common cause.

Lend-Lease

On 28 September 1941, an Allied agreement was signed in Moscow on providing wartime material assistance to the Soviet Union. It was prolonged several times subsequently. According to the agreement, the United States and Great Britain pledged to deliver arms, munitions and other goods on the basis of the Land-Lease Law adopted by the US on 11 March 1941. This law allowed the US government to lease or lend goods to other countries to further the interests of the United States. Leased arms and munitions had to be returned after the war, while civilian goods and multi-purpose items (explosives, fuel) were to be recompensated. The Lend-Lease Law was officially extended to the USSR by a decision of Congress on 7 November 1941. Allied lend-lease deliveries arrived in the USSR from August 1941 to September 1945 (with an interruption in June–August 1945). The goods were sent along three routes: southern (through Iran), eastern (through the Pacific Ocean) and northern (through the Arctic). The Iranian route was the longest and the safest: it passed through the South Atlantic around Africa and then through the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf to the Iraqi port of Basra. From there the cargoes were dispatched by road through Iran and the Caucasus to the USSR. The eastern route passed through the Pacific Ocean along the West Coast of the United States and Canada and past Alaska and the Aleutian Islands to Soviet Far Eastern ports. From there, the cargoes were dispatched by the Trans-Siberian Railway through Siberia and the Urals to the European part of the USSR. The Arctic route was the shortest and the closest to the front. At the same time, it was the most dangerous. It went from US and British Atlantic ports to Iceland and then across the Norwegian and Barents Seas and along the coast of German-occupied Norway to the northern Soviet ports of Arkhangelsk and Murmansk. On this route, cargoes were delivered by Allied Arctic convoys, assisted by the Soviet Northern Fleet. The goods were carried by US and British merchant ships, which were escorted by British warships. Soviet warships joined the convoy escorts in Soviet territorial waters. The first Allied convoy 'Dervish' arrived in Arkhangelsk on 31 August 1941.

In the spring of 1942, the German High Command brought major air and naval forces to Norway. Almost every convoy in the summer and autumn of 1942 (at the peak of war in the Arctic) turned into a bloody battle. A particularly sad incident was the destruction of Allied Convoy PQ-17 in July 1942, which lost 2/3 of its ships due to a mistake of the Allied commander, who ordered the convoy

to disband. Only in early 1943 did the Allies get the upper hand in the war in the Arctic, and convoys ceased to suffer such losses. (Fig. 40)

Lend-lease deliveries to the USSR included materiel (tanks, planes, artillery, firearms), automobiles, locomotives and railway cars, sheet steel, raw petroleum, avgas and mogas, dye constituents, food, shoes, uniforms, and other items. The volume of Allied deliveries was relatively small — only 4% of the total Soviet industrial production. However, lend-lease deliveries of tanks and planes played a key role in 1941 and 1942, amounting to about 10–12% of the Soviet output. In a situation where the Red Army had lost an enormous amount of materiel and the evacuated factories were not yet able to replace it, lend-lease goods helped the country to overcome these losses to a certain extent.

Ratio of Lend-Lease Deliveries to Soviet Output during the War

Materiel	Percent ratio
Planes of all types	15
Tanks	12
War and merchant ships	22.3

(Source: *Velikaya Otechestvennaya voyna 1941–1945 godov* [The Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945]. In 12 volumes. Vol. 9: *Soyuzniki SSSR po Anti-gitlerovskoy koalitsii* [The USSR's Allies in the Anti-Hitler Coalition]. Moscow: Voyenizdat, Kuchkovo Pole, 2013, p. 600.]

Allied lend-lease deliveries made a significant (even if not decisive) contribution to the Soviet victory in the Great Patriotic War. In any event, far from being a selfless contribution on the part of the Allies, they were recompensated in cash after the war. The Soviet lend-lease debts were finally settled by the Russian Federation in the early 2000s.

Muscovites receive food packages delivered through Lend-Lease

1945

Photo: A. Garanin

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Losses in World War II

The Soviet armed forces played the leading role in the victory over Nazism in WWII. The USSR made the biggest contribution to the war effort among all the Allies, and the outcome of the war was decided on the Soviet-German front.

Comparison of the Personnel Losses of Germany and the Axis Powers and the Red Army on the Soviet-German Front between 22 June 1941 and 9 May 1945 (thousand persons)

Types of Losses	Germany and the Axis Powers			Red Army	Ratio
	Germany	Other Axis Powers	Total		
Total losses	8876.3	1468.2	10344.5	11444.1	1:1.1
Killed in action, died from injury and disease, missing in action, non-combat losses	5300	668.2	5968.2	6885.1	
Taken prisoner	3576.3	800	4376.3	4559	
Among them: killed (died) in captivity or did not return home	442.1	137.8	579.9	2722.4	

(Source: G. F. Krivosheev, V. M. Andronikov, P. D. Burikov, and V. V. Gurkin, *Velikaya Otechestvennaya bez grifa sekretnosti. Kniga poter'. Noveysheye spravochnoye izdaniye* [The Great Patriotic War Unclassified. The Book of Losses: An Up-to-date Handbook]. Moscow: Veche, 2010, p. 373.)

The Great Patriotic War brought to light numerous new talented Soviet military commanders, including G. Zhukov, A. Vasilevsky, K. Rokossovsky, I. Konev, R. Malinovsky, F. Tolbukhin, L. Govorov,

K. Meretskov, A. Yeryomenko, N. Vatutin, and I. Chernyakhovsky, to name just a few.

However, the main contribution to victory was made by the massive heroism of ordinary Soviet citizens. From the start of the war, the invaders encountered the totally unexpected resistance of Red Army troops. Border outposts held out for weeks, while encircled soldiers heroically fought for their lives, trying to reach their comrades.

When planning the invasion of the USSR, Hitler's strategists failed to account for the bravery and heroism of the Soviet people and their resolution to fight for the freedom and independence of their country. One will never forget the 900-day defence of Leningrad, the 250-day defence of Sevastopol, and the 125-day defence of Stalingrad; the feats of Captain N. Gastello, who rammed an enemy tank column with his plane in the summer of 1941; Soldiers A. Matrosov and A. Tipanov, Sergeant V. Vasilkovsky and many others who covered the loopholes of enemy pillboxes with their bodies; Junior Lieutenant V. Talalikhin, who, in the autumn of 1941, performed the first nighttime aerial ramming in history in the sky over Moscow; Captain 3rd rank M. Gadzhiyev, Commander of the 1st Submarine Division of the Northern Fleet, and Lieutenant Captain P. Kuzmin, commander of a Shch-408 submarine of the Baltic Fleet, who died engaging several enemy ships at once; and the Soviet fighter aces Captain I. Kozhedub (62 victories) and Lieutenant A. Pokryshkin (59 victories). This list could be continued indefinitely. All of these feats point to the profound desire of the entire Soviet people to defend their liberty and vanquish the hated enemy. Seven million Soviet soldiers and officers received orders and medals for their bravery and heroism in the war, and 11,500 people received the title 'Hero of the Soviet Union'.

Victory in the Great Patriotic War was attained at a terrible cost. According to different estimates, about 10 million Red Army soldiers and officers died or went missing in action and almost 15.5 million were wounded. Soviet civilian losses surpassed 17 million. Thus, the USSR's demographic losses amounted to almost 27 million people. During the war, over 3.6 million Soviet soldiers and officers became prisoners of war, and most of them died in captivity.

Number of Civilians Deliberately Killed by the Fascists in the Occupied Territories

Soviet republic	Total losses	Children
Russian SFSR	1 800 000	Over 15 000
Ukrainian SSR	3 236 000	Over 75 000

Продолжение таблицы

Soviet republic	Total losses	Children
Byelorussian SSR	1 347 000	78 600
Other republics	817 383	126 431
Total	7 420 379	216 431

(Source: *Velikaya Otechestvennaya voyna 1941–1945 godov* [The Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945]. In 12 volumes. Vol. 1: *Osnovnyye sobytiya voyny* [The Main Events of the War]. Moscow: Voyenizdat, Kuchkovo Pole, 2011, p. 607.]

The situation of Soviet prisoners of war was aggravated by the fact that Nazis considered Russians and many other ethnic groups to be 'inferior races' and sought to exterminate them — in particular, by subjecting them to intolerable conditions. The Soviet economy was also direly affected. Military operations and occupation led to the destruction of 1,710 cities and towns as well as countless villages, factories, and fields. The USSR lost about a third of its national wealth during the war.

Human Losses in World War II

Country	Human losses
USSR	26.6 million
China (1937–1945)	15.5 million
Germany	6.9 million (8.4 million by other estimates)
Poland	6.2 million
Japan	2.5 million
Yugoslavia	1 million
US	417,000
Great Britain	380,000

In all, the Second World War resulted in the loss of over 70 million human lives.

Nuremberg, Tokyo and Khabarovsk Trials

The agreements reached at the Yalta and Potsdam Conferences called for the creation of international tribunals for trying war criminals from the German and Japanese leadership. The International Military Tribunal was established on 8 August 1945 by a decision of a US–Soviet–British–French intergovernmental committee, which also drafted its charter. The trial was held in the Palace of Justice in the German city of Nuremberg. Before the trial opened, time was allocated for drafting the indictment, gathering evidence, appointing judges, selecting witnesses, as well as removing some sensitive issues that some of the prosecuting parties wanted to avoid. For example, the USSR excluded issues connected with pre-war foreign policy, while France objected to the discussion of collaborationist organizations. The trial was conducted in accordance with international law: all the defendants were entitled to use lawyers approved by the court; the judges and prosecutors represented all four Allied Powers (USSR, US, Great Britain and France) and had equal rights; and the trial was open to visitors and covered in detail by the press. The court was chaired by judge G. Lawrence from Great Britain. The Soviet Union was represented by judge I. Nikitchenko and prosecutor R. Rudenko.

The court tried 24 former leaders of Nazi Germany, including H. Göring, J. von Ribbentrop, W. Keitel, A. Jodl, E. Reder, and K. Dönitz. Charges were also filed against German organizations: the leadership of the NSDAP, the Reich Cabinet, the High Command, the SS (guard units), the SA (assault units), the SD (security services), and the Gestapo (secret police). The defendants were charged with crimes against peace (waging an aggressive war), war crimes, and crimes against humanity (genocide). The tribunal convened from 20 November 1945 to 1 October 1946. During this time, 403 court sessions were held, and 116 witnesses for the prosecution and 143 witnesses for the defence were heard. The head of the German Labour Front R. Ley committed suicide after receiving his indictment, while the industrialist G. Krupp was ruled unfit to stand trial for health reasons. The verdict was delivered in the night of 30 September — 1 October 1946. Twelve individuals were sentenced to death, three to lifelong imprisonment, two to 20 years of prison, one to 15 years, and one to 10 years. Three were exonerated by the court. The executions were carried out on 16 October 1946. (Fig. 41)

Session of the Nuremberg military tribunal

20 November 1945

Photo: Y. Khaldey

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The NSDAP, SS, SD and Gestapo were ruled criminal organizations, i. e., organizations in which membership in itself was a crime. The SA, Reich Cabinet, and High Command were not ruled to be criminal. The question of whether the Wehrmacht was a criminal organization was not raised during the trial. The Soviet side dissented to the ruling that the Reich Cabinet and the German High Command were not criminal organizations.

The Nuremberg Trial brought about the international legal condemnation of Nazism as a political ideology and recognized the foreign and occupational policies of Nazi Germany as crimes against peace and humanity.

Another 12 US trials for different Nazi and German organizations were held in Nuremberg in 1946. These trials followed US rather than international law. The defendants included the German High Command, the Reich Cabinet, doctors, lawyers, etc. These trials made legal assessments of Nazi crimes in different areas that had not been covered by the Nuremberg trial. Almost every European country — Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Romania, Norway, France, Italy, and the Netherlands — held their own trials for war criminals and collaborationists in 1945–1957. Over 20 open trials were also held in different Soviet cities during the last years of the war and after it, leading to the conviction of 252 war criminals.

The International Military Tribunal for the Far East (Tokyo Process) was established by a proclamation of Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers General D. MacArthur on 11 September 1945. The trial took place in Tokyo at the former Imperial General Headquarters. The judges and prosecutors came from 11 countries of the Pacific Region (US, USSR, United Kingdom, France, China, Philippines, India, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the Netherlands). The tribunal was chaired by the Australian judge W. Webb, and the Soviet Union was represented by judge I. Zyryanov and prosecutor S. Golunsky. The trial adhered to the norms of common law, just as in Nuremberg. Most of the court sessions were open, and defendants were accorded lawyers.

At the decision of the US, the tribunal did not consider evidence that could incriminate Emperor Hirohito or his family or that related to the activities of Unit 731, responsible for developing biological weapons. The Tokyo Process lasted from 3 May 1946 to 12 November 1948 and tried 29 individuals from the Japanese government and army, including 5 prime ministers. The defendants were indicted with war crimes and crimes against peace and humanity. 818 open sessions and 131 closed sessions were held, and the testimony of 419 witnesses was heard. The verdict was delivered on 4–12 November 1948. Seven individuals

were sentenced to death, sixteen to lifetime imprisonment, one to 20 years of prison, and one to 7 years. Two defendants died during the process, one committed suicide before it began, and one was ruled unfit to stand trial for health reasons. The Tokyo Process made a legal assessment of Japanese crimes in the Far East. Another major trial of Japanese war criminals took place in Khabarovsk on 25–30 December 1949.

The Nuremberg and Tokyo Trials along with other trials of war criminals were key precedents that demonstrated the inevitability of punishment for crimes against humanity.

Conclusion

In the spring of 1945, the Soviet Union and its allies defeated the most odious regime in world history — Nazi Germany. This historical victory was attained in large part thanks to the mobilization of the entire multi-ethnic Soviet nation. The war's outcome was the work of millions of individuals: it was forged not only on the battlefields through the courage of Red Army soldiers and the talent of Soviet commanders but also in factories, R&D organizations, and farms — wherever people contributed to the common cause of defending their fatherland. It was truly a national victory.

We must also not forget the contribution of the Allies that fought on different fronts from North Africa to the Pacific and assisted the USSR through the Lend-Lease Programme. Each of these countries paid a high price for restoring peace.

The Second World War taught the world a unique lesson. Countries with different socioeconomic and political systems came together to fight mankind's greatest enemy — Nazism. The conclusion of this struggle was the Nuremberg Trial, which not only convicted war criminals but also censored their odious ideology. The memory of World War II serves as a formidable reminder to future generations that only by uniting our forces can we preserve peace on our planet.

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‘22 June. At precisely 4 a.m…’ internet project — https://june-22.mil.ru
‘I remember… Recollections of veterans of the Great Patriotic War’ — https://iremember.ru
‘War Album’ website — https://waralbum.ru
‘Crimes of the Nazis and their accomplices against the civilian population of the USSR during the Great Patriotic War’ website — https://victims.rusarchives.ru
Special projects of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation — https://mil.ru/ projects.htm
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‘Without Limitations’ project — https://безсрокадавности.рф

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