



Aleksandr M. Nekrich. *Pariahs, Partners, Predators: German-Soviet Relations, 1922-1941*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997. xiv + 308 pp. \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-231-10676-4.

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Stalin and the Origins of the Second World War

The Museum of the Great Fatherland War that opened in Moscow in 1993 testifies to the extent to which the new Russia has appropriated the old Soviet myths about World War II. Visitors to the museum are likely to leave with a powerful impression of the heroism and suffering of the Soviet people in the war, but with little understanding of why the war happened. The prefatory exhibits skim over the 1930s, touching lightly on Hitler's rise to power, the concept of *Lebensraum*, and Western appeasement. The 1939 Nazi-Soviet Pact and its consequences are briefly acknowledged, but the exhibition begins in earnest only with the "beginning" of the war: June 22, 1941. In this rendition, the German invasion appears like a bolt from the blue, a sudden attack on an unsuspecting, peace-loving country by an evil power bent on conquest.[1]

Aleksandr Nekrich would have arranged the exhibition rather differently. In his view, the Soviet Union entered the war—and entered it as an aggressor—on September 17, 1939, when the Red Army invaded Poland in accordance with the secret protocols of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, signed just a few weeks earlier. That the Russian historical community (if not the Russian public) now largely accepts an element of Soviet complicity in the outbreak of World War II is due in no small measure to Nekrich's decades-long efforts to overturn Soviet myths about the war. Nekrich, who himself fought in the war, became something of a celebrity—a hero to some, a heretic to others—in 1965 when he published his daringly revisionist *1941, 22 iunia*, which showed that responsibility for the initial successes of the German invasion lay

not just with Hitler but also with Stalin, who had blindly refused to prepare for the attack.[2]

That book, unfortunately for Nekrich, appeared shortly after Khrushchev's ouster, and in the cooler political climate of the Brezhnev years its criticism of Stalin was met with official hostility. Nekrich was expelled from the party and harassed in various ways, until he emigrated to the United States in 1976. He spent the rest of his career as a fellow of the Russian Research Center at Harvard University, where he published *The Punished Peoples* (1978) on the postwar deportations of "suspect" ethnic groups; co-authored (with Michael Heller) a survey of Soviet history, *Utopia in Power* (1986); and wrote a memoir that presents a fascinating picture of political, ideological, and personal conflicts within the Soviet historical profession.[3]

In his final book, *Pariahs, Partners, and Predators*, Nekrich returns to his main interest: the origins of World War II. Although described as a history of German-Soviet relations from 1922 to 1941, the book's scope is actually more limited. Nekrich covers the Reichswehr-Red Army cooperation of the Weimar period and provides a chapter on the years 1933-1937, but more than half the book concentrates on the crucial period from 1938 to 1941, primarily from the perspective of Stalin and his policies toward Germany.

Although the manuscript (including its translation into English by Gregory Freeze) was completed shortly before Nekrich died in 1993, the book was not published until 1997. The delay in bringing the book to print is

particularly unfortunate because the subject of interwar German-Soviet relations has generated so much interest in the last few years. Although Nekrich used both German and Russian archives, significant new materials from the Russian archives have been published over the last four years.[4] On the German side as well, several important new studies have emerged. Unfortunately (and unfairly), these materials make Nekrich's account seem dated or incomplete in some areas, although in other areas the new documents simply add further support to Nekrich's interpretation.

In recounting the diplomacy of the years immediately after World War I, Nekrich focuses his attention on the activities of Viktor Kopp, the talented Soviet diplomat sent to Berlin in 1919 to improve relations with Germany in political, economic, and military spheres. Drawing on new materials from the former party archives in Moscow, Nekrich provides interesting details about the many obstacles Kopp faced in improving relations in these early years, when Soviet policy toward Germany was pulled in different directions by lingering hopes for socialist revolution in Germany, ingrained suspicion of German "imperialism," and fears of a German rapprochement with the Entente Powers. German policy toward Russia (less thoroughly delineated by Nekrich) was also shaped by conflicting forces and competing factions, as the two countries—the "pariah" states of the postwar period—moved in fits and starts toward the rapprochement that was eventually formalized in the Rapallo Treaty of April 1922.

The diplomatic history of the Rapallo years has been covered in many previous works (although a comprehensive survey of German-Soviet diplomatic, cultural, and economic interactions has not yet been written). Nekrich focuses on the military side of the collaboration, where mutual interest was arguably the strongest: Germany needed a location for military training and rearmament that would allow it to surreptitiously circumvent the restrictions imposed by the Versailles Treaty; the Soviet Union in turn was eager for technical assistance to rebuild its ravaged industrial base.

Nekrich aims less at a thorough and comprehensive account of the military cooperation than at tracing several specific themes. Some of his most interesting material (again drawn from the former party archives) relates to the role of the Soviet secret police. Given the latter's congenital xenophobia, it is not surprising that cooperation—especially military cooperation—with Germany was a major irritant to the OGPU. The OGPU fre-

quently wrote alarmist reports about German military installations, warning that they were hotbeds of espionage and sabotage that ought to be shut down. One of the more fantastic OGPU reports claimed in 1925 that the German aircraft firm Junkers, then operating a concession outside Moscow, was engaging in criminal activities ranging from promoting religion to trying to take over the Soviet aviation industry. The report concluded that Junkers was working with the British to promote a monarchist coup d'état in the Soviet Union (p. 47). Such wild claims, Nekrich argues, were not realistic assessments but deliberate exaggerations aimed at gaining more power and influence for the police organs.

The development of German military installations on Soviet territory is outlined in the second chapter, which provides cursory overviews of the Junkers aircraft factory in Fili, the German pilot training school in Lipetsk, and the German tank school in Kazan.' Most valuable is Nekrich's account of the joint installation for testing poison gas in Samara, based largely on sources from the Russian military archives.[5]

Manfred Zeidler's monograph on the Red Army-Reichswehr partnership was evidently not available to Nekrich before he completed his book. In some instances, Nekrich's work—especially those parts based on materials from Russian archives—supplements Zeidler's study, which was written before the author could gain access to Russian archives.[6] For the most part, though, Zeidler's book will be more useful to anyone interested in a comprehensive account of the military collaboration. Although Nekrich offers the overall assessment that "at various junctures [military cooperation] was advantageous to both parties" (p. 61), he avoids the crucial (and admittedly extremely complex) issue of the specific costs and benefits to each side. He concludes, for example, that the Junkers plant in Fili was "a failure," but does not explain in what sense or for which side. Although he notes that the Soviets stole blueprints and materials from the plant, he does not mention that after the concession ended, Andrei Tupolev built planes and bombers using the Junkers all-metal construction method—presumably with the aid of the information stolen from the plant.[7] The story of German-Soviet military collaboration is certainly interesting, and Nekrich tells it well, but its significance is impossible to evaluate without weighing its consequences, especially in terms of the longer-term effects of the transfer of experience and technology on military and industrial developments in each country.

Nekrich does a good job of describing the dissatis-

factions on both sides (the Soviets, for example, felt the Germans were not sharing the most up-to-date technology; the Germans were annoyed by heavy-handed Soviet surveillance) that began to strain the relationship even before Hitler came to power. In 1932 the German government decided to terminate military collaboration with the Soviet Union, in large part because Germany's increasingly open disregard for the restrictions of the Versailles Treaty made clandestine rearming unnecessary. The Soviet regime continued to hope that some form of military cooperation could be reestablished even after Hitler's *Machtergreifung*, but these hopes were mainly unfulfilled: only naval collaboration survived the early years of the Nazi dictatorship.[8]

Soviet policy toward Germany in the wake of Hitler's *Machtergreifung* is deftly summarized in Chapter Three. Misreading the international situation in typical fashion, Stalin did not immediately see Nazi Germany as a threat to the Soviet Union (a point that, despite the evidence, is still disputed by some historians).[9] Instead, according to Nekrich, the Soviet dictator hoped that fascism would accelerate the revolutionary process in Germany. Nekrich asserts that Stalin in fact welcomed the Nazi takeover because he had a certain "affinity" for Hitler and "probably" preferred to deal with a dictator, whose thinking and behavior would likely have seemed "more comprehensible than the mentality of politicians from democratic states" (pp. 63-4). Later Nekrich refers to "the genetic bonds between the Soviet and Nazi regimes" (p. 66). The Soviet Union's public antifascist rhetoric and Litvinov's pursuit of collective security with the Western powers were, in Nekrich's view, intended as a fall-back position for Stalin's preferred alternative: a deal with Germany.[10]

As Nekrich sees it, Stalin's primary goal—what Nekrich calls the "Stalin Doctrine"—was to foment a conflict between Germany and the West that would leave the capitalist powers exhausted and the Soviet Union (which would have remained neutral) in a position to shape a peace settlement to its advantage. The two lines of Soviet foreign policy after 1934, though outwardly contradictory, were both intended to achieve this goal: collective security and the Popular Front were pursued as a means of encouraging the West to fight Germany; at the same time, in order to deflect a German attack away from the U.S.S.R. and toward the West, Stalin secretly tried to make a deal with Hitler.

Direct evidence for the existence of a "Stalin Doctrine" is scant. Nekrich builds his case by quoting sources

like a speech by Stalin in 1925, an interview Stalin gave to a foreign reporter, and third-hand reports from defectors like Walter Krivitsky, but he relies primarily on inference from indirect evidence to discern Stalin's goals. Indeed, despite new publications of documents and better access to archives, the main source of evidence about Stalin's aim and motives remains the outward manifestation of Soviet policy (Soviet behavior) rather than direct, internal evidence about intentions. The paucity of direct evidence about Stalin's thinking will continue to bedevil scholars until his personal archive is made fully available. (A relatively inconsequential part of Stalin's papers is open for research at the former central party archives, but the bulk of his archive remains in the closed Presidential Archives. Yeltsin has just issued a decree ordering that Stalin's papers be made public; whether this order will be implemented is unclear.)

Based on the evidence that is available, Nekrich's view that the Soviet Union in the second half of the 1930s was a revisionist power that sought territorial gain to expand socialism's base, rather than an upholder of the status quo that sought defensively oriented security arrangements, is plausible and even convincing. At certain points, however, Nekrich's interpretation seems somewhat one-sided. His discussion of the economic ties between Germany and the Soviet Union from 1939 to 1941, for example, at times overstates the case for Stalin's stupidity. In fairness to Nekrich, historians have long seen the trade agreements associated with the Nazi-Soviet Pact as having heavily favored Germany. The traditional view is that Stalin sent large quantities of valuable raw materials to Germany, even up to the day of the invasion, in exchange for an insignificant amount of equipment and a lot of excuses and delays, because he hoped that punctilious fulfillment of Soviet obligations would ward off a German attack.

In supporting this view, however, Nekrich at times understates Soviet efforts to negotiate quicker German deliveries (which included temporarily suspending Soviet shipments of oil and grain) and overstates the benefits to Germany (Nekrich, for example, frequently quotes propagandistic Nazi press statements touting the advantages Germany was reaping from Soviet trade). He also tends to downplay the acrimony and bitterness of the economic negotiations, emphasizing instead the ease with which ideological prejudices were put aside to achieve close cooperation. More recent assessments have indicated that these economic exchanges may not have been quite so favorable to Germany: Soviet exports, in relation to total Soviet production and total German de-

mand, were less consequential than has been thought, and the Soviet side gained some significant advantages, such as advanced German technology. Hitler, like Stalin, miscalculated: he assumed that Germany would defeat the U.S.S.R. so quickly that the Soviets would not have time to use the equipment and technology he was exporting.[11]

Aside from depicting Stalin as clever, grasping, and often obstinately obtuse, Nekrich does not describe personalities. The most colorful characterization Nekrich offers is of the Soviet ambassador Shkvtartsev, who is described as “colorless.” (Compare this, for example, to historian D.C. Watt’s description of Molotov: “Molotov looked like a salesman of encyclopaedias down on his luck. His mottled complexion, ingratiating smile and straggled moustache hid one of the most inexorably stupid men to hold the foreign ministership of any major power in this century.”[12]) In leaving out the personality factor, Nekrich has missed out on an important element of the story: in diplomacy, personalities matter—often a great deal. By leaving the impression that everyone but Stalin was a faceless cog, moreover, Nekrich seems to suggest that Stalin was uniquely responsible for the course of events, whereas in fact there is plenty of blame to go around: the Western powers, as much as the Soviet regime, helped create the conditions that allowed Hitler to unleash war.

Because the years 1939 to 1941 have received so much attention since Nekrich finished the book, his account of the intricate diplomatic initiatives of these years is somewhat dated. Nonetheless, his overview of the Soviet-Finnish War includes interesting archival material, and he astutely assesses the way that Soviet designs in Finland, the Balkans, and the Straits created tensions in the Soviet-German relationship. He notes that Stalin’s move in May 1941 to become chairman of Sovnarkom (and thus de jure as well as de facto head of state) may have been connected to an attempt to hold direct talks with Hitler, indicating that even at this late date Stalin still hoped to reach a deal with the Nazi dictator. (Rumors that such a meeting had been proposed circulated at the time but have only recently been substantiated.) On the contentious issue of Soviet preparations for war, Nekrich concludes not only that no preventive war was planned, but that “the Stalinist scenario simply could not comprehend war with Germany.”[13]

Columbia University Press was not, unfortunately, as meticulous in its copy-editing as Nekrich was in his research. The text contains many typos and minor er-

rors, perhaps the most egregious of which appears on the opening page, which refers to “the German inaction” rather than “the German invasion” (p. vii). Although the book is generally well-written, the narrative is sometimes difficult to follow due to unnecessary zigzags in the chronology. The book is evidently intended for specialists in the diplomacy of interwar Europe: important events are frequently mentioned without explanation and the diplomatic context is often scantily elaborated. Critical issues such as the Soviet reaction to Munich, as well as aspects of the international situation that had important effects on German-Soviet relations, such as Soviet assessments of the Japanese threat, are mentioned only briefly. Many important areas of German-Soviet relations are unexplored, including the extensive Soviet-German cultural relations of the Weimar period, the role of intelligence in foreign-policy decision making, the contribution of German technology to Soviet industrial development, the large Russian emigre community in Berlin, and the Comintern. Nevertheless, specialists in Soviet-German relations (as well as scholars interested in the Soviet treatment of foreigners and ethnic Germans) will find much of interest here. Those who want a broader and more basic treatment of pre-World War II diplomacy would be better off turning to classics like Weinberg and Watt, or waiting for some of the new works by Glantz and Gorodetsky that will soon be coming off the presses.[14]

Notes:

[1]. On the Soviet “holy myth” of World War II, see Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

[2]. A revised and expanded edition has recently been published (Moscow: Pamiatniki istoricheskoi mysli, 1995). In 1968 an English translation was published by V. Petrov under the title “June 22, 1941”: *Soviet Historians and the German Invasion* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1968). A useful survey of recent Russian historiography on the interwar years is provided in M.I. Mel’tiukhov, “Predystoriia Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny v sovremennykh diskussiiakh,” in *Istoricheskie issledovaniia v Rossii: Tendentsii poslednikh let*, ed. G. A. Bordiugov (Moscow: AIRO-XX, 1996), pp. 278-307.

[3]. Nekrich’s memoirs originally appeared in 1979 (in a Russian-language edition published in London); an English translation was published in 1991 under the title *Forsake Fear: Memoirs of an Historian*, trans. Donald Lineburgh (Boston: Unwin Hyman).

- [4]. For a list of recently published documents, see I. A. Kondakova, comp., *Otkrytyi arkhiv: spravochnik opublikovannykh dokumentov po istorii Rossii XX-veka iz gosudarstvennykh i semeinykh arkhivov (po otechestvennoi periodike 1983-1995 gg.)* (Moscow: ZAO "Print-Servis," 1997). Inexplicably, Nekrich does not cite volume 22 of *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1992). The series began in 1957, but after volume 21 (covering the year 1938) appeared in 1977, the series mysteriously stopped. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has now resuscitated it as a forum for publishing newly declassified documents from its own and other archives; volume 23 appeared in 1995.
- [5]. On this issue, see also E. S. Gams, "Sozdanie sovetskogo khimicheskogo oruzhiia, 1920-1941 gg.," *Voprosy istorii* 1997, no. 4.
- [6]. Manfred Zeidler, *Reichswehr und Rote Armee 1920-1933: Wege und Stationen einer ungewoehnlichen Zusammenarbeit* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1993). The book is currently being translated into Russian. See also his articles, "Das Bild der Wehrmacht von Russland und der Roten Armee zwischen 1933 und 1939," in *Das Russlandbild im Dritten Reich*, ed. by Hans-Erich Volkmann (Cologne: Boehlau, 1994), pp. 105-23; and "Eine moderne Armee ist eine offensive Armee. Die Sowjetstreitkraefte im Zeichen des Stalinismus," in *Stalinismus: Neue Forschungen und Konzepte*, ed. Stefan Plaggenborg (Berlin: Berlin Verlag, 1998).
- [7]. Zeidler, *Reichswehr und Rote Armee*, p. 97.
- [8]. Tobias R. Philbin III has written an overview of German-Soviet naval relations, based on German, British, and American (but not Russian) archival documents: *The Lure of Neptune: German-Soviet Naval Collaboration and Ambitions* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994).
- [9]. Ingeborg Fleischhauer recently wrote that "Stalin was highly alarmed at Hitler's rise to power [and]...ended the Red Army's cooperation with the Reichswehr ... Earlier efforts to restore special German-Soviet relations ... were abandoned. German-Soviet relations were deep-frozen, and remained so. Stalin's often-assumed liking for Hitler ... was a myth." See "Soviet Foreign Policy and the Origins of the Hitler-Stalin Pact," in *From Peace to War: Germany, Soviet Russia and the World, 1939-1941* (Providence: Berghahn, 1997), p. 30. (This collection of essays was originally published in German in 1991, under the title *Zwei Wege nach Moskau*.)
- [10]. Stalin's foreign policy aims of the 1930s remain a subject of heated controversy. On the preference for alliance with Germany, see Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above, 1928-1941* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), esp. pp. 228-32, 275, 409-15, 512 and Jiri Hochman, *The Soviet Union and the Failure of Collective Security, 1934-1938* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984). On collective security as the primary aim of Soviet foreign policy, see Jonathan Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe, 1933-39* (London: Macmillan, 1984), esp. pp. 230-1; and Geoffrey K. Roberts, *The Soviet Union and the Origins of the Second World War: Russo-German Relations and the Road to War, 1933-1941* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995).
- [11]. Heinrich Schwendemann, *Die wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit zwischen dem Deutschen Reich und der Sowjetunion von 1939 bis 1941: Alternative zu Hitlers Ostprogramm?* (Berlin: Akademie, 1993); V. Ia. Sipols, "Torgovo-ekonomicheskie otnosheniia mezhdru SSSR i Germaniei v 1939-1941 gg. v svete novykh arkhivnykh dokumentov," *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia* 1997, no. 1: 29-41.
- [12]. Donald Cameron Watt, *How War Came: The Immediate Origins of the Second World War, 1938-1939* (New York: Pantheon, 1989), p. 113.
- [13]. Nekrich, p. 238. On the debate over Suworov's controversial *Icebreaker* thesis, and more broadly on the issue of Soviet offensive preparations and the idea of preventive war, see the last two issues of *Russian Studies in History* (Fall 1997 and Winter 1997-98); and Gabriel' Gorodetskii, *Mif "Ledokola"* (Moscow: Progress-Akademiia, 1995).
- [14]. Gerhard L. Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany*, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Watt, op. cit. Gabriel Gorodetsky's book on prewar Soviet foreign policy is scheduled to appear in 1998 from Yale University Press. See also David M. Glantz, *The Stumbling Colossus: The Red Army in June 1941* (forthcoming from Kansas University Press in 1998) and the collection of essays edited by Gabriel Gorodetsky, *The Soviet Union and the Outbreak of War, 1939-1941* (forthcoming from Frank Cass in 1999).
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