

GERMAN STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR THE
CAMPAIGN IN THE EAST
1939 - 1941

by

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ABSTRACT

Since 1945 a number of historical controversies have arisen over the German leadership in the Second World War. Hitler has been described both as an astute opportunist and as a fanatic relentlessly following a preconceived plan. Thus his decision to turn east in 1941 has been regarded as the result of frustration in the West and also as the ultimate step in a great plan for eastern conquest which he followed throughout his career.

Most of the German military leaders have supported the idea that Hitler had no "war plan." They have depicted themselves as subordinates hopelessly attempting to avert the worst effects of Hitler's irresponsible opportunism and amateurish interference in military strategy. Thus they have attributed most of the blame for the failure of the Blitzkrieg in the East to Hitler's errors.

This study re-examines these controversies in the light of the planning for the invasion of Russia. It shows that Hitler consistently followed a broad plan for the conquest of Lebensraum. Thus in 1940 his decision to attack

Russia even if the war was still unfinished in the West was the result of his determination to fulfil his plan while Germany still held the initiative in Europe.

Most of Hitler's military leaders shared his anti-Bolshevism and favoured a policy which would revive the situation created by the Treaty of Brest Litovsk in 1918. These attitudes made them willing to attack Russia. However, the optimism fostered by their defeat of France and their serious underestimation of Russia's strength caused them to omit careful consideration of the logistic and operational difficulties in the East. While accepting Hitler's more cautious plan they neglected to make the necessary preparations to implement it and instead attempted to adhere to their own simpler plan for a battle of destruction near the frontier followed by a thrust on Moscow. By the time it had become clear that the initial battles had failed to yield a decisive victory it was too late to revive Hitler's plan and the campaign deteriorated into a series of improvised operations.

These served only to show that the Wehrmacht lacked the range and striking power to defeat the Soviet Union by

military force alone. Hitler might have compensated for this deficiency by developing a coalition grand strategy capable of exerting further pressure on Russia from the Far East or the South. But instead, he failed to win the trust and cooperation of the Japanese by concealing his intention of attacking Russia and by directing them and the Italians towards the war against Britain. Furthermore, the Nazi terror and exploitation in Russia precluded the development of a positive policy which might have caused an internal collapse of Stalin's regime.

The basic flaws of Hitler's Lebensraumpolitik as presented in Mein Kampf, his misjudgement of the British and his contempt for the Russians, were major political and grand strategic causes of his ultimate defeat. But on the military strategic level the German generals bear a far greater share of the responsibility for the failure of the Blitzkrieg in the East than has previously been recognised.

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NOTE ON ABBREVIATIONS, TITLES AND
GERMAN WORDS USED IN THE TEXT

In order to avoid the repetition of long titles, the following abbreviations are used:

- OKW - Oberkommando der Wehrmacht,
High Command of the Armed Forces.
- OKH - Oberkommando des Heeres,
High Command of the Army.
- OKM - Oberkommando der Kriegsmarine,
High Command of the Navy.
- OKL - Oberkommando der Luftwaffe,
High Command of the Air Force.

The phrase "the Army leaders" refers to the Commander-in-Chief and the Chief of the General Staff.

The various ranks between Major-General and Colonel-General are abbreviated to "General."

Formation titles are capitalized and given in the following form in the text:

<u>Army</u>	<u>Air Force</u>
Army Group "North"	Air Fleet 2
18 Army	
<u>Panzer</u> Group 4	
XXXVIII Army Corps	VIII Air Corps
4 Infantry Division	

German words are used where there is no exact English equivalent (e.g. Oberquartiermeister) or where they carry a greater significance than their literal translation (e.g. Lebensraum).

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE FOOTNOTES

- DGFP (D) - Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918 - 1945, from the Archives of the German Foreign Ministry, Series D (13 vols.; Washington, 1949).
- FCNA - "Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs, 1939-1945", Brassey's Naval Annual (London/New York, 1948), pp. 25-496.
- FNC - Fuehrer Conferences on Matters Dealing with the German Navy, 1939 to 1945.
Translated and issued by the U.S. Navy Department (9 vols.; Washington, 1946-7).
- Halder KTB - Hans-Adolf Jacobsen (ed.). Generaloberst Halder: Kriegstagebuch (3 vols.; Stuttgart, 1963).
- IMT - Trial of the Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal (42 vols.; Nuremberg, 1947).

KTB OKW, I

- Hans-Adolf Jacobsen (ed.), Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht (Wehrmachtfuehrungsstab), 1 August 1940 - 31 Dezember 1941, Vol. I of Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht (Wehrmachtfuehrungsstab), 1940-1945, General editor, Percy Ernst Schramm (4 vols.; Frankfurt a.M., 1961-1965).

MK

- Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf, trans. James Murphy (London, 1939).

NCA

- Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression (10 vols.; Washington, 1946).

NSR

- Raymond J. Sontag and James S. Beddie (eds.), Nazi-Soviet Relations 1939-1941, from the Archives of the German Foreign Office (Washington, 1948).

USNA

- United States National Archives and Records Service and American Historical Association Committee for the Study of War Documents, Microcopies of German Documents.

- VfZ - Vierteljahrshefte fuer Zeitgeschichte.
- WR - Wehrwissenschaftliche Rundschau.
- ZfG - Zeitschrift fuer Geschichtswissenschaft.

Short titles are repeated when more than one work by the same author is cited.

PREFACE

This work owes much to many people to whom I wish to express my sincere thanks. It began in 1953 when Colonel H. C. Slessor of the British Army encouraged me to use the results of my correspondence with Field Marshal von Rundstedt and discussions with many former officers and men of the Wehrmacht as an operational study of the German campaign in Russia for use at the Staff College, Camberley. In 1962, Professor John S. Conway of the University of British Columbia suggested that this study might form the basis of an analysis of German leadership in the Second World War with particular reference to the relationship between Hitler's policies and German strategy in the East. Generous grants from the Department of History, the University of British Columbia, and the Canada Council made it possible for me to take up this suggestion.

Throughout the period of research and writing, Professors Robert C. Walton and L.E. Hill have, by their advice and guidance, encouraged a critical assessment of the mass of material on this subject which has become

available since the war. Though I have not always agreed with their interpretation of events, Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, Colonel General Franz Halder and Lieutenant General Burkhardt Mueller-Hillebrand have in correspondence and discussions provided great stimulus to this study and valuable insights into the methods and attitudes of the German officers corps.

I wish to express my appreciation to Mr. George E. Blau of the Special Studies Division, Office of the Chief of Military History, United States Army, Heidelberg, and Mr. Hans Burndorfer of the Library of the University of British Columbia who have helped me to obtain much of the essential source material for this study. My thanks are also due to Mrs. John Ippen and to my wife who typed the final drafts.

INTRODUCTION

In this study of German strategic planning for the eastern campaign I have endeavoured to answer four questions. Did Hitler follow a great pre-conceived plan? Why did he decide to invade Russia before ending the war against Britain? What role did the German military leaders play in the planning for the invasion of Russia? Why did the Blitzkrieg fail in Russia?

The best known debate among British historians on Hitler's aims and plans focused mainly upon the events leading up to the Second World War. A.J.P. Taylor and E.M. Robertson asserted that the policy statements made by Hitler in Mein Kampf had little relevance to his foreign policy in practice.¹ This was challenged by Hugh R. Trevor-Roper who saw in Hitler's early writings "a programme of Eastern Colonisation entailing

¹See A.J.P. Taylor, Origins of the Second World War (London, 1964), p. 98. In Taylor's opinion ". . . Statesmen are too absorbed by events to follow a preconceived plan . . . (Hitler's) systems were day-dreams. . . the generalisations of a powerful, but uninstructed, intellect." See also E.M. Robertson, Hitler's Pre-War Policy and Military Plans: 1933-1939 (London, 1963), p. x, 1-4. Robertson asserted that "Hitler seldom looked more than one move ahead; and the view that he had tried to put into operation a programme, carefully formulated in advance, is quite untenable . . ." (p. 1).

a war of conquest against Russia."² The views of British and American historians have been similarly divided over Hitler's wartime policy. One group has regarded the decision to attack Russia as the act of an opportunist recoiling from failure in the West.³ The other has described it as part of a policy of eastern expansion "from which Hitler had never wavered since he wrote Mein Kampf."⁴

A similar division of opinion between historians of East and West Germany has been sharpened by its relevance to the Cold War and to the origins of the situation in which the

²Hugh R. Trevor-Roper, "A.J.P. Taylor, Hitler and the War," Encounter, XVII (July, 1961), 91. Also reprinted in John L. Snell (ed.), Outbreak of the Second World War: Design or Blunder? (Boston, 1962), pp. 88-97. T.W. Mason, "Some Origins of the Second World War," Past and Present, XXIX (1964), 67-87, also criticises Taylor's work on the grounds that it ". . . is not informed by any conception of the distinctive character and role of National Socialism. . ." (p. 68).

³F.H. Hinsley, Hitler's Strategy (Cambridge, 1961), p. 124 ff; Gerald Reitlinger, The House Built on Sand, Conflicts of German Policy in Russia, 1939-1945 (London, 1960), pp. 10-11. Reitlinger's view that the chaos and improvisations of the German administration in Russia were hardly compatible with a great pre-conceived plan was welcomed by A.J.P. Taylor, who stated that "Hitler, it seems clear, had no defined aim when he attacked Russia except victory for its own sake. He simply wanted to win another war." Review of The House Built on Sand by Gerald Reitlinger, The Observer (13 March, 1960). See also Taylor, Origins, p. 24.

⁴Alan Bullock, Hitler: A Study in Tyranny (London, 1962), p. 594; see also pp. 574, 597-8, 622. Hugh R. Trevor-Roper, Introduction, Hitler's War Directives, 1939-1945 (London, 1964),

Germans have found themselves since the war. This historiographical battle was opened by the German generals who in testimonies, interviews, histories and memoirs claimed that though Hitler dominated the higher direction of the war, he lacked the strategic training and ability to develop and follow a consistent war plan.⁵ Many of them viewed the invasion of Russia as a preventive war by which Hitler sought with one blow to avert the consequences of the political and military mistakes made in 1939 when he encouraged Soviet expansion westward and involved Germany in a war with Great Britain which she was unable to conclude.⁶ They also blamed

pp. xii-xvii; Alexander Dallin, The German Rule in Russia (London, 1957), p. 7 ff.; John R. Bengtson, Nazi War Aims: The Plans for the Thousand Year Reich (Augustana, 1962), pp. 11-12, 16 ff.; Ihor Kamenetsky, Secret Nazi Plans for Eastern Europe. A Study of Lebensraumpolitik (New York, 1961), pp. 32, 33-5; William L. Shirer, The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich (New York, 1962), p. 1044. All of these works link Hitler's decision to attack Russia with his statements on foreign policy in Mein Kampf.

⁵Erich von Manstein, Lost Victories, trans. Antony G. Powell (London, 1958), pp. 154, 169; Franz Halder, Hitler as Warlord, trans. Paul Findlay (London, 1950), pp. 17, 22 ff.; Peter Bor, Gespraeche mit Halder (Wiesbaden, 1950), p. 199; B.H. Liddell Hart, On the Other Side of the Hill (London, 1951), pp. 468-9.

⁶See Bor, p. 195; Walter Goerlitz (ed.), Keitel, Verbrecher oder Offizier? (Goettingen, 1961), p. 245; Manstein, pp. 181-2.

Hitler's bungling interference for the subsequent failure of the campaign in Russia.⁷

East German historians and their Soviet colleagues strongly condemned these interpretations as a blatant attempt by the "Fascist" generals to revive militarism in West Germany by freeing their caste from responsibility for the crimes and failures of Nazi aggression.⁸ They countered with works which depicted the German attack as the ultimate step in an aggressive, expansionist plan conceived, not by Hitler alone, but by the "monopoly capitalists and militarists" behind him.⁹ They pointed out that the decision to strike

⁷ See Kurt Dittmar, Introduction to Karlheinrich Rieker, Ein Mann verliert einen Weltkrieg (Frankfurt a.M., 1955), pp. 5, 8.

⁸ See Andreas Hillgruber and Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, Introduction to Boris S. Telpuchowski, Die Sowjetische Geschichte des Grossen Vaterlaendischen Krieges, 1941-1945, trans. Robert Frhr. von Freytag-Loringhaven, et al. (Frankfurt a.M., 1961), pp. 51E, 54-5E. See also P.A. Nikolaev, "Versuche zur Rehabilitierung des deutschen Militarismus in der modernen buergerlichen Historiographie," ZfG, X(1962), 50.

⁹ Telpuchowski, pp. 64-5E. See also Johannes Zuckertort, "Der deutsche Militarismus und die Legende von Praeventivkrieg Hitler-deutschlands gegen die Sowjetunion," Der deutsche Imperialismus und der Zweite Weltkrieg. Materialien der Wissenschaftlichen Konferenz der Historiker der DDR und der UdSSR, 14-19 Dezember 1959 in Berlin (Berlin, 1960-1963), I, 145 ff. Gerhard Hass, "Hans-Adolf Jacobsens Konzeption einer

eastwards was made immediately after the fall of France, and that German operations against Britain across the Channel and in the Mediterranean were mere side-shows.¹⁰ Furthermore, they attributed the failure of the campaign in Russia not to Hitler's interference nor to the material weaknesses in the Wehrmacht but to the political, social and economic solidarity of the Soviet people.¹¹

In West Germany a school of military historians attempted to resolve some of the conflicts between the extremes of the Communist and German apologist interpretations.¹² They rejected the "legend of preventive war" and agreed that the German motive was aggressive expansionism.¹³ But they did

Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges," ZfG, XII (1965), 1163; P. Zhilin, "Military History and Modern Times," Soviet Military Review, X (1966), 37-8.

¹⁰V. Ryabov, "Reflections on the Past War," Soviet Military Review, VI (1966), 35. See also Gerhard Foerster, Olaf Groehler, Guenther Paulus, "Zum Verhaeltnis von Kriegszielen und Kriegsplanung des faschistischen deutschen Imperialismus," ZfG, XXII (1964), 943-5.

¹¹See Zhilin, pp. 36-8; Hass, pp. 1158-59.

¹²The leading historians of this school are Percy Ernst Schramm, Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, Andreas Hillgruber and Walter Hubatsch. Their approach to the historiography of the Second World War is indicated in Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, "The Second World War as a Problem in Historical Research," World Politics, XVI (July 1964), 620-41. See also "Die amtliche militaergeschichtliche Forschung in Westdeutschland," ZfG, X (1962), 1669-71.

¹³Jacobsen, "The Second World War. . .", p. 631. See also Goerlitz, Keitel, p. 245; Andreas Hillgruber, Hitlers

not accept completely the idea that the decision to attack Russia was the result of a preconceived plan. They presented it rather as a desperate strategic expedient by which Hitler attempted to cut the "Gordian knot" of the military, political, and economic problems resulting from the inconclusive nature of the campaign in the West and the "ad hoc" strategy followed between August and November 1940.¹⁴

Much of the disagreement between these various schools on the question of whether Hitler followed long-term plans can be reduced to differences of opinion on what constitutes a plan. A.J.P. Taylor, for instance, regards a plan as "something which is prepared and worked out in detail."¹⁵ He rejects most of Hitler's writings and statements as ". . . day-dreams the generalisations of a powerful but unstructured intellect."¹⁶ Similarly, many of the former German

Strategie, Politik and Kriegfuehrung, 1940-1941 (Frankfurt a.M., 1965), p. 533.

¹⁴ Halder, KTB, II, viii; KTB OKW, I, 67E. See also Walter Hubatsch and Percy E. Schramm, Die deutsche militaerische Fuehrung in der Kriegswende (Cologne/Opladen, 1964), pp. 73-5.

¹⁵ Taylor, Origins, p. 24.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 98.

officers and the archivists of the Wehrmacht who now occupy an influential place in the West German school of military history tend to regard Hitler's rambling writings and speeches about Lebensraum as too vague and fantastic to be accepted as the basis of a war plan or a grand strategy.¹⁷

However, the most important consideration is not whether the soldiers or post-war historians consider the ideas of Mein Kampf to constitute a plan, but whether Hitler did so himself. His attitude on this subject was clear. In Mein Kampf he criticised the foreign policies of the Kaiser's Empire and of the German Republic for their lack of any planned approach to the problems confronting the nation.¹⁸ In his second book he was even more emphatic and warned that if Germany failed to set a clear foreign policy aim ". . . aimlessness on a large scale will cause planlessness in particulars. This planlessness will gradually turn us into a second Poland in Europe."¹⁹ The pursuit of a fixed political

¹⁷ See KTB OKW, I, 42E; Manstein, p. 154; Rudolf Bogatsch, "Politische und Militaerische Probleme nach dem Frankreichfeldzug," Vollmacht des Gewissens (2 vols.; Frankfurt a.M./Berlin, 1965), II, 28 ff.

¹⁸ MK, pp. 521-2. See also Werner Maser, Hitlers Mein Kampf (Munich, 1966), p. 177.

¹⁹ Adolf Hitler, Hitler's Secret Book, trans. Salvator Attanasio (New York, 1961), p. 143.

goal which he advocated in the subsequent pages was intended to prevent such a fate, and thus was evidently regarded by Hitler as a plan.

He was not without justification. For planning does not need to conform to rigid procedures, nor does it have to involve detail. Indeed, planning in the realm of long-term policy and strategy can seldom include detail since flexibility is essential to deal with unforeseeable opportunities.²⁰ Hitler sought to combine such flexibility with clarity of purpose, to use opportunist methods for the attainment of a fixed goal. He regarded this as a revival of Bismarck's techniques, which he described as

. . . a mastery of specific momentary situations with an eye on a visualized political aim. . .

In pursuit of this aim Bismarck utilized every opportunity and worked through the diplomatic art as long as it promised success; he threw the sword into the scales if force alone was in a position to bring about a decision.²¹

²⁰See Maurice Matloff and Edwin M. Snell, Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1941-1942 (Washington, 1953), p. ix. "National planning in this field (of strategy) extends from the simple statement of risks and choices to the full analysis of an immense undertaking. Strategic decisions are rarely made and military operations are rarely conducted precisely in the terms worked out by the planning staffs. . ."

²¹Hitler, Secret Book, p. 53. See also MK, p. 558.

Since such methods embraced both civil and military spheres of action it is necessary to examine Hitler's planning in broad terms. In this study the process of planning is regarded as comprising three stages: the critical analysis of the situation; the definition of aims; and the selection and organisation of the means by which the aims are to be attained. Since the executors do not require the first stage, the final plan embodies the last two stages. The last stage may not be fully completed until circumstances present a favourable opportunity or demand for the implementation of the plan.²²

Strategic planning cannot be restricted to purely military terms, because it is conducted at two levels, grand strategic and military strategic. Grand strategy, which the Germans called Wehrpolitik or military policy, is the coordination and direction of "all resources of a nation, or band of nations towards the attainment of the political object of the war - the goal defined by national policy."²³ Thus grand

²² According to Matloff and Snell ". . . planning, which may at times seem superficial and futile even to the staffs, is the principal instrument by which political leadership arrives at an accomodation between the compulsions of politics and the realities of war, exercises control over military operations and allocates the means necessary to support them" (p. ix).

²³ Basil H. Liddell Hart, Strategy (New York, 1954), pp. 335-6.

strategy comprises political and economic considerations as well as military ones. Pure or military strategy, which was known in the Wehrmacht as Kriegsfuehrung — "war direction" or "military leadership", is "the art of distributing and applying military means to fulfil the ends of policy."²⁴ But even here ideas which fail to conform to procedures and jargon of military institutions should not be excluded. In the 1930's Hitler showed far greater understanding of many of the psychological and technological factors influencing military strategy than most of the professional soldiers, who, he complained, had erected war "into a secret science . . . surrounded with momentous solemnity."²⁵ Nevertheless, he admitted the need for an officer corps to conduct the mechanical task of converting military strategic thought into systems and procedures,²⁶ plans and orders culminating in military action: operations, or the deployment and movement

²⁴Ibid., p. 335.

²⁵Hermann Rauschning, Hitler Speaks (London, 1939), p.16.

²⁶The usual stages of German military planning were: (1) the memorandum (Denkschrift), (2) the operational study (Operationsstudie), (3) the draft plan (Operationsentwurf), (4) the command exercise or war game (Kriegsspiel), (5) the deployment directive or plan (Aufmarschanweisung).

of forces; and tactics, or the employment of weapons in fighting.

To trace the development of German planning for the eastern campaign from its political origin through the levels of grand and military strategy I have first re-examined the policy statements on this topic made by Hitler in his own writings, Mein Kampf, and his second book which was published only after the war, his conversations as recorded by Hermann Rauschning and Martin Bormann,²⁷ and in his speeches, especially those given to restricted audiences of military leaders between 1933 and 1941. The war directives which Hitler issued to the three services²⁸ and to the war industry²⁹

²⁷ The authenticity of Rauschning's work is confirmed by comparison between his account of Hitler's conversations between 1932 and 1934 and statements made by Hitler after the publication of Rauschning's book. Ideas, sentences and phrases are frequently repeated in almost identical form, in Hitler's secret speeches and in his later conversations. See Hugh R. Trevor-Roper, "The Mind of Adolph Hitler," Introduction, Hitler's Secret Conversations, trans. Norman Cameron and R.H. Stevens (New York, 1961), p. x. This collection of notes is translated from the Bormann-Vermerke in the possession of Francois Genoud of Switzerland.

²⁸ Walter Hubatsch (ed.), Hitlers Weisungen fuer die Kriegfuehrung, 1939-1945, Dokumente des Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (Munich, 1965).

²⁹ Georg Thomas, Geschichte der deutschen Wehr- und Ruestungswirtschaft (1918-1943/45), Schriften des Bundesarchivs, ed. Wolfgang Birkenfeld (Boppard am Rhein, 1966), p. 402 ff.

give a valuable outline of his grand strategy in practice, especially if they are related to the records of Hitler's military conferences and verbal orders described in the War Diaries of the Armed Forces High Command and of Colonel General Franz Halder, the Chief of the General Staff between 1938 and 1942.³⁰ These War Diaries also reveal the progress of the military strategic planning for the attack on Russia. However, it must be pointed out that General Halder's volumes were not written as diaries but were note-books of short-hand entries summarizing each day's work and recording matters requiring further attention. These entries are abbreviated, often tantalisingly vague and occasionally misleading. Even when opinions of situations are recorded it is sometimes difficult to make out whether they are those of Halder or of someone else. Dr. Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, the editor of the published version, has endeavoured with General Halder's help, to clarify such entries. But his footnotes sometimes tend to give an interpretation more favourable to the reputation of the General Staff and its former chief than is justified by

³⁰ Percy Ernst Schramm (ed.), Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (Wehrmachtfuehrungsstab), 1940-1945 (4 vols.; Frankfurt a. M., 1961-1965). Hans-Adolf Jacobsen (ed.), Generaloberst Halder: Kriegstagebuch (3 vols.; Stuttgart, 1963).

the entries themselves or by evidence from other sources. Nevertheless, Halder's daily notes provide a useful background to the documents on the campaign in Russia contained in the files of the German military staffs microfilmed by the American Historical Association and General Services Administration. Thanks to the kindness of Mr. George E. Blau, Director of the Special Studies Division, Office of the Chief of Military History, the United States Army, I was able also to use the manuscript memoranda and strategic studies written by German officers shortly after the war. To these were added the personal comments and letters from the late Field Marshal von Rundstedt, Field Marshal von Manstein, Colonel General Halder and Lieutenant General Mueller-Hillebrand.

After a careful examination of this material I have concluded that Hitler followed a broad plan, albeit an ill-conceived and erroneous one. It had as its main aim the winning of Lebensraum, "living space" for settlement and exploitation in the East by means of political opportunism and the concept of Blitzkrieg, short wars waged against an isolated opponent "with surprise effects and . . . superior technical weapons."³¹ Although Hitler gambled that he would

³¹Thomas, p. 8.

avoid it, the outbreak of a general European war in 1939 was the result of his determination to adhere to the aims of his great plan even though the conditions for their successful achievement had not been fulfilled. Until 1938 Hitler had hoped that it would not be necessary to fight Great Britain in order to win freedom to expand in central and eastern Europe. Thus when the Western Powers declared war in 1939 Germany was ill-prepared for warfare directed against the British Isles on the sea or even in the air. In the summer of 1940 Hitler knew he could defeat the British only if their nerve had been so cracked by the fall of France that they would succumb to a further demonstration of force. An analysis of German strategic planning in the second half of 1940 will show that he was willing to commit the Wehrmacht to such a demonstration only because he had time and forces available in 1940. But in 1941 he was not prepared to postpone his great task of conquering Russia in order to first complete the defeat of Britain.

The contemporary documents related to the German planning in 1940 and 1941 indicate that although the German military leaders played a subordinate role they were neither so ill-informed of Hitler's aggressive intentions in the East

nor so critical of the decision to strike or the methods to be used there as their post-war accounts assert. The swift victory over France caused them to swing from pessimism and grudging acceptance of the Blitzkrieg doctrine to a mood of surprisingly excessive optimism. It will be shown too that persistence of this mood throughout the period of detailed planning for the campaign in the East accounts to a great degree for the failure of the Blitzkrieg in Russia.

CHAPTER I

THE BASES OF HITLER'S STRATEGY -

LEBENSRAUMPOLITIK AND BLITZKRIEG

Lebensraumpolitik and Blitzkrieg in Theory and Practice

Hitler's early policy statements all indicate that he had a set of aims and methods which he regarded as a grand strategic plan. Furthermore, in the early 1930's he began to express definite ideas on the role and form of military strategy to be employed by Germany under his leadership. His grand strategy was designed for the conquest of Lebensraum in the East. His military strategic ideas contributed to the development of the Blitzkrieg.

In practice both Hitler's Lebensraumpolitik and his Blitzkrieg failed through the flaws contained in his original concept. He misjudged the attitude of the British towards Germany, he underestimated the strength of the Soviet State, and he wrongly assessed what could be achieved by military means with the resources and leadership available to him. Thus the conditions he envisaged for the attainment of his aims were not fulfilled. Nevertheless, Hitler refused to

abandon them, and his foreign policy and strategy were shaped by his attempts to adhere to the aims of his pre-conceived plans, even though the means left to him were grossly inadequate. His career is remarkable for the fact that by efforts of will, by bluff and risk-taking he came very close to the successful conquest of Lebensraum to which he had aspired as an almost unknown political prisoner in 1924.

The Concept of Lebensraum

Although Lebensraum can be literally translated as "living space", it had for Hitler's Germany far more complex significance. It provided the propaganda of the Nazi Party with a myth capable of evoking in the masses ". . . a devotion which. . . inspired them, often a kind of hysteria which. . . urged them to action."¹ In contrast to the restricted and mundane policies of the Weimar Republic, Lebensraum summoned up romantic visions of the "Germanic crusade", "the road formerly trodden by the Teutonic Knights"² and the "Drang

¹MK, p. 294. (The abbreviations used in the footnotes are as listed on p. x). See also Rauschnig, pp. 229-30; Bullock, p. 339. Cf. Georges Sorel, Reflections on Violence, trans. T.E. Hulme (Glencoe, Illinois, 1950), p. 145. Sorel pointed out that every great social movement finds its driving force in "a body of images" or a myth.

²MK, p. 132.

nach Osten". For those who sought a more tangible goal, Lebensraum offered "soil for the German plough",³ a cure for the economic ills of the day and for the worse problems of overpopulation predicted for the future. A vast audience at the Nuremberg Rally in 1936 was told by Hitler that:

If we had at our disposal the incalculable wealth and stores of raw material of the Ural Mountains and the unending fertile plains of the Ukraine to be exploited under National Socialist leadership. . . our German people would swim in plenty.⁴

To the military leaders of Germany such gains offered not only autarky but also the re-establishment of the buffer states which Ludendorff had fleetingly obtained by the Treaty of Brest Litovsk in 1918. To Hitler Lebensraum offered even more. It was a means of satisfying his lust for struggle and power which expressed itself in his urge to exterminate the Jews and his desire to seize and defend a great Germanic Empire. In 1932 he explained his eastern policy to a small circle of party comrades as follows:

I do not follow General Ludendorff nor anyone else, . . . I am not thinking in the first instance of economical matters. Certainly we need the wheat, oil and the ores. . . But our true object is to set

³Ibid.

⁴Max Domarus, Hitler: Reden und Proklamationen, 1932-1945 (2 vols.; Wuerzburg, 1963), I, 642-3.

up our rule for all time, and to anchor it so firmly that it will stand for a thousand years.⁵

Thus the concept of Lebensraum was a panacea. Its acquisition was to restore World Power status to the German race by assuring it of sufficient territory, foodstuffs and raw materials to make it economically self-supporting and so militarily and politically impregnable.⁶ But Hitler's Lebensraumpolitik had no sound economic or agronomic foundations. Its economic goals, geographical limits, and military objectives were expressed only in vague terms. Dr. Goebbels remarked cryptically in April 1940: "Today we say 'Lebensraum'. Each can make of that what he likes. What we want we shall know when the time is right."⁷ Hitler had no wish to set limits to his aims, nor to define the difficulties involved in their attainment. The imagination of the masses was to be fired by racial, geopolitical and romantic myths, not repelled by laying stress upon the realities of war which Lebensraumpolitik clearly involved in both its preparatory

⁵Rauschning, pp. 47-8.

⁶MK, p. 548; see also pp. 124, 520. See also Hitler, Secret Book, pp. 145, 195, 209-10; DGFP(D), I, 31-2; IMT, XXVI, 789-PS, 329-30; Bengtson, pp. 18-20.

⁷Hillgruber, Strategie, p. 22.

and final stages.⁸ In the second paragraph of Mein Kampf Hitler stated that "the tears of war will produce the daily bread for the generations to come",⁹ but he usually preferred to use romantic phrases like "the German sword" or the euphemisms "struggle" or "conflict" instead of the plain term "war".¹⁰

A war of conquest against Russia was for Hitler the main means of fulfilling his desire for Lebensraum. Not only was she the possessor of vast territories rich in resources, but she was also the centre of Bolshevism, which Hitler regarded as a Jewish plot for world domination.¹¹ Thus the defeat of Russia offered him the opportunity to achieve simultaneously both his economic and ideological aims. Furthermore, Bolshevism, Hitler considered, had so weakened the internal structure of Russia and deprived her of external allies that she was "ripe for dissolution".¹² Thus eastern

⁸ See MK, pp. 557, 570-71; Hitler, Secret Book, pp. 83, 145, 195, 209-10; IMT, XXVI, 789-PS, p. 330.

⁹ MK, p. 11.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 132, 557.

¹¹ MK, p. 562.

¹² Ibid., p. 557.

expansion could be achieved without the long and ghastly battles or fatal coalition warfare which had resulted from the Kaiser's simultaneous conflicts with Russia, France and the British Empire. A "continental policy" of expansion into adjacent territory over land, was not only better suited to Germany's military experience as a land power, but would also enable her to avoid a further conflict with Great Britain.¹³ Indeed, Hitler asserted in Mein Kampf, the British should even welcome a revival of German strength if it was used to counter the threat of Bolshevism and check the further growth of French influence.¹⁴ "A last decisive struggle with France", he stated, was necessary to "make it possible for our people finally to expand in another quarter".¹⁵

Before the preliminary war against France or the conquest of territory in the East could begin, the internal consolidation of the Reich had to be completed.¹⁶ This involved the winning of power in Germany, the psychological and

¹³Ibid., p. 126 ff. See also Trevor-Roper, Hitler's Secret Conversations, pp. xvi-vii.

¹⁴MK, p. 526.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 570-71; see also pp. 564.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 11, 552-3.

material rearmament and unification of Greater Germany, including Austria and adjacent areas occupied by German speaking people. Then Germany would be capable of making the alliances with Italy and Great Britain which would enable her to destroy French political and military power.¹⁷ These alliances would also lead to the collapse of the Little Entente and expose Czechoslovakia, Rumania, Poland, and the Baltic States to German domination. The way would then be open for the advance into Russia.

The Concept of Blitzkrieg

This sequence of events was the basis of Hitler's grand strategic plan. It depended for its success upon the avoidance of a great coalition war. There was no doubt that wars would have to be fought, probably against France, perhaps against some of the eastern states if they refused to become vassals, and ultimately against the Soviet Union. Thus Hitler's grand strategy was based upon a series of local wars, each to win an easily attainable objective in a short, swift decisive campaign.¹⁸ This concept, which Hitler described

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 132, 524-32, 536, 542-45, 564.

¹⁸ Rauschning, p. 17 ff.

in the early thirties, was developed into what became known as the Blitzkrieg.

To Hitler the Blitzkrieg was not just a military concept, a tactical application of mechanical equipment to avoid the futilities of positional warfare. It was designed to avoid a repetition of the political, economic and psychological strains of the First World War. Unlike Ludendorff whose concept of total war was a coordination of all aspects of national life primarily for an enormous military effort,¹⁹ Hitler believed that Germany would ". . . never be able to proceed against the forces now mobilized in Europe by relying only on military means."²⁰ "Why", he asked,

should I demoralise the enemy by military means if I can do so better and more cheaply in other ways?
 The place of artillery preparation for frontal attack by the infantry in trench warfare will in future be taken by revolutionary propaganda, to break down the enemy psychologically before the armies begin to function at all.²¹

¹⁹Erich Ludendorff, Der Totale Krieg (Munich, 1935), p. 10. See also Liddell Hart, Strategy, pp. 226-7; Chapter IV, n. 28 of this study.

²⁰Hitler, Secret Book, p. 128.

²¹Rauschnig, pp. 17, 19.

When diplomatic pressure, subversion and propaganda had reduced the enemy's will to resist he would launch a swift overwhelming blow by the "largest air fleet" and by "mass armies" spearheaded by "highly qualified special formations."²² Such a war, he predicted, would be "unbelievably bloody and grim", but at the same time it would be "the kindest, because it will be the shortest."²³ Much would depend upon the timing of the attack and this decision Hitler was determined to reserve for himself. "There is only one most favourable moment", he told his party comrades. "I shall not miss it. I shall bend all my energies towards bringing it about. That is my mission."²⁴

The Leadership of the Wehrmacht

Hitler regarded his own personal, direct leadership as a key to future military success. He rejected the concept of a committee of political, economic and military planners to develop grand strategy. Such methods, he stated in his Leadership Principle, reduced the leader to "the executor of

²²Ibid., p. 17, 158. Since Hitler envisaged expansion over land he did not require large naval forces. See MK, p. 132; Hitler, Secret Book, p. 145.

²³Rauschning, p. 21.

²⁴Ibid.

the will and opinion of others."²⁵ The role of committees and military staffs, like that of all "intermediary organizations" in the Nazi State, was

to transmit a certain idea which originated in the brain of one individual to a multitude of people and to supervise the manner in which this idea is being put into practice.²⁶

Hitler acknowledged his need for the officer corps to provide the Wehrmacht with superior "military qualities",²⁷ but the expertise of the generals made them incapable of exercising imaginative leadership on the highest level. They were, he said, "sterile . . . imprisoned in the coils of their technical knowledge."²⁸ He, on the other hand, was a "creative genius . . . outside the circle of experts" with "the gift of reducing all problems to their simplest foundations."²⁹ As such, he predicted in 1932, he would not allow himself "to be ordered about by 'commanders-in-chief'."³⁰

²⁵MK, p. 300.

²⁶Ibid., p. 301.

²⁷Hitler, Secret Book, p. 85.

²⁸Rauschnig, p. 16.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid., p. 20.

During the early 1930's Hitler made efforts to ensure that the German military leaders were fully informed of his plans and of their role in them. On 2 December 1932 he wrote a letter to Walther von Reichenau, then a Colonel and Chief of Staff of the 1st Military District, East Prussia, outlining the initial internal phase of his plan.³¹ His first policy statement to the senior commanders of the Army and Navy on 3 February 1933, was couched in similar terms, but extended to the question of how Germany's renewed political and military power was to be used. "Perhaps," he suggested, "the winning of new export possibilities, and - much better - the conquest of new living space in the East and its ruthless Germanisation."³² A year later, on 28 February 1934, Hitler confirmed further elements of the plan proposed in Mein Kampf when he told the leaders of the Army, the S.A. and S.S. that the Wehrmacht should be ready for defensive war in five years and offensive war within eight years. It would be necessary, he warned, to deliver "short decisive blows first in the West and then in the East."³³

³¹Robertson, p. 4.

³²Walter Hofer, Der Nationalsozialismus. Dokumente, 1933-1945 (Frankfurt a.M., 1957), p. 180.

³³Robert J. O'Neill, The German Army and the Nazi Party, 1933-1939 (London, 1966), pp. 39-41, 127-8; See also Karl Dietrich Bracher, Wolfgang Sauer, Gerhard Schulz,

Lebensraumpolitik in Practice, 1933 - 1939

The fact that events turned out differently from what Hitler suggested in his writings and speeches was due not to any weakening of his determination to carry out his plan, but rather to the fallacies on which his plan was based. From the start Hitler's Lebensraumpolitik contained two errors of judgement which limited his chance of success: first, the conviction that Britain would be prepared to abandon her traditional "Balance of Power" policy and tolerate a German hegemony in Europe; second, the belief that for racial and political reasons the Soviet Union was a rotten structure on the point of collapse. These two errors persistently marred Hitler's attempts to adhere to his pre-conceived plans and were ultimately major reasons for his failure and defeat. Nevertheless, there was enough crude logic in his judgement to enable him to follow his "grim erroneous system"³⁴ with remarkable consistency and success between 1928 and 1937.

Die Nationalsozialistische Machtergreifung (Cologne, 1960), p. 749; Erich von Manstein, Aus einem Soldatenleben, 1887-1939 (Bonn, 1958), p. 185.

³⁴Trevor-Roper, Hitler's Secret Conversations, p. xxvi.

Hitler's first foreign policy success, the Non-Aggression Pact with Poland, reduced the danger of outside interference at "the most dangerous time. . . during the build-up of the Wehrmacht."³⁵ It also brought about an improvement in German-Polish relations which enabled the Nazi leaders to suggest the possibility of a "concerted march against Russia" which would fulfill Polish aspirations for an outlet to the Black Sea.³⁶ Meanwhile, throughout the mid-1930's the Soviet state showed encouraging signs of the "ferment of decomposition" which Hitler had predicted in Mein Kampf³⁷ as Stalin conducted purges of staggering size and ruthlessness. According to the accounts given by former members of the German intelligence services, Hitler helped to extend the purges into the Red Army by permitting Reinhard Heydrich, then head of the Sicherheitsdienst, to send partially falsified documents incriminating Marshal Tuchachevsky

³⁵ Hofer, p. 180.

³⁶ Poland, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Official Documents concerning Polish-German and Polish-Soviet Relations, 1933-1939 (Polish White Book) (London, 1940), pp. 23-7. See also Hans Roos (Otto Meissner), Polen und Europa, Studien zur Politischen Aussenpolitik, 1931-1939 (Tuebingen, 1957), p. 209.

³⁷ MK, p. 557.

and other Soviet generals into Stalin's hands.³⁸

Hitler's policies in the West also developed well at first. In 1935 he laid the foundations for an improvement in relations with Great Britain by sending von Ribbentrop to London to sign the Anglo-German Naval Agreement. This limited the German fleet to 35 per cent of that of Britain as a demonstration of German determination not to repeat the Kaiser's error of challenging the British Empire. In 1936 Hitler remilitarised the Rhineland and in 1938 he achieved the Anschluss with Austria. But neither Hitler's naval gesture nor the sympathy he had won in the West with his anti-Bolshevist policy was enough to persuade the British to acquiesce in further revision of the territorial boundaries of Central and Eastern Europe without negotiation. Their policy helped to frustrate Hitler's hopes of bringing Bohemia, Moravia and Poland under German domination "in one campaign."³⁹ Instead, much to his subsequent regret,⁴⁰ he

³⁸ See Walter Schellenberg, The Schellenberg Memoirs, Trans. Louis Hagen (London, 1956), p. 46 ff; Wilhelm Hoettl, The Secret Front, trans. R.H. Stevens (London, 1953), p. 79 ff.

³⁹ IMT, XXVI, 789-PS, 329.

⁴⁰ Francois Genoud (ed.), The Testament of Adolf Hitler: The Hitler-Bormann Documents, February-April 1945, trans. R.H. Stevens (London, 1961), pp. 58, 84.

was forced to settle for the Sudetenland and to postpone the seizure of the rest of Bohemia and Moravia until the following spring. Furthermore, the attitude of the British during the Munich crisis strengthened Hitler's growing conviction that they would not dissociate themselves from France. War with Britain was neither desirable nor inevitable but the danger of it was great enough to justify major changes. Thus on 27 January 1939 he finally abandoned the naval policy which he had advocated and followed since the 1920's and gave the expansion of the German fleet top economic priority.⁴¹ Admiral Raeder's great construction programme which Hitler approved in February 1939 was based upon the assumption that war with Britain would not take place "before about 1944."⁴²

In the meantime, Hitler was determined to complete the "nucleus" in Central Europe, which, he had stated in 1932, "will not only make us invincible, but will assure us

⁴¹IMT, XXXV, 855-D, 597. See also Erich Raeder, My Life (U.S. Naval Institute, Annapolis, 1960), p. 158; Anthony Martienssen, Hitler and his Admirals (London, 1948), pp. 12-14; Rolf Benzel, Die deutsche Flottenpolitik von 1933 bis 1939. Beiheft 3 der Marine-Rundschau (Berlin and Frankfurt a.M., 1958), p. 53.

⁴²Martienssen, p. 19.

once and for all time the decisive ascendancy over all the European nations".⁴³ It was a difficult task, for it involved the extension of his domination over the rest of Czechoslovakia, part of Poland and the Baltic States without provoking a general war.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, he was again initially successful. In March 1939 the frightened and ailing President Hacha delivered Bohemia and Moravia into his hands, Slovakia accepted the status of a vassal state, and Lithuania ceded the city of Memel to Germany. Throughout the winter of 1938-9 Hitler exerted diplomatic pressure in Warsaw in order to convert Poland into a German satellite for a future war against Russia. Since Munich he had seen that he might also need ". . . to establish an acceptable relationship with Poland in order to fight first against the West."⁴⁵ But the Polish leaders refused to make territorial concessions or to accede to the Anti-Comintern Pact. In doing so they gained the support of Britain and France, and

⁴³Rauschnig, p. 46.

⁴⁴Ibid. Cf. IMT, XXVI, 789-PS, 328: "The next step was Bohemia, Moravia and Poland."

⁴⁵IMT, XXVI, 789-PS, 339.

"the Polish problem" became "inseparable from the conflict with the West."⁴⁶ This necessitated a major change in Hitler's grand strategy because, as he warned his military leaders on 23 May 1939, Poland saw "danger in a German victory in the West" and would "attempt to rob us of our victory."⁴⁷ He, therefore, decided "to attack Poland at the first suitable opportunity"⁴⁸ in the hope of destroying her before the Western Powers' rearmament programmes had given them the strength to intervene. He knew that it would be a

⁴⁶ IMT, XXXVII, 079-L, 549; Leonidas Hill, "Three Crises, 1938-39," Journal of Contemporary History, III, 1 (1968), p. 126, points out that there are a number of interpretations of Hitler's declaration in April and May 1939. Walter Hofer, Die Enfesselung des Zweiten Weltkrieges (Frankfurt a.M., 1964), pp. 428-9, 440, considers that Hitler wanted war. Taylor, Origins, p. 304, states that Hitler's speech on 23 May, was intended only to impress and frighten his generals. This is an exaggeration. Hitler presented them with the worst possibilities because war is the business of generals and they should be prepared for the worst. In fact, they failed to react to his warnings and were caught unprepared for the conflict in the West. The most balanced assessment is that of Bullock, pp. 510-11, who accepts the explanation Hitler gave his generals. He wanted a localised war with Poland, because it served his "continental expansion eastwards" and the needs of a possible future war with Britain. But he also wanted "to keep and exploit his freedom of diplomatic manoeuvre during the summer."

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

gamble and that Germany might be confronted by an alliance between France, Britain and Russia. But in such a case, he asserted confidently, he "would be constrained to attack Britain and France with a few annihilating blows."⁴⁹ He attempted to set the generals an example in resolution by telling them that:

The principle whereby one evades solving the problem by adapting oneself to circumstances, is inadmissible. Circumstances must rather be adapted to aims.⁵⁰

Thus he had no intention of abandoning the aims of his Lebensraumpolitik and in this address he returned repeatedly to this old familiar theme.

The adaption of circumstances to aims involved on this occasion the isolation of Poland. This Hitler said would be "decisive" and he gave a hint of the radical changes in foreign policy it might involve when he explained that:

Economic relations with Russia are possible only if political relations have improved. A cautious trend is appearing in (Soviet) press comment. It is not impossible that Russia will show herself to be disinterested in the destruction of Poland.⁵¹

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 550.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 548.

⁵¹Op. cit.

Nevertheless, the political, ideological and strategic effects of establishing a rapprochement with the Soviet Union were a bitter pill to swallow. Hoping desperately for some other means of isolating Poland from the West, Hitler delayed taking this step until the eleventh hour, and then rushed von Ribbentrop to Moscow with unconcealed haste. The price of Soviet cooperation was accordingly high. Hitler was forced to give his arch-enemy, Stalin, the prestige of regaining territories lost since the Civil and Polish Wars. Furthermore, the acquisition of bases and the shortening of the Soviet western frontier greatly strengthened the defences of the Soviet Union against a future German attack. To make matters worse, the new pact with Russia did not prevent Britain and France from declaring war when Germany invaded Poland.

Recalling these events in 1944, Hitler stated that "the disastrous thing about this war is the fact that for Germany it began both too soon and too late."⁵² He was not fully prepared for the struggle in the West in 1939, and he regretted that he had not consolidated his position in

⁵²Testament of Adolf Hitler, p. 58.

Eastern Europe by invading Czechoslovakia in 1938. Instead at Munich he had lost "a unique opportunity of easily and swiftly winning a war that was in any case inevitable"⁵³ while the Western Powers were still hesitant.

Nevertheless, Hitler did not allow the declaration of war by Britain and France to deter him from his course. Though he could not completely avoid the disadvantages of his self-imposed weakness at sea, he determined to make the maximum use of his land and air forces to destroy his enemies in the West as a prelude to expansion in the East. He was encouraged in this decision by the success of the Blitzkrieg in Poland. But this doctrine, like his Lebensraumpolitik, contained deep-seated flaws which ultimately contributed to his defeat.

The Development of the Blitzkrieg, 1933-1939

Like his foreign policy, Hitler's rearmament policy in practice also fell short of his plans. His errors in this case were a misjudgement of his Army leaders and an under-estimation of the economic difficulties involved in his concept of warfare. Thus the doctrine of Blitzkrieg which

⁵³Ibid., p. 84.

formed the basis of German military strategy in the first three years of the Second World War was not the fully pre-conceived and carefully prepared system which the propaganda of both Germany and her opponents depicted.⁵⁴ The Wehrmacht in 1939 had neither the material strength nor the unanimity of leadership which Hitler had expected, and he never forgave the Army leaders for their part in causing these deficiencies.⁵⁵ In fact much of the blame lay with Hitler himself and was due to his blind disregard for the fiscal and economic difficulties involved in his policies.

Hitler's original concept of a new form of warfare was designed to avoid a repetition not only of the tactical and psychological blunders but also the economic mistakes of

⁵⁴ Alan S. Milward in The German Economy at War (London, 1965), p. 11, gives the impression that the Blitzkrieg was developed as "a whole idea and system". But the contributing factors which he describes formed part of an evolutionary process rather than a planned development. See Mason, p. 86: ". . . the Blitzkrieg strategy was perhaps as much a product of . . . problems, as the consideration which determined the level of rearmament . . . "

⁵⁵ Op. cit., p. 59. See also Hitler's final message to the German Armed Forces, quoted by Hugh R. Trevor-Roper, The Last Days of Hitler (London, 1952), p. 195; see also Hitler's Secret Conversations, pp. 589-90: ". . . in 1939 we had nothing. I cannot tell you with what fury and anger I had to work in order to get what I wanted." See also Heinz Guderian, Panzer Leader, trans. Constantine FitzGibbon (London, 1952), pp. 87-8.

the First World War.⁵⁶ In practice his superficial grasp of economics merely replaced the old problems with new ones. After coming to power he began to develop the Nazi party institutions for maintaining morale at home and for exerting pressures through diplomacy, propaganda and subversion on his enemies abroad. Together with the rearmament of a Wehrmacht capable of launching a "gigantic, all destroying blow"⁵⁷ these preparations amounted to a "total mobilisation" of the national resources. Yet the actual military striking power produced was low in relation to the overall effort and cost, because in addition to rearmament Hitler demanded simultaneously the maximum production of consumer goods and exports, the construction of highways, public buildings and monuments, and the expansion of the Nazi party's subsidiary organisations.⁵⁸ As a result the leaders of the Wehrmacht became involved in a highly competitive struggle for economic

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 80; Rauschning, pp. 13, 207-8; MK, p. 162; Hitler's Secret Book, pp. 8-9; Milward, p. 7.

⁵⁷ Rauschning, p. 20.

⁵⁸ See Hitler's Secret Conversations, pp. 409, 433-34, 589-90; Peter de Mendelssohn, The Nuremberg Documents. Some Aspects of German War Policy, 1939-45 (London, 1946), pp. 89-90.

resources with the Nazi Party, the Labour Front, industrial and commercial interests and the departments of state. In 1936 Hitler realised that the Armed Forces were faring badly in this struggle and he intervened to establish the Four Year Plan under the direction of Hermann Goering.

The new economic chief was no better qualified than Hitler to handle the complex financial and management problems which confronted him. Goering sought to instil a sense of urgency in his subordinates by reading to them an economic memorandum written by Hitler in the summer of 1936. He introduced it with the warning that "it starts from the basic thought that a showdown with Russia is inevitable."⁵⁹ Nevertheless, economic factors, especially limited supplies of raw material and oil, continued to influence the quantity and types of equipment and thus the tactics and strategy of the Wehrmacht. In spite of Hitler's early expression of enthusiasm for the development of armoured forces,⁶⁰ General Ludwig Beck, Chief of the General Staff between 1934 and 1938, rejected the establishment of "a short-term and hastily created offensive instrument without consideration for the

⁵⁹Mendelssohn, p. 18.

⁶⁰Guderian, p. 30.

financial and industrial means available."⁶¹ Even in Goering's Luftwaffe the plans for a fleet of long-range, four engined "Ural" bombers were abandoned on economic grounds. Since cheaper, lighter aircraft lacked the carrying capacity for area bombing, dive bombing was introduced to give accuracy instead of weight.⁶²

In 1938 Hitler took over personal direction of the Wehrmacht and became fully aware for the first time of the inadequacy of the rearmament measures and strategic and tactical thinking of his generals.⁶³ For the Army it was a year of crisis, change and improvisation. Conservative generals

⁶¹Statement by General Otto Stapf, quoted by W. Foerster, Generaloberst Beck, sein Kampf gegen den Krieg (Munich, 1953), pp. 35-7. See also Guderian, pp. 32-3; Manstein, Soldatenleben, p.240 ff.

⁶²The Rise and Fall of the German Air Force, 1933-1945, Air Ministry Publication (London, 1947), p. 43; Hermann Flocher, The German Air Force versus Russia, 1941, USAF Historical Study No. 153 (Aerospace Studies Institute, 1965), pp. 43-4; Werner Baumbach, The Life and Death of the Luftwaffe, trans. Frederick Holt (New York, 1960), pp. 23, 321; Telford Taylor, The Breaking Wave (New York, 1967), p. 104.

⁶³See especially Hitler's criticisms of the Army's plans for operations against Czechoslovakia in 1938; IMT, XXV, 338-PS, 429-32, 441-5, 463-4, 466-9. See also O'Neill, pp. 124, 162 ff.

were pushed aside to make way for men whom Hitler thought he could trust to carry out his wishes. The armoured and motorized forces were hastily increased and the construction of defences in the East and West speeded up.⁶⁴ Similar hurried expansion and changes in tactics which took place in the Luftwaffe in 1938 and 1939 were reflected in the loss of no less than 572 aircraft in flying accidents including an entire wing of 31 dive bombers which plunged through low cloud into the ground.⁶⁵ To mask the defects and deficiencies massed parades of armour and motorized troops and displays of large formations of aircraft were staged at state and party occasions.⁶⁶ The success of these measures was demonstrated by the exaggerated estimates of German military strength which prevailed in the rest of Europe.⁶⁷ As a result of the skilful

⁶⁴See Guderian, p. 62; Burkhart Mueller-Hillebrand, Das Heer, 1933-1945; Entwicklung des Organisatorischen Aufbaus, I, 39-43; Goerlitz, Keitel, pp. 185, 196-7.

⁶⁵See "Falling Starfighters," Time, 2 June 1967, p.29; Manstein, Lost Victories, p. 27.

⁶⁶See Ernest K. Bramsted, Goebbels and National Socialist Propaganda (Michigan, 1965), pp. 214-218; Fritz Terveen, "Der Filmbericht ueber Hitlers 50. Geburtstag. Ein Beispiel nationalsozialistischen Selbstdarstellung und Propaganda," VfZ, VII (1 January 1959), 75-84.

⁶⁷French estimates of German strength in 1940 varied from 3,700 to 8,000 tanks, and from 14,865 to 15,700 aircraft. See Theodore Draper, The Six Weeks War (London, 1946), pp.

use of propaganda the tactical doctrines of Blitzkrieg were described and analysed in the popular press before they were fully accepted in the Wehrmacht.⁶⁸ Later even Hitler admitted that "the expression Blitzkrieg is an Italian invention, we picked it up from the newspapers."⁶⁹

In spite of the success of his propaganda abroad Hitler's greatest difficulty was to convince his own officer corps that psychological factors outweighed the deficiencies in material and training of which they were well aware, and that the Statesman ". . . cannot wait until the Wehrmacht is ready in every respect. . ."⁷⁰ Memories of the First World

42-3. The official German figures showed that 2,574 tanks and 3,530 combat aircraft, 475 transport aircraft and 45 gliders were employed in the West on 10 May 1940. See Guderian, p. 472; The Rise and Fall of the German Air Force, p. 66. See also A. Goutard, The Battle of France, 1940, trans. A.R.P. Burgess (New York, 1959), p. 23 ff.

⁶⁸See Brigadier General Reilley, "Report on the Spanish Civil War," Illustrated London News, 19 August, 1939.

⁶⁹See Hitler's Secret Conversations, p. 182; see also F. O. Miksche, Atomic Weapons and Armies (London, 1955), p. 61.

⁷⁰U.S.N.A. Microfilm, Guide No. 18, Serial T77-775, frames 5500629-30.

War caused many of the generals to reject the view ". . . that just the efficiency of modern weapons will be the guarantee of a short 'lightening war'."⁷¹ Their fears of a repetition of the defeat of 1918 also made them critical of the increasing risks which Hitler was prepared to take in order to adhere to his policy of expansion in 1938 and 1939. But their past collaboration with Nazism, their isolation in German society and the divisions in their own ranks prevented them from effectively resisting Hitler's foreign policy.⁷² The conflicts of 1938 deepened those divisions but they also resulted in the retirement of the most outspokenly critical military leaders, leaving Hitler free to reorganise the high command

⁷¹Hermann Foertsch, The Art of Modern War (New York, 1940), p. 123; see also pp. 137 and 160. Critical views on the effect of modern weapons on tactics and operations were provoked in the military journals. See General Ernst Busch, "Ist die Schlacht entscheidende Rolle der Infanterie zu Ende?" Jahrbuch fuer Wehrpolitik und Wehrwissenschaften (Berlin, 1937-38), pp. 11-27; General Hermann Geyer, "Ueber die Zeitdauer von Angriffsgefechten," Militaerwissenschaftliche Rundschau, IV (1939), 649-66; see also subsequent articles on this subject by General Wolfgang Muff (IV, 340-340); Major Robert Westphal (IV, 353-360), and General von Sodenstern (IV-574-579). The naval leaders shared the generals' scepticism towards the ability of the tank and aeroplane to overcome the effects of firepower. See Carl Axel Gemzell, Raeder, Hitler und Skandinavien, Der Kampf um einer Maritimen Operationsplan (Lund, 1965), p. 50.

⁷²Gordon A. Craig, War, Politics and Diplomacy (London, 1966), pp. 132-5.

and establish methods of issuing orders and conducting planning which gave him sole control of grand strategy and the power to intervene in military strategy.

The Strategic Direction of the Wehrmacht

Neither in tradition nor training were the German Army leaders in a strong position to challenge the right of the Head of State to exercise sole control of grand strategy. In the First World War, the Supreme Command had obtained great powers over the political, social and economic life of the nation. But it failed to use those powers to formulate a viable grand strategy which ensured that military strategy and operations served realistic policy aims.⁷³ After the war this problem remained unsolved. German strategic thought was restricted by the small size of the Reichswehr which made the planning of major operations impossible. Its officers were preoccupied with internal security tasks, and with the improvisation of tactical means of defending the nation's borders with inadequate strength.⁷⁴ They also devoted much

⁷³Corelli Barnet, The Sword Bearers (London, 1966), p. 306. The failure of the German Supreme Command to develop an effective grand strategy was criticised by Hans Delbrueck, Krieg und Politik (Berlin, 1918-19), II, 95, 187; III, 123.

⁷⁴General Franz Halder, letter to writer, 22 April, 1966.

effort to the evasion of the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles which restricted the technical development of the Reichswehr in the fields of mechanization, chemical and air warfare. Even after Hitler had removed such restrictions and introduced rearmament, interest and understanding for grand and military strategic questions failed to grow in proportion to the size and capability of the armed forces.

The German officer corps became engrossed in applying the tactical and technical ideas developed in the Reichswehr to the new formations of the expanding Wehrmacht. It apparently gave little thought to the grand strategic purpose behind this work. The majority of the Army leaders regarded Hitler's references to the conquest of Lebensraum as the vague fantasy of a vulgar propagandist.⁷⁵ Perhaps their lifelong training in staff planning procedures and military security made it difficult for them to believe that the Head of State could seriously be following a plan discernible in a book available in any German bookstore or public library. They were of course not alone in this error. But having heard Hitler's secret policy statements between 1933 and 1939

⁷⁵ Sauer, Machtergreifung, pp. 749, 764-65; Karl Otmar Frhr. von Aretin, "Die deutsche Generale und Hitlers Kriegspolitik," Politische Studien, 10 (1959), p. 570; Hugh R. Trevor-Roper, "Why didn't They Invade?" Sunday Times Magazine (16 May, 1965), p. 32; O'Neill, p. 125 ff.

the senior generals had less reason than others in Germany and Europe to believe that Hitler in office would settle for something more limited than the aims of Hitler the political agitator. Nevertheless, the OKH refrained from revealing any sign of agreement with Hitler's grand strategy. Indeed, until 1938 the only acknowledgement that it understood his long-term aims was given when the Army Commander-in-Chief, General von Fritsch, used them to support the Army's case for directing the operations of the entire Wehrmacht in war. In a memorandum submitted to the War Minister, Field Marshal von Blomberg, in August 1937, he stated:

As long as the objective of a German victory can lie only in eastern conquests then only the Army can bring about a final decision by conquest in the East and defence in the West, because no eastern state can be fatally struck from the air or sea.⁷⁶

In spite of this statement, no methodical preparation in the form of studies and plans was undertaken by the Army for operations against France until 1939 or against Russia until 1940.

In contrast, studies and war games conducted by the Navy between 1936 and 1939 were based upon the idea of a

⁷⁶Goerlitz, Keitel, p. 128.

conflict with Russia and France.⁷⁷ In a study written for the major war game conducted by the Baltic Fleet Station early in 1939, Admiral Albrecht stated that:

The great objective of German policy is seen as securing Europe from the western border of Germany as far as, and including, European Russia under the military and economic leadership of the Axis Powers (This means) basically defence in the West and attack towards the East . . . either from the South East over Rumania and the Ukraine or across the Baltic States into northern Russia.⁷⁸

Admiral Fricke, Chief of Naval Operations, suggested that before planning supporting operations for a Baltic offensive "we will wait and see what 'political objective' the Fuehrer gives us."⁷⁹ Nevertheless, the attitude of the Naval Staff towards Hitler's strategic plans was obviously very different from that of the Army.

Similarly, the leaders of the Luftwaffe, with their close ties with the Nazi Party, had no hesitation in accepting Hitler's grand strategic aims. However, since the Luftwaffe was mainly concerned with the technical and tactical problems of air defence and giving close support to the field army its

⁷⁷Gemzell, p. 45.

⁷⁸Ibid., pp. 68-9.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 69.

staff played little part in grand or even military strategic planning.

The creation of the Luftwaffe as an independent service with strong Nazi attitudes caused new problems and rivalries within the German High Command which further discouraged the development of a staff capable of giving advice and direction in grand strategy. Hitler's War Minister, Field Marshal von Blomberg, and later, the Chief of the OKW, General Keitel, both attempted to extend the responsibilities of their offices to embrace the coordination of the economy, the national propaganda, and the three services in wartime.⁸⁰ Their efforts were frustrated, not only by Hitler's wish to exercise direct leadership of the Wehrmacht, but also by the attitude of the OKH, which preferred to take orders directly from the Fuehrer rather than see the War Ministry or the OKW become a supreme staff for the direction of the entire Wehrmacht. However, Hitler's failure to make the OKW responsible for directing grand strategy did not raise the status

⁸⁰ Keitel's memorandum on the role of the OKW is presented in Goerlitz, Keitel, p. 154 ff.

of the OKH; it merely gave Hitler direct control over the three services and their strategic planning.⁸¹

During 1938 Hitler developed the procedure by which he exercised this control throughout the following three years. First he presented his political and grand strategic decisions verbally to the Commanders-in-Chief of the Army, Navy and Air Force. They and their senior staff officers worked out a military strategy and an operational plan to meet the needs of those decisions. The draft plan was then submitted to the Fuehrer by the Army Commander-in-Chief. If approved it was passed to the OKW which prepared a directive encompassing the proposals of the three services and any amendments made by Hitler. A similar procedure was used for the coordination of the war economy with the needs of policy and strategy. Hitler gave commands to the Reich Defence Council, presided over by Goering as Head of the Four Year Plan Organisation,⁸² and to the War Economy and Armament

⁸¹See Ibid., p. 168.

⁸²Field Marshal von Blomberg had hoped that the Reichs-verteidigungsrat might be the means by which the military would obtain supervision of the war economy. But instead Goering, Fritz Todt and, later, Albert Speer gained control of economic planning. See Craig, p. 133; see also Milward, p. 19 ff.

Office of the OKW. Their detailed plans were then incorporated into a directive by the Wehrmachtfuehrungsamt⁸³ of the OKW and issued to the relevant civil and military departments. Thus the OKW was usually no more than a centre for confirming decisions made by Hitler and the operational plans made by the three services.⁸⁴ In the view of General Warlimont, who served on the operations staff of the OKW,

When the Second World War broke out no established headquarters existed capable of undertaking the overall direction of the German war effort. . .⁸⁵

Not merely the direction, but also the coordination of the three services lay in the hands of Hitler alone. Unlike the British and American chiefs of staff, who met in committee almost daily, the heads of the German Army, Navy and Air Force only came together when they attended a Fuehrer conference to receive their orders, or at state or party functions. The broad outline of their cooperation was indicated by Hitler verbally or in the War Directives issued on

⁸³The Wehrmachtfuehrungsamt was the operational planning staff of the OKW. See KTB OKW, I, p. 132E ff. and Trevor-Roper, Hitler's War Directives, pp. xix ff. for details of its organisation and function.

⁸⁴See Walther Warlimont, Inside Hitler's Headquarters, trans. R.H. Barry (London, 1964), pp. 18, 20.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 3.

on his authority by the OKW. The details were arranged by liaison officers of each service on the main staffs, or occasionally, by visits of senior staff officers, though these were infrequent as the service staffs were often in widely dispersed locations.⁸⁶

The lack of cooperation and consultation between the leaders of the three services was not, however, entirely a product of Hitler's influence. He merely took advantage of the sort of narrow specialization already prevalent in the German officer corps. This was reflected in the view expressed by Colonel Hermann Foertsch, Commandant of the War Academy, who stated in a book on the art of war that ". . . it would not be proper for . . . an officer of the Army, to consider also questions of naval and aerial warfare. . ."⁸⁷

The readiness of the Army leaders to accept the role of narrow specialists and to eschew even an advisory role in the field of grand strategy did not prevent Hitler from interfering in their remaining fields of military strategy,

⁸⁶ See KTB OKW, I, 169E-174E; see also Ronald Wheatley, Operation Sea Lion, German Plans for the Invasion of England, 1939-1942 (Oxford, 1958), p. 147.

⁸⁷ Foertsch, p. 12, n. 1.

operations and even tactics to ensure that the Blitzkrieg methods which he favoured were put into practice. This habit helped to maintain the resentment and hostility with which he was regarded by some of the generals. But none of them was prepared to follow the example of General Beck, whose protests at Hitler's readiness to invade Czechoslovakia led to his resignation from the post of Chief of the General Staff in 1938.

The man on whom Beck had most relied for support, the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, General von Brauchitsch, had limited his independence by accepting Hitler's assistance in obtaining a divorce in order to marry a woman who was an enthusiastic Nazi.⁸⁸ Frequently torn between his military judgement, the influence of his second wife and his loyalty to Hitler, he became vacillating and ineffectual. On the outbreak of war when Beck's successor, General Franz Halder, insisted that he as Chief of the General Staff should direct the operations of the Army, the office of Commander-in-Chief deteriorated into one of comparative unimportance.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ See O'Neill, pp. 68, 146-8, 172.

⁸⁹ See KTb OKW, I, 135E-36E.

General Halder's attitude and conduct was more equivocal. Since the war he has been depicted as an active member of the military opposition group working against Hitler.⁹⁰ But Halder's acts of "opposition" were conducted without arousing the disapproval of von Brauchitsch and without sabotaging or affecting the needs of the fighting troops.⁹¹ Thus they can hardly have amounted to more than the maintenance of critical attitudes towards Hitler and an avoidance of initiating new aggressive plans until Hitler's orders made further delay impossible.⁹² It also appears from his diary and from the testimony of others that Halder's ability to conduct even this type of resistance effectively was further reduced by the professional satisfaction which he evidently derived from his work.⁹³ It is still open to question whether the deterioration of German military strategic planning into a series of individual responses to the

⁹⁰Kurt Sendtner, "Die deutsche Militaeropposition im ersten Kriegsjahr," Vollmacht des Gewissens, p. 393 ff.

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²Ibid., p. 403.

⁹³Ulrich von Hassell, The von Hassell Diaries, 1938-1944 (London, 1948), pp. 88-9, 121-2, 158.

demands of the Fuehrer was due to deliberate "passive" resistance of the General Staff or merely a paralysis resulting from the pessimism, bordering on defeatism, which seems to have prevailed in the German Army in 1938 and 1939.

Nevertheless, the General Staff contained a small, isolated group of officers whose resistance to Hitler was based not merely upon the fear that he was leading Germany to defeat but upon moral objections to his aims and methods. They included some of Halder's closest associates, General Karl-Heinrich von Stuelpnagel, the Deputy Chief of the General Staff, General Wagner, the Quartermaster General, General Fellgiebel, Inspector General of Signals, and Colonel von Tresckow, the Staff Officer Ia of the Operations Department of the General Staff. In 1944 these men paid with their lives for their resistance. Also in this group were several officers of the OKW including Admiral Canaris, Chief of the Abwehr and General Oster, one of his department heads. General Thomas, Head of the War Economy and Armament Office was also said to be an opponent of Hitler, but like Halder, he confined his opposition to professional criticism of Hitler's decisions.

The majority of the German generals followed the example set by their Commander-in-Chief, von Brauchitsch.

They suppressed their doubts and, out of a sense of duty, for the sake of ambition or merely to escape an "insoluble dilemma",⁹⁴ obeyed Hitler's orders. This group included the senior army group commanders, von Bock, a soldier who combined a guardsman's discipline with a driving ambition, and von Rundstedt, who viewed with scepticism the value of attempts to resist Hitler as long as he had the support of the troops and the people.⁹⁵

While most of the field commanders shared such views, some were clearly impressed by Hitler's abilities. Without necessarily simulating the servility of the Chief of the OKW, Wilhelm Keitel, or the enthusiasm for "the genius of the Fuehrer"⁹⁶ expressed by Alfred Jodl, Chief of the Wehrmachtsfuehrungsamt, they admired his remarkable insight into the technical and psychological factors of modern war and served him with loyalty. The leading personalities in this group at the start of the war were von Reichenau and his gifted

⁹⁴Manstein, Lost Victories, p. 80.

⁹⁵Otto E. Moll, Die deutschen Generalfeldmarschaele, 1939-1945 (Rastatt, 1961), p. 223.

⁹⁶Jodl's Diary, 10 August 1938, quoted by Warlimont, p. 14.

chief of staff, Paulus, and also Busch and Guderian.⁹⁷

The leaders of the Luftwaffe, selected and led by Goering, were loyal to the Nazi regime. So too were the German admirals, though they had ample grounds to be critical of the situation in which Hitler's policies had placed them. Having been assured in February 1939 that there would be no war with Britain for another five or six years, Admiral Raeder wrote on 3 September that the German surface forces could "do no more than show they know how to die gallantly"⁹⁸ But since Hitler depended mainly upon the Army for the fulfilment of the aims of his Lebensraumpolitik, it was of the utmost importance that he should instil confidence in the leaders of the OKH and General Staff, and overcome their unwillingness to develop their military planning on the basis of his grand strategy. This, however, he was unable to do. Like the admirals, they were disappointed at the failure of his foreign policy to prevent Britain and France from declaring war. Several of the senior generals saw a negotiated peace as the best course. Thus Hitler's demand for an offensive in the West found them with neither enthusiasm nor plans.

⁹⁷Walter Goerlitz, Paulus and Stalingrad (London, 1963), pp. 21-3, 36.

⁹⁸Martienssen, p. 21.

CHAPTER II

THE WAR IN THE WEST AND ITS RESULTS

OCTOBER 1939 - JULY 1940

The Reluctant Warriors

It has been asserted that in 1939 Hitler had no war plan, ". . . no all-embracing strategic conception in which the political purpose, means, and military objectives were meaningfully related."¹ The evidence of Hitler's secret speeches and directives does not support this assertion. It is true that his "war plan" was not set down in writing.² It is also true that there were discrepancies between his aims and means, especially since it had become necessary to fight Great Britain as well as France, but he was not prepared to admit this. The basis of his plan for the conquest of Lebensraum remained unchanged; having consolidated his hold over central Europe he would strike in the West and then in

¹KTB OKW, I, 42E. See also Manstein, Lost Victories, pp. 154, 169; Craig, p. 136; Vollmacht des Gewissens, II, 28 ff. Albert Kesselring, "Der Krieg im Mittelmeerraum," Bilanz des Zweiten Weltkrieges (Oldenburg/Hamburg, 1953), p. 152.

²See Hermann Hoth, Panzer Operationen (Heidelberg, 1956), p. 25.

the East. The outbreak of a general war in September 1939 had come as a disappointment; it was momentarily disconcerting, but not entirely unexpected. On 23 May he had warned his service chiefs that it might be necessary "to attack Britain and France with a few annihilating blows",³ and even suggested, on the basis of a critical analysis of the errors of the First World War, that a "wheeling movement towards the Channel ports"⁴ and the cutting of Britain's food supply routes might be the decisive actions of a war in the West. But the Army leaders failed to respond to these hints. They could no longer regard Hitler's strategic ideas as mere fantasies, but out of short-sightedness, mere pessimism, or, in the case of a very few, moral indignation, they still ignored them. As a result it was they, not Hitler, who were caught totally without a plan in September when Britain and France declared war.

By means of verbal orders on 27 September, a written directive and a memorandum on 10 October, and a long speech on 23 November Hitler managed to convince the Army leaders

³IMT, XXXVII, 079-L, 550.

⁴Ibid., p. 554.

of the seriousness if not of the wisdom of his decision to strike as soon as possible in the West.⁵ They then produced "an imitation of the famous Schlieffen Plan of 1914",⁶ a response which provoked humiliation and despair among some of their more imaginative subordinates.⁷ Most of the senior generals argued that the operation should be postponed. General von Stuelpnagel advised that it should not be attempted until 1942, and even Hitler's most ardent supporter among the field commanders, General von Reichenau, urged him to delay it until the spring.⁸ Some considered that it should not be attempted at all. The commander of the army group facing the Maginot Line, General Ritter von Leeb, suggested to von Brauchitsch that Hitler should seek a negotiated peace and set aside his "far-reaching plans."⁹ He even proposed

⁵ Halder, KTB, I, 86 ff, 27 September 1939; Hubatsch, pp. 37-8; Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, Dokumente zur Vorgeschichte des Westfeldzuges, 1939-1940 (Berlin/Frankfurt a.M., 1956), p. 4 ff.; IMT, XXVI, 789-PS, 327 ff.; IMT, XXXVI, 052-L, 467 ff.

⁶ Manstein, Lost Victories, p. 98.

⁷ Ibid.; see also Guderian, p. 89.

⁸ Ibid., p. 82; see also Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, Fall Gelb, der Kampf um den deutschen Operationsplan zur Westoffensive, 1940 (Wiesbaden, 1957), p. 10.

⁹ Moll, p. 102. See also Nuremberg Document NOKW-3433, quoted by Shirer, p. 855.

that much of the Lebensraum conquered so far should be restored to the Czechs and Poles.¹⁰ General von Rundstedt also wrote to von Brauchitsch on the same day, 31 October, warning him that ". . . once Germany's offensive strength has been used up in the West . . . anything may happen in the East."¹¹ However, the Army leaders were far too preoccupied with problems in the West to give consideration to the East where they relied upon the pact with Russia and a mere nine divisions to hold the frontier. Before September they had concentrated upon preparations for the Polish campaign and ignored the possibility of an attack on France in 1939. Now they focused their gaze on the campaign in the West, albeit reluctantly, and ignored all indications that a victory there would be but a prelude to an attack on Russia.

Such indications were not hard to find. In the memorandum which he read to von Brauchitsch and Halder on 10 October, Hitler stated that the German war aim was to deprive the Western Powers of the ability to oppose ". . . the state

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Nuremberg Document NOKW-511, quoted by G.L. Weinberg, Germany and the Soviet Union, 1939-1941 (Leiden, 1954), p. 98. See also Heinrich Uhlig, "Das Einwirken Hitlers auf Planung und Fuehrung des Ostfeldzuges," Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte, Beilage zur Wochenzeitung Das Parlament (16 March 1960), p.164.

consolidation and further development of the German people in Europe."¹² A week later he gave a clear indication of where this "further development" lay when he ordered General Keitel and the Quartermaster General of the Army, General Wagner, to ensure that the roads, railways and lines of communication in Eastern Poland were to be kept in order because ". . . the territory is important to us from a military point of view as an advanced jumping off point and can be used for the strategic concentration of troops."¹³

On 23 November Hitler sought to quell the doubts and criticisms of his military leaders by explaining the grand strategy behind his decision to attack in the West to a wider audience of generals. His speech made it quite clear that his goal was still ". . . to create a rational relation between the number of people and the space for them to live in."¹⁴ Although he did not wish to provoke further pessimism by over-stressing his determination to attack Russia, he did not attempt to conceal the possibility of a future conflict

¹²KTb OKW, I, 50E. See also Shirer, p. 853.

¹³IMT, XXVI, 864-PS, 379. See also Halder, KTb, I, 107, 18 October 1939.

¹⁴IMT, XXVI, 789-PS, 329.

in the East. He pointed out that Germany should make full use of her opportunity to fight on only one front, because Russia would keep the pact which made this possible "only as long as she considers it to be to her advantage."¹⁵ He warned "we can oppose Russia only when we are free in the West."¹⁶ The cause of the conflict would, he suggested, be future Soviet expansion because, in addition to strengthening her position in the Baltic, Russia was ". . . striving to increase her influence in the Balkans and towards the Persian Gulf."¹⁷ He also stated that:

. . . at the present time the Red Army is of little worth. For the next year or two the present situation will remain.¹⁸

But it was clear that this gave him only the minimum time necessary to win the war in the West and prepare the German forces for the conflict in the East. This was probably one of the reasons for his impatience to start the campaign against France as soon as possible and for his open criticism of those generals who counselled caution on the grounds that

¹⁵Ibid., p. 331.

¹⁶Op. cit.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 331.

¹⁸Ibid.

the German troops were not yet equal to the task in the West.

General von Brauchitsch was mortified at the criticism of the Army leadership in Hitler's speech. Anxious to avoid a repetition of this humiliating experience, he suggested to Halder that the General Staff should perhaps conduct studies of the operational possibilities in the Balkans, the Middle East and Scandinavia,¹⁹ which Hitler had mentioned. Halder, however, declined to take up these proposals on the grounds that ". . . the clear, political objectives for such studies were lacking, because Hitler had only made vague suggestions."²⁰

The least "vague" of Hitler's suggestions was that the campaign in the West would be followed by a conflict with Russia. Yet this was not even mentioned as the topic for a General Staff study by von Brauchitsch. Quite apart from Hitler's statements, the changes in the strategic situation in the Baltic area, Finland and Eastern Europe resulting from the secret protocol to the Russo-German Pact would alone have justified more than the routine observations of the Foreign Armies East Branch of the General Staff. Yet until mid-

¹⁹Hitler had described Scandinavia as "...hostile to us because of Marxist influences." Ibid.

²⁰Halder, KTB, I, 132-3, n.1, 25 November 1939.

summer 1940 neither the OKH nor the OKW conducted any major study of the military situation in the East.²¹

Preoccupation with the immediate problem in the West was no reason for the military staffs to ignore the East altogether. Furthermore, the alacrity with which the OKH turned to the question of Russia after the defeat of France rules out the possibility that the Army leaders were restrained by an aversion for planning aggressive war. It seems more likely that the same tendency to avoid problems of grand strategy, the narrow outlook and rigid, bureaucratic working methods which had characterised the General Staff in the past was still limiting its initiative. But above all, it appears that the Army leaders had so little hope of winning a decisive success in the West that they regarded long-term planning for a war in the East as futile.

German Operational Planning, 1939-40

In spite of the remarkable success achieved by German arms in 1940 the German operational planning conducted between October 1939 and April 1940 was mainly the product of pessimism. Until the spring of 1940 even Hitler expected the

²¹ Warlimont, pp. 55-6.

offensive in the West to win only "territory in Holland, Belgium and Northern France as a base favourable for waging extensive air and sea warfare against Britain and as a wide protective belt before the essential Ruhr area."²² The final victory was to be won by knocking Britain out of the war, but no one expected a quick success. Before the war Hitler had toyed with the idea of a swift surprise attack directed against the Royal Navy.²³ However, once Britain had declared war the slender chance of successfully crippling the British fleet with one blow dissolved.²⁴ Instead Hitler placed his trust in a blockade conducted by his Navy and the Luftwaffe, especially the U-boat fleet and the new magnetic mines laid by aircraft. On 23 November he told his military

²²Hubatsch, p. 37; KTB OKW, I, 56E.

²³IMT, XXXVII, 079-L, 552.

²⁴The sinking of H.M.S. Royal Oak and damaging of H.M.S. Repulse in Scapa Flow by U-boat 47 in October 1939 showed that Hitler's hopes of a surprise attack on the Royal Navy were not entirely impracticable. On 13 December 1941 he told the Japanese Ambassador in Berlin, General Oshima, that the attack on Pearl Harbour had been ". . . the right declaration of war!" Andreas Hillgruber (ed.), Staatsmaenner und Diplomaten bei Hitler (Frankfurt a.M., 1967), p. 683.

leaders that "the permanent sowing of mines along the English coasts will bring Britain to her knees."²⁵ Neither Admiral Raeder nor General von Brauchitsch were convinced by this show of confidence.²⁶ They both sought more orthodox means of striking at the British Isles and conducted studies for an invasion of England. But these proved no more encouraging and in January 1940 the Army, confronted by the difficulties predicted by the Navy and Air Force, abandoned further planning.²⁷

Meanwhile, the Naval Staff had turned to an alternative. Sceptical of the Army's chance of winning the Channel ports in the West, Admiral Raeder attempted to interest Hitler in the possibility of obtaining bases in Norway from which to conduct a vigorous siege of Great Britain.²⁸ Though in 1934 Hitler had envisaged the possibility of "a daring, but interesting" operation in Scandinavia ". . . protected by the fleet, and with the cooperation of the air force,"²⁹ he was

²⁵IMT, XXVI, 789-PS, 335.

²⁶A German Naval Staff memorandum stated in January 1940 that "the effect of mining all the ports of the island cannot yet be foreseen." Wheatley, pp. 10-11.

²⁷See Ibid., pp. 7-8; see also Taylor, Breaking Wave, pp. 202-3.

²⁸IMT, XXXIV, 122-C, 423-4.

²⁹Rauschning, p. 143.

anxious to avoid diverting forces from the coming offensive in the West. He agreed to do so only when persuaded that the British might land there first.³⁰ The operation which resulted was a further demonstration of the tactical skill of the Wehrmacht. Nevertheless, the German fleet suffered heavy losses which seriously impaired its ability to support a successful invasion of England four months later. Furthermore, the fact that Hitler was forced to divert part of his forces and keep them in Norway was an ominous indication of the advantages of sea power with which Britain could foil his attempts to limit the war to Blitzkrieg campaigns at a time and place of his choosing.³¹ The Norwegian campaign was the first of several operations which resulted in delays and diversions of German forces to counter threats on the periphery of Europe, especially in the Balkans.

The Germans' concern for the security of their interests in the Balkans, especially the vital Rumanian oil fields

³⁰ See Earle K. Ziemke, The German Northern Theatre of Operations, 1940-1945. Department of the Army Pamphlet No. 20-271 (Washington, 1959), pp. 7-10; Christopher Buckley, Norway, the Commandos, Dieppe (London, 1951), p. 4; Hinsley, p. 51; Gemzell, pp. 289-90.

³¹ See KTB OKW, I, 135E; Buckley, p. 4.

began to develop in December 1939. The first step was taken by Admiral Canaris, Chief of the Abwehr, who arranged co-operation with the Rumanian security forces.³² Early in January, after a meeting between Generals Keitel and Halder, the Army General Staff began an operational study of measures to safeguard the oil-fields.³³ Meanwhile General Jodl, Chief of the Operations Staff of the OKW, produced a strategic study in which he echoed the view expressed by Hitler that Germany should divert the Russians from the Balkans by encouraging them to expand into the Middle East where they would also threaten the bases of the Western Allies.³⁴ This idea was repeated in a further memorandum written by Jodl, dated 21 March 1940.³⁵ In it he made the additional suggestion

³² Andreas Hillgruber, Hitler, Koenig Carol und Marshall Antonescu; die Deutsch-rumaenischen Beziehungen, 1938-1944 (Wiesbaden, 1954), p. 67.

³³ Halder KTB, I, 151, 2 January 1940.

³⁴ DGFP(D) VIII, 514. Hitler is reported as saying on 23 November 1939 that ". . . Russia is striving to increase her influence in the Balkans and towards the Persian Gulf. That is also the goal of our foreign policy." (IMT, XXVI, 789-PS, p.331). Two days later Admiral Raeder interpreted Hitler's remark to mean that "the expansion of Russian interests towards the Persian Gulf is supported by Germany." (Mendelssohn, p. 246)

³⁵ USNA, Guide No. 18, Serial T77-775, frames 5500651 ff.

that a Soviet force advancing from the Caucasus might be reinforced by German units and leadership. However, Jodl hastened to add that such an operation would only be thinkable once the Western Powers were considerably weakened in the European theatre.

By the spring of 1940 improvements in the operational plan and better equipment, preparations and intelligence about the capabilities of their opponents had encouraged the German leaders to view the prospects of the offensive in the West with more optimism.³⁶ Nevertheless, the OKW made no attempt to question the need for an attack on Norway in view of the probable capture of the Low Countries and Flanders. The possible effects of Italy's entry into the war, the problem of defeating Britain and the results of Soviet expansion were still ignored. Nor was there any attempt to coordinate the strategic planning of the three services and the OKW operations staff within the framework of aims which

³⁶General Fromm, Chief of the Reserve Army, told von Hassell on 25 April 1940 that "we will push through Holland and Belgium at one blow, and then finish off France in fourteen days; the French will run like the Poles. France will then make peace, England will fight on alone for a while but will finally give up too. Then the Fuehrer will make a very moderate, statesmenlike peace." Hassell, p. 127. See also KTB OKW, I, 56E.

Hitler had repeatedly expressed. General Warlimont, Jodl's senior department head, later admitted that in contrast to the Chiefs of Staff Committee in Britain or the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the United States there was nothing but a "disastrous vacuum" at this level of strategic planning in Germany.³⁷ But without the support of detailed studies prepared and coordinated by the military staffs Hitler's broad grand strategic ideas proved inadequate to meet the demands of the changing situation. Thus it was mainly as a result of the omissions resulting from their pessimism that the German military leaders were caught unprepared for the consequences of the swift collapse of France.

The Strategic Problem of Britain

The German victory in the West caused a wave of optimism among the German leaders which had far-reaching effects on their subsequent conduct of the war. The first result, towards the end of May, was the growing belief that the defeat inflicted upon the armies of the Western Allies would cause not only the collapse of France but also that of Great

³⁷ Warlimont, p. 54.

Britain. Even though this hope proved unfounded, the continued resistance of Britain was regarded as likely to be ineffectual. Thus neither Hitler nor his Army leaders were discouraged from turning in July to preparations for an attack on Russia.

The assumption that Hitler had no "war plan" or had abandoned or at least postponed his aims of further expansion in the East had encouraged the view among Western historians that an invasion of Britain was the next logical step after the defeat of France.³⁸ But his failure to prepare plans for a Channel crossing at the time of planning the campaign in the West, his half-hearted attitude towards the belated attempts to repair this omission, and the badly planned and ill-coordinated efforts of the Luftwaffe in August and September 1940 all suggested that Hitler's main interest after June 1940 lay in the East.³⁹

Here too the influence of the victory in the West unbalanced the judgements of Hitler and his Army leaders.

³⁸See Peter Fleming, Operation Sea Lion (New York, 1957), p. 240; Wheatley, pp. 28, 38, 133; Karl Klee, Das Unternehmen "Seelowe". Die geplante deutsche Landung in England, 1940. (Goettingen, 1958), p. 244; Mendelssohn, pp. 209-11, 215.

³⁹See Trevor-Roper, "Why didn't they invade?" p. 28 ff.

Doubts about the efficiency of the Blitzkrieg were now completely dispelled, and the attitude of the General Staff swung from pessimistic truculence to over-confident zeal. Naturally, the most extreme effects of the exhilarating experiences of the campaign in the West wore off when the problems confronting the Wehrmacht on the sea and in the air were more soberly assessed. Nevertheless, enough of the aura of invincibility on land remained to give the German leaders an inflated image of what could be achieved with the forces at their disposal and a correspondingly low opinion of their opponents in the East and West.

Hitler's ambivalent attitude towards the British combined the anger of frustration with the lingering conviction that his assessment of them could not have been completely wrong. Though he desired victory over Great Britain, he claimed that he had no wish to destroy her or her empire.⁴⁰ He clung to the hope that a serious set-back would "bring the British to their knees," and that they would then be ready to reach an agreement with Germany as he had always predicted.⁴¹ In May and June 1940 Hitler thought that the defeat inflicted

⁴⁰See Halder KTB, II, 21, 13 July 1940; Schellenberg, p. 107.

⁴¹Schellenberg, ibid.

on the Western Allies in the Low Countries and France was sufficient for this purpose. On 20 May, hearing that the Panzer thrust from the Ardennes had reached the Channel, he told General Jodl that "the British can get a separate peace at any time. . ." ⁴² When the British Expeditionary Force was surrounded at Dunkirk he exclaimed to General von Rundstedt and his Chief of Staff, von Soder~~st~~ern, that he expected that Britain would come to a "sensible peace arrangement" and that he would at last have his hands free ". . . for his real major task, the conflict with Bolshevism." ⁴³

In the first half of June, while optimism about the favourable outcome of the war in the West still flourished, Hitler began to plan new production priorities to meet the future needs of the Wehrmacht. ⁴⁴ On 7 June he told von Brauchitsch that with the collapse of France ". . . the task

⁴² IMT, XXVIII, 1809-PS, 431. See also Halder, KTB, I, 308, 21 May 1940.

⁴³ Klee, p. 189. The cryptic remark which he added: "The only problem is how shall I break it to my child?", probably referred to the German public. Hitler's concern at "having to call the German people to arms once more in the years to come" was mentioned later by Jodl. (Warlimont, p. 112)

⁴⁴ Tentative planning began late in May. See Halder, KTB, I, 324, 28 May 1940. But written directives were not issued until June. See also Mueller-Hillebrand, Das Heer, II, 62; KTB OKW, I, 968-9; Milward, p. 37; Warlimont, p. 104.

of the Army in this war would be essentially fulfilled."⁴⁵ The phrase "in this war", meaning the war in the West, was later omitted by Halder in a diary entry of this subject.⁴⁶ This, together with his persistent use of the term "peace-time Army"⁴⁷ to describe the new organisation, has fostered the impression that Hitler ordered a reduction of his Army because he had abandoned or postponed his intention of attacking Russia.⁴⁸ This was not so. A year earlier, in accordance with his determination to avoid warfare of the 1914-18 style, Hitler had stated that once "the Army . . . has taken the most important positions (in the West), industrial production will cease to flow into the bottomless pit of the Army's battles and can be diverted to the benefit of the Air Force and Navy."⁴⁹ As Milward has pointed out, Hitler's Blitzkrieg war economy gave him the flexibility to do this.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the Army was not excluded from the

⁴⁵ Thomas, p. 406.

⁴⁶ Halder, KTB, I, 357, 15 June 1940.

⁴⁷ Ibid., I, 324, 28 May, 357, 15 June 1940.

⁴⁸ See Taylor, Breaking Wave, pp. 21, 50; Fabry, p. 231; Greiner, p. 289; Mendelssohn, p. 210; Wheatley, p. 18, n. 6, p. 141, n. 3; Weinberg, Germany and the Soviet Union, p. 104.

⁴⁹ IMT, XXXVII, 079-L, 554.

⁵⁰ Milward, pp. 25, 37-8.

new economic programme. On the contrary, it was to be transformed into a more mobile, harder hitting force of 120 combat divisions fully equipped in the light of the experience gained in mobile warfare. The main Blitzkrieg striking power, the Panzer divisions were to be increased in number from ten to twenty and equipped with heavier tanks. The six motorized divisions were to be increased to ten. The age of the fighting troops was to be kept if possible below thirty.⁵¹ The reduction of the Army involved the disbandment of twenty-two under-equipped infantry divisions, nine Landwehr divisions and four fortress divisions.⁵²

These improvements in the Army were not made for the war against Britain. At the time when they were ordered Hitler still did not consider that an invasion of Britain would be necessary and even when he did decide to plan a landing he lacked the ships to carry all the armoured formations already available across the Channel.⁵³ Clearly the

⁵¹Thomas, p. 406.

⁵²Mueller-Hillebrand, Das Heer, 11, 62-3.

⁵³The Army Order of Battle for Operation Sea Lion on 26 July included in the second wave six out of the ten available Panzer divisions. But the Navy lacked the ships to carry them, and in September this number was reduced to four. See Wheatley, pp. 186-7.

reorganisation of the Army was conducted with a different purpose in mind, and on 5 July Dr. Fritz Todt, the Minister of Armaments and Munitions gave an indication of the nature of that purpose. Speaking at a conference, he stated that the conversion of the Army would not mean any easing of the pressure on the war economy, but merely "a transfer of effort from munitions to equipment, above all for the mobile troops."⁵⁴ He acknowledged that every effort must be made to complete the victory over Britain, but "the aims of the Fuehrer" he defined as follows:

to expand the Army until it equals the sum of the enemy armies, and to complete the cultural and social build-up of Germany.⁵⁵

The "enemy armies" could only have been those of Britain and Russia, because they alone could equal the proposed German total of 120 divisions. Thus the armament programme instituted in June, to which Dr. Todt was referring, was designed to meet the short-term needs of exerting pressure on Britain from the air and sea to force her to come to terms. But it also met the long-term needs of a great mobile campaign in the East.

⁵⁴KTb OKW, I, 74E.

⁵⁵Ibid.

This was confirmed on 18 July when a meeting of the Reich Defence Council placed the expansion of the mobile forces, the railway rolling stock and locomotive programme, road transport and synthetic rubber tyre programmes, in "Priority Level No. 1," together with the Junker 88 (bomber) programme and the U-boat programme.⁵⁶

Until the middle of July Hitler's strategy remained based upon the hope that Britain would abandon the struggle that summer. This would leave almost a year in which to complete the Army reorganisation and re-equipping programme, because once Britain came to terms, interference in European affairs by the United States would become most unlikely. Furthermore, Hitler did not think that Russia would abandon her Non-Aggression Pact with Germany until the spring of 1941, by that time the Wehrmacht would be ready to attack in the East.⁵⁷

The situation was changed when Hitler realised that Britain would not give up easily. On 13 July he accepted the recommendations of the Army operational study for a cross-Channel invasion commenced at the beginning of the

⁵⁶See Thomas, pp. 413-416.

⁵⁷See IMT, XXVI, 789-PS, 331.

month,⁵⁸ and three days later issued Directive No. 16, "Preparations for a Landing Operation against England."⁵⁹ As a result, on 26 July, the Reich Defence Council was forced to amend its plans for an air and sea war against Britain and until 31 August the preparations for a landing, Operation "Sea Lion", were placed above "Priority No. I" of the Economic Directive issued on 18 July.⁶⁰

In spite of the confidence with which the OKH presented its first plans for a landing, Hitler was never enthusiastic about the operation.⁶¹ He recognised the risks of a cross-Channel attack and the adverse effect a failure would have upon the aura of invincibility surrounding the Wehrmacht, and he was not eager to make the attempt before turning his triumphant armies upon Russia. He agreed with Admiral Raeder that it should be a last resort, carried out against an enemy already broken by blockade and air attacks.⁶² But Hitler knew that his U-boat force was too weak to achieve

⁵⁸See Wheatley, pp. 32, 35.

⁵⁹See Hubatsch, pp. 71-5; Wheatley, pp. 36-8.

⁶⁰Thomas, p. 417.

⁶¹Wheatley, p. 35.

⁶²Ibid., p. 34.

swift results and he had already expressed doubt about the possibility of defeating Britain quickly from the air.⁶³ An air and sea war might drag on for many months especially if the United States increased her economic and political support to Britain or entered the war. Furthermore, Russia might abandon the Non-Aggression Pact during this period, for she had already strained it by claiming Bukhovina from Rumania. It therefore seems likely that from mid-July onwards Hitler was never fully convinced that it would be possible to finish the war in the West before attacking Russia.

Hitler's growing doubts about the willingness of the British to make peace or the ability of the Wehrmacht to make them do so quickly caused him to reconsider the size of the land forces he would require in 1941. On 13 July he told General Halder that of the 35 divisions earmarked for disbandment twenty should merely be sent on prolonged leave to enable the men to return to industry and yet have them ready for a quick recall.⁶⁴ The only apparent reason for this

⁶³ See IMT, XXXVII, 079-L, 552. See also Halder, KTB, II, 49, 31 July 1940: "U-boat warfare and air attacks can win the war but they will take 1 to 2 years."

⁶⁴ Halder KTB, II, 20, 13 July 1940; Mueller-Hillebrand, Das Heer, II, 63-4.

change was Hitler's growing conviction that Britain "will not take the path to peace."⁶⁵ By the end of the month he had decided that in addition to the 120 divisions required for Russia, the number planned in June, he would require a further 60 divisions to garrison Scandinavia and the West.⁶⁶ Thus, the modifications in Hitler's plans for the war economy and reorganisation of the Army were due to the British determination to fight on and not to changes in his intentions towards Russia. They had remained constant. Nevertheless, the German military leaders were made increasingly uneasy at the prospect of attacking Russia while Britain still fought on in the West, and their nagging doubts later weakened the confidence and enthusiasm with which, in July 1940, they approached the task of invading Russia.

The OKH and the Initial Planning for the East

The victory in the West not only dispelled most of the scepticism which the senior Army leaders had shown towards the Blitzkrieg, it also removed their main objection to Hitler's leadership. Hitherto most of them had based their

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 21, 13 July 1940.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 50, 31 July 1940.

criticism, not on any political or moral disagreement with his aims, but upon the irresponsible risks involved in his foreign policy and grand strategy. For the past two years they had dreaded a repetition of the defeat and humiliation of 1918. But when Hitler dictated the armistice terms to France at Compi gne their fears dissolved. The Chief of the General Staff, General Halder, no longer felt it necessary to exercise restraint in planning new operations. Nor did von Brauchitsch see any divergence between Hitler's further aims and the interests of the Army. In contrast to their previous custom and to their post-war accounts of these events, the leaders of the Army and senior general staff officers, acting on a report that Hitler's interest had turned to the East, actually began in July 1940 to plan an attack on the Soviet Union, even before Hitler had given any direct orders to do so.⁶⁷

A week before the end of the campaign in the West the General Staff began to plan the transfer of fifteen divisions to the East.⁶⁸ On 25 June this number was increased to twenty-four, including six Panzer and three motorized divisions.⁶⁹

⁶⁷See IMT, XX, 576-7.

⁶⁸Halder KTB, I, 358, 16 June 1940.

⁶⁹Ibid., 372, 25 June 1940.

The formations in the East were placed under the command of the 18th Army, General Georg von Kuechler. On 4 July he and his Chief of Staff, General Marcks, were briefed on their tactical, defensive and administrative tasks by General Halder and Colonel Kinzel, Chief of the Foreign Armies East Branch.⁷⁰ On arrival in the East von Kuechler issued an order to his formation commanders to scotch any rumours of a deterioration of Russo-German relations.⁷¹ These actions would seem to be part of the normal redistribution of forces after the completion of a campaign. But this process had been given extra impetus by the strain imposed on Russo-German relations when the Soviet Union had attempted to occupy not only Bessarabia, which lay within her "sphere of influence", but also Bukhovina, which did not.⁷² Developments in the General Staff in July made the transfer of forces to the East part of a continuous build-up of German might which culminated in the invasion of Russia in June 1941.

⁷⁰Ibid., II, 8, 4 July 1940.

⁷¹N.D. NOKW-1531, quoted by G.L. Weinberg, "Der deutsche Entschluss zum Angriff auf die Sowjet-Union," VfZ, I (1953), 303.

⁷²See NSR, pp. 78, 155-6, 157 ff.

At the end of June 1940 General Halder returned to Berlin where Baron von Weizsaecker briefed him on Hitler's view of the political situation.⁷³ Attention was now focused on the East, the State Secretary explained. This was not due entirely to recent Soviet expansion. On the contrary Hitler had been satisfied with Russia's readiness to limit her claim in North Bukhovina. The reason seemed to lie rather in Hitler's long-term plans, for he took the view that "Britain will probably need a further demonstration of our military strength before giving up and leaving our rear free for the East."⁷⁴ The prospect of further military effort was evidently not welcome to von Weizsaecker, and he prophetically warned Halder that:

The difficulties lie less in the present situation than in the future developments because the preservation of our success by military means must lead to overexertion.⁷⁵

But the Chief of the General Staff was in no mood to be deterred by the cheerless counsel of a diplomat. Without

⁷³Halder KTB, I, 374, 30 June 1940. Halder had not conferred with Hitler since 8 June.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 375, 30 June 1940.

⁷⁵Ibid.

awaiting direct instructions from Hitler he proceeded to examine the military tasks which von Weizsaecker's statement had raised. Next day he visited the Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Schniewind and discussed the possibility of undertaking an invasion of England.⁷⁶ He also conferred on the reorganisation of the Army for its future tasks with General Fromm, Chief of the Reserve Army, who, he noticed "seemed unwilling to disband formations in the East."⁷⁷ On arriving back at Fontainebleau he warned Colonel von Greiffenberg of the Operations Branch that there were two major problems still to be solved, the defeat of England, and the delivery of "a military blow at Russia which will force her to recognise Germany's dominant role in Europe."⁷⁸

At this time the Deputy Chief of Staff, General von Stuelpnagel, and his chief assistant, General Mieth, were both transferred to the Armistice Commission. This placed a heavy burden of work on Colonel von Greiffenberg, and

⁷⁶Ibid., II, 3, 1 July 1940.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 4, 1 July 1940.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 6, 3 July 1940; see also Ibid., 15, 9 July 1940: "Russland-England".

Halder warned him that in order to cope with the strategic planning to be expected he should divide his Operations Branch into separate working groups.⁷⁹ Thus, although the invasion of England occupied most of the attention of the General Staff, Russia was not ignored.⁸⁰ The possibility that Britain was continuing the struggle in the hope of an alliance with Russia was discussed by Halder and von Etzdorf, the representative of the Foreign Office with the General Staff, on 11 July.⁸¹ Two days later Hitler repeated the same idea, but professed himself reluctant to expend German blood on the destruction of the British Empire, only to see it fall into the hands of "Japan, America and others."⁸² The logical but as yet unspoken, conclusion to this line of argument seemed to be an attack on Russia to forestall an Anglo-Russian alliance, and so von Brauchitsch warned Halder to give further thought to the Russian problem so that "the OKH shall not be caught unprepared."⁸³

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 6-7, 3 July 1940.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 15, 9 July; 17, 11 July 1940.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 18, 11 July 1940.

⁸² Ibid., p. 21, 13 July 1940.

⁸³ Klee, p. 191, n. 521.

This remark reflected another aspect of the attitude of the Army leaders to the possibility of a war with Russia. Pique at Hitler's failure to acknowledge the contribution of the General Staff to the recent victory over France and a humiliating awareness that their pessimistic warnings of French military power had proved unfounded had made the generals anxious to restore their status and prestige.⁸⁴ None was more eager in this endeavour than the Commander-in-Chief of the Army. Flushed with the victory and promotion won for him by more imaginative men, and impatient to prove that the Army could complete the establishment of a German hegemony over Europe,⁸⁵ Field Marshal von Brauchitsch rushed with incautious zeal into the preparation of plans for an attack on Russia and for an invasion of England.

The Conference on 21 July 1940

When von Brauchitsch arrived for the Fuehrer conference on 21 July, Hitler was probably unaware that his Army

⁸⁴Op. cit., p. 7, 4 July 1940; see also p. 63, 13 August 1940.

⁸⁵This intention clearly lies behind the discussion between von Brauchitsch and Halder on 30 July. See Ibid., p. 46, 30 July 1940. Cf. Halder's discussion with von Greiffenberg, p. 6, 3 July 1940.

Commander-in-Chief had discarded his customary attitude of hesitant caution and incoherent pessimism.⁸⁶ Thus, he approached the subject of an attack on Russia guardedly, presenting it as a precautionary measure made necessary by Stalin's "flirting" with Britain.⁸⁷ The response he received must have come as an agreeable surprise. For, according to Halder's account of the conference, a proposal was submitted to Hitler outlining the concentration, aims and comparative strengths for an autumn campaign in Russia.⁸⁸ The punctuation as well as the form, normal staff sequence and content of the proposal indicates that it was made by one speaker.⁸⁹ It was

⁸⁶The last Fuehrer Conference attended by von Brauchitsch was on 13 June 1940. See KTB OKW, I, 158E.

⁸⁷Halder KTB, II, 32, 22 July 1940.

⁸⁸Ibid., pp. 32-3, 22 July 1940. The proposal comprises paragraphs 8(a) to (d) inclusive. Paragraph (e) outlines the questions and discussion customary at the end of a presentation of this sort. The questions were probably posed by Hitler.

⁸⁹The proposal conforms to the normal staff method and sequence for presenting a plan: (1) an indication of the basic idea; (2) aims; (3) method or allocation of force; (5) co-operation (omitted on this occasion); (6) logistics (also omitted); (7) questions. Cf. outline Plan "Barbarossa," Ibid., p. 266 ff., 2 February 1941.

a proposal of extraordinary optimism. It suggested that using only 80 to 100 divisions Germany could defeat Russia in the autumn of 1940. Their concentration would take from four to six weeks. The military aims were loosely expressed as

. . . the defeat of the Russian army or the capture of at least as much Russian territory as necessary to prevent enemy air attacks against Berlin and the Silesian industrial areas. It would be desirable to advance far enough to attack the most important Russian centres with our air force.⁹⁰

The political aims were strongly reminiscent of the terms of the Treaty of Brest Litovsk which the Germans had imposed on Russia in 1918: the creation of a "Ukrainian Empire" and a federation of Baltic States as a "thorn in the flesh" of Russia. White Russia and Finland were merely named in Halder's notes, presumably they were to become part of a system of vassal buffer states from the White Sea and the Baltic to the Black Sea.⁹¹ It was admitted that an eastern campaign in the autumn of 1940 would have the disadvantage of relieving Britain from the pressure of air attacks, and would enable the United States to deliver supplies to both Great Britain and Russia.⁹²

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 32, 22 July 1940.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 33, 22 July 1940.

⁹²Ibid.

The only person present who could have made such a proposal was Field Marshal von Brauchitsch. The assertion that it was a dialogue between Hitler and someone else seems unlikely, not only because it has the unity of form of a single report, but also because none of Hitler's economic or strategic directives gave any hint that he contemplated an attack in the East in 1940. Later he admitted that he was attracted by the idea, but his subsequent doubt about its feasibility suggests that it was not his.⁹³ Nor does it seem likely that Keitel or Jodl expressed it, since they too rejected it within a week of this conference.⁹⁴ In contrast the OKH had been discussing an operation against Russia since the beginning of July. Furthermore, the General Staff worked upon the proposal for a week after the conference on 21 July with every sign of approval. So irrespective of whether the proposal stemmed from von Brauchitsch or not, the OKH undoubtedly accepted Hitler's first verbal orders for the preparation of plans for a war with Russia with neither surprise nor protest.

⁹³Ibid., pp. 49-50, 31 July 1940.

⁹⁴Keitel and Jodl never presented proposals of this type at conferences attended by representatives of the other senior staffs. See Ibid., p. 32, n. 9; Hillgruber, Hitlers Strategie, p. 218, n. 52.

A few days later, however, cooler counsels seem to have prevailed. On 30 July von Brauchitsch and Halder met again to discuss the situation and reached the conclusion that an attack on Russia, as an alternative to the invasion of England in 1940, could be dangerous.⁹⁵ A number of factors could have contributed to their change of mind. The latest estimates from the Foreign Armies East Branch showed that the Soviet strength was much greater than the 50 to 75 good divisions reported on 21 July.⁹⁶ Furthermore General Fellgiebel stated on 26 July that the simultaneous preparation of signals networks for "Sea Lion" and the East was impossible.⁹⁷ On 28 July the Army leaders received from the Naval Staff a memorandum which seemed to upset all their previous ideas about a cross-channel invasion.⁹⁸ The situation was further complicated by pessimistic reports about the forthcoming Italian operation in North Africa.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Op. cit., pp. 45-6, 30 July 1940.

⁹⁶ John Erickson, The Soviet High Command, A Military-Political History, 1918-1941 (London, 1962), p. 557, n. 125; IMT, VII, USSR-228, 301.

⁹⁷ Halder KTB, II, 33, 22 July, 36, 26 July 1940.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 40, 28 July 1940.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 38, 27 July, 45, 30 July 1940.

The combined effect of these factors made von Brauchitsch and Halder realise that it was essential, first of all, to knock Britain out of the war by means of an invasion. But if this could not take place in the autumn the greatest danger would be the loss of the strategic initiative in the West. They decided, therefore, that the Wehrmacht should not turn East but strike at Britain by conducting operations against Gibraltar, Haifa and Suez, by supporting the Italians with Panzer formations and by encouraging Russian expansion towards the Persian Gulf. The possible value of Russian cooperation and the dispersion of the German forces in these widespread operations made an attack on the Soviet Union neither desirable nor practicable until Britain had been defeated. They ~~felt~~ felt that rather than start a war on two fronts it would be better to remain friendly with Russia. In contrast to the later assertions of the need for a preventive war, von Brauchitsch and Halder agreed that there were really no grounds for conflict over Soviet aspirations towards the Persian Gulf and the Straits, and in the Balkans, where Germany did have economic interests, the two countries could "keep out of one another's way."¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 46, 30 July 1940.

Under these circumstances von Brauchitsch and Halder abandoned or at least postponed the idea of an eastern campaign and decided that:

. . . we can decisively strike the British in the Mediterranean and push them away from Asia, assist the Italians to build up their Mediterranean Empire, and, with the help of Russia, build up our own empire in West and Northern Europe. We can then face with confidence a protracted war with Britain.¹⁰¹

Confronted by unexpected complications, the Army leaders were evidently reverting to their earlier caution. But some aspects of their discussion on 30 July were just as unrealistic as their earlier support for an autumn attack on Russia. Von Brauchitsch well knew that in advocating an operation in the East he was anticipating the wishes of the Fuehrer, thus he must have been equally aware that Hitler would welcome neither the idea of limiting his Lebensraum to North or Western Europe, nor of turning the Wehrmacht to the South, especially within days of having been assured of the feasibility of an autumn campaign in Russia. By revealing such vacillation von Brauchitsch would surely have revived all the contempt which Hitler had felt towards him in the autumn of 1939.¹⁰² It was thus fortunate for the Army leaders

¹⁰¹Ibid.

¹⁰²In November 1939 Hitler admitted to General Guderian, then a junior corps commander, that the only reason he had not

that Hitler was not yet prepared to abandon Operation "Sea Lion" and it was left to Admiral Raeder in September to propose the diversion of the major effort to the Mediterranean.

The naval records of the conference on 21 July do not mention the proposed attack on Russia. It seems probable that, as in the case of the conference on 31 July, Admiral Raeder left before this topic was discussed.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, awareness of Hitler's long-term aims¹⁰⁴ and doubts about the possibility of a short war in the West caused the Naval Staff also to examine the prospects in the East. In a study entitled "Observations on Russia," dated 28 July 1940,¹⁰⁵ it urged the establishment of an impregnable continental base and an autarkic war industry, and suggested the conquest of Russia as a means to those ends. The defeat of the inferior

sacked von Brauchitsch was that he lacked a suitable replacement. See Guderian, pp. 87-8. Later Hitler said of his Army Commander-in-Chief, "He's no soldier, he's but a poor thing and a man of straw." Hitler's Secret Conversations, p. 194.

¹⁰³ See Hillgruber, Strategie, p. 218, n. 53.

¹⁰⁴ See above p. 96.

¹⁰⁵ West Germany, Bundesarchiv Koblenz, K10-2/10, 75MS "Betrachtungen ueber Russland," quoted by Klee, pp. 191-92, and Hillgruber, Hitlers Strategie, pp. 220-21.

Soviet forces and the occupation of an area extending to Lake Ladoga-Smolensk-Crimea was described as "militarily feasible."¹⁰⁶ Displaying the same optimism as that of the OKH a week earlier, the Naval Staff stated that the operation in the East might be carried out in the autumn of 1940 if Britain could be held down with comparatively small air forces. Indeed, the whole concept had a marked similarity to the outline plan presented to Hitler on 21 July. However, unlike Field Marshal von Brauchitsch, Admiral Raeder did not support the idea of an attack in the East before Britain was defeated, and there is no evidence that he ever revealed the contents of this study to Hitler. Nor did Hitler consult him on the decision to turn East. Leaving both the Naval and Luftwaffe Staffs to conduct their planning for the war against Britain, Hitler relied upon his leading soldiers for advice upon this question.

CHAPTER III

HITLER'S GRAND STRATEGIC DECISIONS,

JULY - NOVEMBER, 1940

The Decision to Attack Russia in 1941

Professor J.B. Bury once stated that:

When a war breaks out, there are two things to be explained which must be kept distinct: why the aggressors go to war at all, and why they go to war at the time they actually do.¹

The reason why the Germans invaded Russia at all was that such an attack was an essential step in the policy of conquering Lebensraum which Hitler had followed throughout his career. His actions in the summer of 1940 confirm that this policy was still the driving force behind his grand strategy. The desire to attack Russia as soon as possible was the only compelling reason for his initial choice of a strategy of annihilation against Britain, the attempt to defeat her quickly by direct assaults on her homeland, in preference to a strategy of exhaustion, combining a major effort in the Mediterranean with a blockade by sea and air

¹J. B. Bury, The Ancient Greek Historians (New York, 1958), pp. 93-4.

forces. The Mediterranean theatre in July 1940 offered ample opportunities for a series of swift Blitzkrieg campaigns of the type which appealed to Hitler's impatient mentality and need for spectacular action. But his desire for conquest, though far from limited, was too strongly oriented eastwards. He rejected any strategy which left uncertain the date of the attack of Russia. Thus the main decision was not whether to attack Russia but only when. How and when to defeat Britain depended in turn upon this decision.

The reason why Hitler decided to attack Russia in the spring of 1941 was that after consulting his closest military advisers, Keitel and Jodl, he felt that this was the earliest and also the latest date on which he could safely concentrate sufficient forces in the East for the attack. The contents of Hitler's economic directives suggests that in June 1940 he hoped for a period of peace, a recuperative pause, between the war in the West and the coming struggle in the East.² In July he realised that it might not be possible to defeat Britain quickly with the limited forces at his

²See Thomas, pp. 406-7. The general impression given by the directive of 14 June 1940 is one of a basic recuperation to be undertaken by all three services. See also Hillgruber, Strategie, p. 208.

disposal. On the other hand, Soviet pressure on Rumania made him acutely aware that the Russians might not remain bound by their agreements with Germany long enough for him to build up the necessary naval and air strength in the West to defeat Britain by a strategy of exhaustion and then convert the Wehrmacht for war in the East. The vital question, whether to attempt a swift blow in the East in the autumn of 1940 or to delay the eastern campaign and invade England first, was openly raised at the conference on 21 July. At this time the Army leaders, von Brauchitsch and Halder, showed unbounded, if short-lived, confidence in the ability of the Wehrmacht to conduct whichever of these operations the Fuehrer chose. Hitler, however, was not certain that either operation could succeed. He viewed the situation far more realistically than his Army leaders. On 21 July he described the invasion of England as ". . . not just a river crossing, but the crossing of a sea which is dominated by the enemy."³ Similarly, he greeted the proposal for an autumn attack on Russia not with unrestrained enthusiasm but with questions which reflected doubts about its feasibility: "What operational objectives

³ Naval War Staff Diary, 21 July 1940, quoted by Wheatley, p. 43. See also Halder KTB, II, 31, 22 July 1940.

can we set? What strength? Time and place for preparation?"⁴ He was evidently not convinced by the answers he received from von Brauchitsch, and shortly after the conference he asked Keitel and Jodl for their views. They replied in a memorandum signed by Keitel and probably written by Jodl, that the time, space and weather factors rendered an autumn attack on Russia "totally impracticable."⁵ Hitler accepted their objections and informed them that he had already decided to plan the operation for the spring of 1941.

This decision was a compromise solution. It did not make a choice between concentrating all efforts upon first defeating Britain and then attacking Russia or vice versa. It gave Germany almost a year in which to prepare for the war in the East. During this time a series of blows could be launched at Britain, which, though they might not defeat her, would further reduce her ability to interfere on the continent.

⁴Ibid., p. 33, 22 July 1940.

⁵Warlimont, p. 112. Keitel's post-war account was confused and inaccurate, probably with the deliberate intention of under-playing his role in the decision to invade Russia. He stated that he heard of the decision only in August and composed a memorandum opposing the idea. However, this is evidently not the same document as that seen by Warlimont in July. See Goerlitz, Keitel, pp. 240, 242-5; and IMT, X, 425 ff.

Though some forces might have to remain in the West, the bulk of the Wehrmacht could be employed in the East for a full summer and autumn campaign. Thus there seemed to be a good chance of defeating Russia in a single Blitzkrieg campaign.⁶ Since Britain was powerless to intervene Hitler regarded it as hardly legitimate to refer to a two-front war.

Hitler has been correctly criticised for his failure to appreciate the importance of naval power. Thus it is illogical to attribute him with an inordinate dread of a two-front war in 1940 when the shattered remnants of Britain's land forces were confined to their home islands or to distant outposts overseas. As on previous occasions her refusal to act "logically" was a nuisance involving improvisations and delays, but it was not to be allowed to change the entire pattern or main aims of Hitler's grand strategic plans. He ordered the air attacks and preparations for an invasion of Britain in the hope of snatching an easy victory from his maimed and isolated opponent. Operation "Sea Lion" was not a mere bluff prepared merely for its psychological effect because if the British morale or economy had suffered a

⁶ See Halder KTB, II, 49, 31 July 1940.

collapse it would have been launched.⁷ Nevertheless, Hitler realized that the British might refuse to be cowed and that under these circumstances his decision to turn east might be subjected to some criticism. Thus, at conferences on this subject Hitler played the role of master strategist before his generals, justifying his aggressive designs with a series of political exaggerations and inconsistent strategic rationalisations. He countered Keitel's misgivings with a vague reference to the "threatening danger" to be fended off in the East and stated that:

. . . he had already ordered von Brauchitsch to double the number of Panzer divisions . . . he had not built up this great mobile army just to let it be idle in wartime. The war wouldn't end itself and he could no longer attack the British with the Army in 1941; a landing in England would by then be impossible.⁸

A further indication of Hitler's thoughts on the East was given on 29 July when General Jodl informed Colonel Warlimont and his three section chiefs in the National Defence Department of the OKW of the decision to launch "a

⁷ Ibid., p. 48, 31 July 1940: "If we get the impression that the British are collapsing, and that after a time the (desired) effect will follow, then attack (i.e. landing operation)."

⁸ Goerlitz, Keitel, p. 243.

surprise attack on Russia . . . at the earliest possible moment, i.e. in May 1941."⁹ Although it conflicted with the ideas expressed in his earlier studies and memoranda,¹⁰ Jodl had accepted the mixture of truth and rationalisation with which Hitler had justified this decision, and he now presented Hitler's arguments to his subordinates. He said that the Fuehrer considered

a collision with Bolshevism was bound to come and that it was better therefore to have this campaign now, when we were at the height of our military power, than to have to call the German people to arms once more in the years to come.¹¹

Admitting that the operation would take place even if the war against Britain had not been concluded, Jodl explained that it was "the best method of forcing England to make peace if this had not proved possible by other means."¹² As we shall see later, Jodl himself was by no means convinced by this argument.¹³ But out of loyalty to Hitler he concealed his doubts

⁹ Warlimont, p. 111; see also Greiner, p. 288 ff.

¹⁰ See p. 67 above and Hillgruber, Strategie, p. 157 ff; IMT, XXVIII, 1776-PS, 301 ff.

¹¹ Warlimont, p. 112.

¹² Ibid., p. 111.

¹³ See KTB OKW, I, 981.

from Warlimont and the others. When they protested against the prospect of a two-front war he engaged them in "an hour of bitter argument" in which he "countered every question."¹⁴ Finally, he sent them away to draw up a directive for the administrative preparations for the concentration of forces in Poland known as Aufbau Ost.¹⁵

Three Decisions

Hitler's attempts to justify his decisions and to dramatize his historical role were repeated in the analysis of the war which he dictated to Martin Bormann in 1945. In this account he attributed his decision on when to attack Russia to three different dates. The first was in July 1940, "as soon as I realised that Britain was determined to remain stubborn."¹⁶ The second occasion was "on the very anniversary of the signing of the Moscow Pact"¹⁷ on 28 September. The third was in mid-November 1940 "immediately after Molotov's visit to Berlin."¹⁸ Subsequent writers including both gener-

¹⁴Op. cit., p. 112.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Testament of Adolf Hitler, p. 96.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 99. The Moscow Pact comprised the Non-Aggression Treaty of 23 August and the Boundary and Friendship Treaty of 28 September 1939. For reasons explained below, it is likely that Hitler was referring to the latter.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 65.

als and historians, who believe that Hitler's main motive in attacking Russia was the conquest of Lebensraum have selected the first date for the decision.¹⁹ Those who see the eastern campaign as a preventive war or an indirect means of defeating Britain have chosen the last date, or have stated that the final decision came even later.²⁰ But none of these interpretations explains the significance of the Moscow Pact. Nor do they make it clear why Hitler should have found it necessary to make or reaffirm his decision to attack Russia on these separate occasions.

An examination of the situation facing Hitler on each occasion reveals that each one did in fact have a special significance. The initial decision, made in the last days of July 1940 remained constant and was reaffirmed on the two subsequent occasions. The factor which caused him to re-appraise his grand strategy was not Russia but Great Britain. For once he had decided to strike at Russia in May 1941 it

¹⁹For example: Warlimont, p. 114; Alan Clark, Barbarossa, The Russian-German Conflict, 1941-1945 (London, 1965) pp. 19-20; Dallin, pp. 12-14; Weinberg, "Der deutsche Entschluss, . . ." p. 313.

²⁰Hinsley, p. 119; Halder, Hitler as Warlord, p. 39; Hans-Guenther Seraphim and Andreas Hillgruber, "Hitlers Entschluss zum Angriff auf Russland," VfZ, 2(1954), p. 241.

it became desirable to make every attempt to defeat the British. Thus on 31 July 1940 Hitler's verbal orders for the preparations for the spring campaign in the East were accompanied by orders for immediate air attacks on Britain. When it was clear these had failed, Hitler turned to an attempt to form a coalition directed against the British Empire, especially its bases in the Mediterranean. This was accompanied, on 28 September, by a definite confirmation of the decision to attack Russia as scheduled. Finally after the Molotov conversations, Hitler abandoned hope of defeating Britain before attacking Russia and had to be content to isolate her from Europe by eliminating her last footholds in Greece and Gibraltar. The reaffirmation of the decision to attack Russia in 1941 now caused Hitler to show signs of nervous anxiety, for this time it definitely meant that Germany would be fighting a two-front war with a far more active enemy in the West than he had expected in July. By November 1940 the British had demonstrated that they were capable of striking back. They had bombed the Reich throughout the autumn and vigorously attacked the Italian fleet.²¹

²¹On 11 November 1940 aircraft of the Fleet Air Arm seriously damaged three Italian battleships in Taranto harbour.

Nevertheless, Hitler subdued his doubts by deluding himself with optimistic assessments of Soviet weakness and the rationalisation that the time which he had selected was "especially favourable."²² Such arguments, stressing the importance of the timing of the Russian operation and its relationship to the war with Great Britain, were easy to use because at the conference with the Army leaders on 31 July Hitler had taken care to present his initial decision to attack Russia in the spring of 1941 in just such terms.

The Conference on 31 July 1940

When Field Marshal von Brauchitsch, General Halder, Admiral Raeder, Field Marshal Keitel and General Jodl gathered at the Berghof for a Fuehrer conference on the last day of July they had no unified ideas on the further prosecution of the war. The Army leaders wished to press for an invasion of England regardless of the difficulties revealed by the Naval Staff. Failing this, they preferred a strategy of attrition including operations in the Mediterranean to the alternative of an attack in the East, which ten days earlier

²² KTB OKW, I, 205, 5 December 1940; see also 258, 9 January 1941.

they had optimistically supported. Admiral Raeder wished to postpone Operation "Sea Lion", but he was not yet ready to abandon it altogether. Nor apparently was he prepared to support the case for an attack on Russia recommended by some of his staff. The leaders of the OKW had accepted the idea of such an attack provided it was not attempted in the autumn of 1940. The Luftwaffe was not represented on this occasion.

The lack of coordination between the German military leaders was of little consequence because, as usual, Hitler had called them together not to seek their advice but to inform them of the decisions which he had made. So when Admiral Raeder opened the proceedings by proposing that Operation "Sea Lion" should be postponed until the spring of 1941 he was overruled.²³ Nevertheless, Hitler reassured him that a landing would be attempted only if the air assault brought about a favourable situation. Similarly, when von Brauchitsch attempted to suggest an operation in North Africa, in accordance with the alternative strategy which he had discussed on the previous evening with Halder, this was des-

²³ Halder KTB, II, 47, 31 July 1940; see also p. 48, n. 5.

cribed as a "diversionary manoeuvre."²⁴ However, the Army leaders were relieved to hear that Hitler still thought as they did that a "really decisive effect" could be achieved "only by an attack on England,"²⁵ and were glad to drop the discussion of operations in the Mediterranean when Hitler gave orders for the commencement of the air offensive which was to become the Battle of Britain.²⁶

The reason for Hitler's eagerness to seek a swift decision in the West in preference to the longer but less risky alternative of a siege of Britain and a war of attrition against the British Empire was not revealed until Admiral Raeder had left the conference room. Presumably Hitler assumed that his naval Commander-in-Chief would object to the decision to attack Russia, and he kept him in ignorance of it until September.²⁷ Even though he had no reason to expect any criticism from the leaders of the Army or the

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid., p. 48, 31 July 1940.

²⁷ See Raeder, pp. 333, 335; see also Hinsley, p. 94; Hillgruber, Strategie, p. 218, n. 53; Warlimont, p. 115.

OKW, he approached the subject somewhat obliquely, carefully presenting a strategic basis for his decision. If an invasion of England did not take place, he stated, all factors which gave Britain hope of a change in the situation must be eliminated. These, he stressed, were Russia and America. But if Russia were to be destroyed, the corresponding increase in the power of Japan would prevent America from aiding Britain. Thus the key to the strategic problem facing Germany was the destruction of Russia, ". . . for then Britain's last hope will be shattered."²⁸ All this led him to the decision that "Russia must be defeated in the course of this struggle. Spring 1941."²⁹

The whole charade was transparently weak. Hitler referred to "overheard conversations" between the Soviet President, Kalinin, and the Yugoslav Ambassador in Moscow, which revealed only an understandable concern on the part of the Soviet leader at the position of strength attained by Germany. There was no substantial evidence that the Russians had any intention of aiding Britain.³⁰ On the contrary

²⁸Op. cit., p. 49, 31 July 1940.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Halder KTB, II, 49, 31 July; see also p. 34, 22 July 1940; DGFP(D), X, 321, n. 1; Philip W. Fabry, Der Hitler-

Hitler was reported as stating only ten days earlier that "even though Moscow is unenthusiastic about Germany's great success, she will nevertheless make no effort to enter the war against Germany of her own accord."³¹ Thus a German attack was the most certain way to force Stalin into the very alliance which Hitler claimed that he wished to avert. Furthermore, the predatory aims, including the annexation of the Ukraine, White Russia, and the Baltic states, which Hitler went on to describe were hardly indicative of a purely preventive war to avert an alliance between Britain and Russia.³²

Though he presented the whole concept as an alternative to the invasion of England,³³ these aims must have dispelled the idea that if Britain made peace before the

Stalin Pact, 1939-1941 (Darmstadt, 1962), p. 257 ff. Fabry lays considerable stress upon such incidents to support the argument that Hitler's decision to attack Russia was a reaction to Soviet political and military threats.

³¹FNC, 1940, I, 81, 21 July 1940, quoted by Wheatley, p. 141, n. 2. Cf. Halder KTB, II, 32, 22 July 1940: "There are no signs of Soviet activity directed against us."

³²Halder KTB, II, 50, 31 July 1940.

³³See Ibid., p. 49, n. 11. The entry "Angenommen: England tritt nicht ein. . ." is interpreted as "if the landing operation should not be carried out. . ."

spring the Russian campaign would have been cancelled as no longer necessary. Yet General Halder claimed after the war that in spite of the categorical nature of the entry in his diary neither he nor von Brauchitsch gained the impression from the conference on 31 July that Hitler made an "irrevocable decision" to attack Russia, but only gave the "the starting shot (for preparations) for foreseeable possibilities."³⁴ The Army's role in preparing plans for an eastern offensive in the autumn and Hitler's own admission that he would have preferred to attack Russia in 1940 indicated an eagerness to expand eastward, not merely to complete a plan for possible use if Russia became more hostile.³⁵ General Jodl, in briefing his staff two days earlier, expressed no doubt of the finality of Hitler's decision.³⁶ Furthermore, in spite of the fact that the date set was a long way off, and that Hitler had absolute power to change his mind on grand strategic matters, the changes in economic and foreign policies coupled with the decision to attack Russia placed

³⁴ General Franz Halder letter to Andreas Hillgruber, 5 October 1954, quoted by Fabry, 498, n. 272.

³⁵ Halder KTB, II, 50, 31 July 1940.

³⁶ See pp. 99-100 above.

growing limitations on his freedom of choice. These changes, the increase of the Army to 180 divisions, and the strengthening of German resistance to Soviet pressure on Rumania and Finland,³⁷ also reduced Hitler's flexibility after the failure of the Luftwaffe over England, when he sought alternative methods of defeating the British.

The Second Decision, 28 September 1940

On 31 July Hitler stated that if the results of the air attacks on Britain were not favourable preparations for Operation "Sea Lion" would be halted.³⁸ Nevertheless, in mid-September when confronted with the bitter fact that the Luftwaffe had not achieved the prerequisites for an invasion Hitler showed great reluctance to abandon the operation.³⁹ It was not until late in the month that he turned to the Mediterranean in search of alternative means of defeating Britain. Since the end of July he had encouraged the OKW and OKH to study the possibilities there in case the Luftwaffe

³⁷ On 31 July Hitler named Finland as a possible ally in an attack on Russia. He also stated that Hungarian-Rumanian disagreements would have to be "regulated" after which a guarantee would be given to Rumania. Op. cit.

³⁸ Halder KTB, II, 48, 31 July 1940.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 99, 14 September 1940; see also Wheatley, pp. 85, 94-5.

should fail.⁴⁰ But they had done so without enthusiasm, and it was Admiral Raeder who became the chief advocate of a major effort in the Mediterranean. Appalled when he finally heard of the decision to attack Russia without first ending the war in the West, he attempted to convince Hitler that German control of the Mediterranean and Middle East would not only defeat Britain but also enable Germany to threaten Russia from the South.⁴¹ Though Hitler had no intention of changing his plans for the attack on Russia, the idea of bringing Britain to heel by striking at her overseas possessions seemed particularly favourable at that moment because the Tripartite Pact was to be signed the next day, 27 September, and von Ribbentrop was full of enthusiasm for the idea of inviting the Soviet Union to join its signatories in the partition of the British Empire.⁴² So, while the representatives of Germany, Italy and Japan gathered in the Reichs Chancellery in Berlin, Keitel issued a short directive

⁴⁰See Warlimont, pp. 109-10; Halder KTB, II, 79, 27 August 1940. It seems likely from Warlimont's evidence that Jodl was the main supporter of these studies.

⁴¹See FCNA, 26 September 1940.

⁴²See NSR, pp. 196-213, 255-58. See also Halder KBT, II, 118-19, 30 September 1940.

to the economic staffs stating that with immediate effect and until 15 November the army construction programme, Code name "Axis", would be given priority above the special programme for Operation "Sea Lion".⁴³ The strategy of direct assault on the British mainland having failed, the Wehrmacht was now to be turned to a strategy of coalition warfare against the British Empire.

This did not mean, however, that Hitler's resolve to attack Russia in May was in any way diminished. On the next day, 28 September, the first anniversary of the Russo-German Boundary and Friendship Treaty, he issued a major economic directive confirming the verbal orders of 31 July for an increase in the Army. The main features of the new war economic programme were:

- (a) In the Army, the preparation of armaments for 180 field divisions and certain occupation divisions by spring 1941;
- (b) In the Navy, unrestricted continuation of the U-boat programme beyond 1 January 1942;

⁴³Thomas, p. 430.

- (c) In the Luftwaffe, raising of the anti-aircraft artillery priority and the speediest increase in anti-aircraft artillery.⁴⁴

This directive, together with that issued by Keitel on the previous day, meant that the Army's immediate task would be to conduct certain limited operations in the Mediterranean theatre with the support of part of the Navy and the Luftwaffe.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, the remaining naval and air forces would maintain pressure on the British homeland and the bulk of the Army would prepare for the invasion of Russia. The stress on anti-aircraft artillery reflected Hitler's concern at the growing success of the R.A.F. night bombing on German cities and, perhaps also, his fear that the war in the East might expose important industrial targets to Soviet air attacks.⁴⁶

On 29 September Field Marshal von Brauchitsch was informed by Keitel that as a result of major changes in

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 432.

⁴⁵The war-economic priority programme for Code name "Axis" was to last only until 15 November 1940. Thus a sustained offensive in the South was evidently not envisaged.

⁴⁶See Halder KTB, 33, 22 July 1940.

strategy Hitler was to meet Mussolini to discuss the conduct of the war in the Mediterranean.⁴⁷ But events in October showed that Hitler had left his bid to undertake a major effort in the Mediterranean too late. The opportunity had existed in July, but Hitler had gambled that he could obtain a quick success by direct attacks on Britain and dismissed operations in the Mediterranean as "diversionary manoeuvres."⁴⁸ His divided and uncertain military leaders had accepted this decision on 31 July without protest because none of them was able confidently to offer a better solution. On that occasion the Army leaders, though they preferred operations in the Mediterranean to an attack on Russia,⁴⁹ still gave first priority to Operation "Sea Lion" and clung to the hope that the Luftwaffe and the Navy would somehow produce conditions favouring a Channel crossing. For their part, Keitel and Jodl both would have welcomed an opportunity to avoid a two-front war. Jodl especially had consistently suggested anti-British operations in the Mediterranean in memoranda

⁴⁷ Ibid., II, 118-19, 30 September 1940. See also DGFP(D), X, p. 245 ff; Warlimont, pp. 121-2; Galeazzo Ciano, The Ciano Diaries, 1939-1943, ed. Hugh Gibson (New York, 1946), pp. 298-9.

⁴⁸ Halder KTB, II, 47, 31 July 1940.

issued in January, March and June 1940, and abandoned these views only in deference to Hitler.⁵⁰ Goering also preferred a Mediterranean campaign to the attack on Russia, but he stood too much in awe of Hitler to dispute his decisions.⁵¹ Admiral Raeder, as we have seen, did not believe that Operation "Sea Lion" could be undertaken until the spring of 1941, and although he did not suggest a Mediterranean effort until September, he probably would have done so earlier if he had been aware of Hitler's decision to attack Russia.

The political situation was also favourable in July 1940. France was cowed by defeat, Italy and Spain eager for easy gains and Russia devoid of tangible grounds for suspecting Germany of ill-faith. But Hitler's decisions to attack Britain immediately and directly and to strike Russia in the spring changed the entire situation. The failure of the German air attacks on Britain made the leaders of Spain and France wary of committing themselves to fight an enemy

⁵⁰See p. 67, n. 10 above.

⁵¹See Hillgruber, Strategie, pp. 396-97. Evidence of Goering's support for a Mediterranean strategy is slight. After the war he described "his plan" for a huge drive to the South, but this was evidently calculated to demonstrate his military wisdom. See Milton Shulman, Defeat in the West (London, 1947), pp. 55-6; Liddell Hart, On the Other Side . . . , p. 233.

still clearly capable of striking back. Furthermore, renewed rivalry in North Africa between Italy, Spain and Vichy France made it seem unlikely that they could be combined in a successful alliance.⁵² This insecure situation did not encourage Hitler to commit German land forces where they would depend upon the Italian fleet to safeguard their supply line.⁵³ Military and political cooperation between Italy and Germany was never close, and the dispatch of the German Military Mission to Rumania, which resulted from Hitler's decision to invade Russia,⁵⁴ aroused such jealous resentment in Mussolini that he launched an ill-conceived attack on Greece, upsetting German plans for the Balkans and Eastern Mediterranean. The final blow to Hitler's hopes of a campaign in the Mediterranean came in November when Molotov made it clear that the German activities in Finland and Rumania and other Balkan countries had made the Soviet Union too suspicious of German intentions to participate in a war against Britain without further safeguards for her security.

⁵²Halder KTB, II, 124, 30 October 1940: Hitler cynically remarked that the solution to this problem could only be found by means of a "grandiose deceit."

⁵³Ibid., p. 164, 4 November 1940.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 50, 31 July 1940.

There is no evidence to indicate what Hitler would have done if the Russians have proved gullible enough to cooperate with the Axis against Britain on his terms. It is doubtful, but not impossible that with the Soviet Union thus committed, he might have postponed the attack in the East until the defeat of Britain was achieved.⁵⁵ Alternatively, he might have embroiled the Russians in the Middle East and then struck at them. However, one thing is clear; whatever Molotov's attitude Hitler would not have abandoned the attack on Russia. Directive No. 18 issued on 12 November 1940, the day of his arrival in Berlin, stated that irrespective of the results of the talks with the Soviet Foreign Minister, "all preparations for the East already verbally ordered are to be continued."⁵⁶

The Third Decision, November 1940.

After the meeting with Molotov, Hitler remarked that he ". . . hadn't expected anything of it anyway,"⁵⁷ and this

⁵⁵ Hitler thought that the United States would stay out of the war until 1942. Thus he had another year in which to defeat Britain while she was still isolated had he so wished. See Ibid., p. 165, 4 November 1940; KTB OKW, I, 996.

⁵⁶ Hubatsch, p. 81.

⁵⁷ G. Engel, Tagebuch des Adjutanten des Heeres bei Hitler (Juni 1940-Mai 1941), manuscript diary cited by Hillgruber, Strategie, p. 358.

was probably true. By the time the conversations took place Mussolini's folly, Franco's astute caution and Petain's studied obtuseness had already reduced his hopes of a successful coalition warfare in the South.⁵⁸ Hitler was convinced that unless Russia was prepared to cooperate by advancing towards the Persian Gulf the risks of committing the Wehrmacht to operations in the Mediterranean theatre would be worse than those of a two-front war. Thus on 14 November Raeder, who had mistakenly believed that Hitler had adopted the plans for the Mediterranean as an alternative to the attack in the East, was disappointed to find that he was "still inclined to pursue the conflict with Russia"⁵⁹ and he appealed in vain for a postponement until after the defeat of Britain.

Hitler's determination to strike at Russia as soon as possible was fortified by the uncooperative attitude of the

⁵⁸ Hitler's doubts were already apparent on 4 November. See Halder KTB, II, 163-4, 4 November 1940.

⁵⁹ FCNA, 14 November 1940. Raeder conferred with Hitler only once, on 14 October, between 26 September and this conference. Thus the Mediterranean strategy which he had advocated had been attempted and abandoned almost without his participation. See KTB OKW, I, 166E, 177, 15 November 1940.

Soviet Foreign Minister in Berlin. He told his entourage that:

The conversations had shown where the Russian plans were leading. Molotov had let the cat out of the bag. This would not remain even a marriage of convenience. To let the Russians . . . in would mean the end of Central Europe.⁶⁰

Thus the only change in Hitler's strategy resulting from the conversations with Molotov was that he now knew that the war against Britain could not be ended before the attack on Russia. His plans for the Mediterranean were therefore reduced to the ejection of the British from their last footholds on the continent, Greece and Gibraltar, and limited assistance to the Italians in North Africa.⁶¹ Hitler's resolve to strike eastward in 1941 was thus further strengthened as the possible alternatives fell away. But he issued no orders after the failure of the Molotov conversations to confirm this because he saw no need for them. The processes of political, economic, administrative and operational preparation had all been developing since July, and would be

⁶⁰Engel, Tagebuch, 15 November 1940, quoted by Hillgruber, Strategie, p. 358.

⁶¹Halder KTB, II, 207, 3 December 1940. The offensive into Egypt was not to take place until the autumn of 1941.

continued without further instructions. Nevertheless, this was not clear to the military leaders, to whom the operation in the East had been presented as an alternative to the invasion of England. Since they had not yet abandoned hope of carrying out Operation "Sea Lion" they did not share Hitler's conviction that the spring of 1941 was the "one most favourable moment" for the conquest of Lebensraum.⁶²

The Attitude of the OKH to Hitler's Grand Strategy,

August - December 1940

During the late summer and autumn of 1940 the General Staff of the Army was called upon to conduct planning for the invasion of England (Operation "Sea Lion"), the capture of Gibraltar, the Azores, Canary and Cape Verde Islands (Operation "Felix"), the invasion of Greece (Operation "Marita"), the defence of the Finnish nickel mines, the defence of the Rumanian oil fields, the support of the Italians in North Africa, and the invasion of Russia (Operation "Otto"). But throughout this period the Army leaders were not called upon to offer advice on the grand strategy which these operations were to serve. Indeed, between August and November von

⁶² See p. 24 above.

Brauchitsch conferred with Hitler only once each month. Halder also met Hitler only four times, once in August, once in September and twice in November. In October, a month of considerable grand strategic preparations for the war in the Mediterranean he did not see Hitler at all.⁶³ The poor advice which these two generals had given in July can hardly have encouraged Hitler to consult them on the subsequent grand strategic problems. However, they preferred to place a different interpretation upon their neglect. On 3 September when von Brauchitsch complained bitterly that Hitler was even trying to keep him out of the public eye, Halder noted that it was "apparently jealousy on the part of the Fuehrer."⁶⁴ Furthermore, resentment at their exclusion from the higher strategic counsels made von Brauchitsch and Halder hypercritical of Hitler's decisions even when these were little different from views they themselves had expressed.

Throughout July the OKH planned a Channel crossing with an optimism made possible only by a stubborn disregard for the difficulties facing the Navy and the Luftwaffe. But within a week of the conference on 31 July the Army leaders

⁶³See KTB OKW, I, 159E.

⁶⁴Halder KTB, II, 85, 3 September 1940.

became disillusioned with Operation "Sea Lion." On 6 August Halder complained that:

We are in the peculiar situation where the Navy takes a narrow view, the Luftwaffe is unwilling to start on a task which is its alone at the onset, and the OKW, which for once is really confronted with a Wehrmacht operation, plays possum (sich tot stellt). The only driving force comes from us (the OKH). But we cannot succeed alone.⁶⁵

Next day he told Admiral Schniewind that a landing attempt would be "complete suicide."⁶⁶ It does not seem to have occurred to Halder that the unrealistic plans developed by the OKH might have contributed to Hitler's choice of a strategy of annihilation towards Britain for which the Wehrmacht was ill-equipped. Once committed, however, Hitler was determined to make a sustained attempt to defeat the British by air attacks on their homeland culminating in a cross-channel landing. By 28 September Halder was petulantly complaining that "dragging out the continued existence (of Operation "Sea Lion") is intolerable."⁶⁷ But what alterna-

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 57, 6 August 1940.

⁶⁶ Naval Staff record, 7 August 1940, quoted by Wheatley, p. 68.

⁶⁷ Op. cit., p. 117, 28 September 1940.

tive had the OKH to offer? On 30 July von Brauchitsch and Halder had agreed that a strategy of attrition, including operations in the Mediterranean theatre was preferable to a campaign in the East as an alternative to Operation "Sea Lion". But in August, when Hitler issued orders for studies of Mediterranean operations which might be undertaken before the attack on Russia if Operation "Sea Lion" was abandoned, Halder indignantly expostulated against the boundless schemes which were drawn from the "political kaleidoscope"⁶⁸ without any establishment of priorities. In October it became clear that the struggle for the Mediterranean was to be the main task for the winter,⁶⁹ but Halder was still exasperated by the lack of clear purpose and direction from above.⁷⁰ By November, he was growing concerned that the operations planned in the Balkans would cause a delay in mounting the attack on Russia, especially if Turkey was provoked into a

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 79, 27 August 1940.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 130, 8 October 1940.

⁷⁰See Halder's conversations with von Etzdorf (Ibid., 129, 8 October 1940) and von Brauchitsch (Ibid., 133, 11 October 1940).

hostile reaction.⁷¹ Furthermore, he doubted whether they would achieve a decisive success over Britain which was "what really mattered,"⁷² and it appears that by late November he would have preferred a revival of Operation "Sea Lion" in the spring to the attack on Russia.⁷³ However, he was also concerned that if "Sea Lion" was abandoned, the alternative to it should be given clear priority.

Operational planning for Operation "Otto", the invasion of Russia, was continued throughout this period, but Halder's notes give very little indication of the attitude of the OKH towards it. His statements that the Balkan operation might delay the Russian campaign did not necessarily prove that he was eager to begin it. They may have been no more than further expressions of scepticism provoked by Hitler's failure to set clear priorities. On 4 November he noted in his diary "the Commander-in-Chief wishes to present the operational plan for the eastern campaign on 18 or 20 November (will that be (time) enough?)"⁷⁴ The question in

⁷¹Ibid., p. 188, 18 November and 191, 24 November 1940.

⁷²Ibid., p. 194, 25 November 1940.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 166, 4 November 1940.

parenthesis seemed to indicate that Halder doubted whether the plan would be ready in time for the date proposed.⁷⁵ But after the war he gave a more complex explanation, and stated that he attempted to restrain von Brauchitsch from taking the initiative in presenting the plan to Hitler. When the Field Marshal insisted, Halder suggested that he should then do so before the visit of Molotov ". . . in order to draw Hitler's attention again to the difficulties of the campaign."⁷⁶ This statement does not seem consistent with the optimism with which the General Staff conducted the operational planning during this period. But although the leaders of the Army were convinced that the defeat of Russia lay well within the operational capability of the Army, they doubted both the need and the wisdom of the attack in the East for grand strategic reasons.

This somewhat ambivalent attitude arose from their preference for a revival of Operation "Sea Lion".⁷⁷ In July

⁷⁵ The war-game by which the operational plan for the East was tested was not completed until 7 December, two days after the plan was presented to Hitler. Ibid., p. 217, 7 December 1940.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 166, n. 15, 4 November 1940.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 194, 25 November 1940.

when they had embarked on the planning for the East the situation seemed to offer them the opportunity to strike a blow at Russia which would "force her to recognise Germany's dominant role in Europe."⁷⁸ At the same time they would destroy the centre of Bolshevism, which as conservative nationalists they feared and detested. On the other hand the parallel problem of ending the war against Britain aroused in them increasing uneasiness about embarking prematurely upon a campaign in the East. In July Hitler had presented the idea of an attack on Russia as if it depended upon the condition that the invasion of England did not take place⁷⁹ so the generals still had reason to hope that he might still attempt to end the war in the West first. Since the postponement of Operation "Sea Lion" in September Hitler had not given them a clear indication of his intentions. In the first draft of Directive No. 18 General Warlimont placed Operation "Sea Lion" at the beginning and made it the primary operation for the spring of 1941. But he was informed

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 6, 3 July 1940.

⁷⁹See n. 33 above.

by General Jodl that ". . . this order of things might well accord with the ideas of the OKH but not with those of Hitler"⁸⁰ and the section on England was transferred to the end of the directive. Nevertheless, it did state that Operation "Sea Lion" might be revived in the spring if there were ". . . changes in the overall situation. . . "⁸¹ The only possibility of such changes seemed to lie in the conversations with Molotov which might lead to an extension of the settlement between Russia and Germany. Thus, in spite of the instruction that ". . . all preparations for the East already verbally ordered"⁸² were to continue, it appeared to the Army leaders that the choice between East and West was still open.

In fact, as already indicated, it was not. Hitler had made his decision in July and subsequent events had merely served to confirm it. His references to the campaign in the East as an alternative method of striking at Britain had begun as mere strategic rationalisations, but as

⁸⁰Warlimont, p. 116.

⁸¹Hubatsch, p. 81.

⁸²Ibid.

Britain's resistance presented increasing problems it seems likely that Hitler became a victim of his own arguments. Nevertheless, his desire to conquer Lebensraum was still the dominant factor. If there had been any question of a choice still open until the talks with Molotov there would surely have been some indication of a decision made as a result of those talks at the first conference between Hitler and his Army leaders after the departure of the Soviet Foreign Minister.

The Conference on 5 December 1940

The accounts of the conference on 5 December 1940 in the War Diary of the OKW and in General Halder's diary⁸³ reveal that Hitler took it for granted that the attack on Russia would take place in the spring of 1941 as decided in July. When von Brauchitsch asked him to give his views on the overall situation, he did not refer to Russia as if making a new decision, or even specifically reaffirming an old one as a result of the conversations with Molotov. Instead, he delivered a rambling survey of his Mediterranean plans, in the course of which he casually remarked that even

⁸³ KTB OKW, I, 203 ff; Halder KTB, II, 209 ff., 5 December 1940.

if the attack on Greece proved unnecessary the forces assembled for it could quite conveniently be used in the eastern campaign.⁸⁴

This comment gave von Brauchitsch a cue for discussing the danger of embarking on a two-front war. He was not concerned about the ability of the Army but that of the Luftwaffe to meet the simultaneous demands of the East and West. Hitler replied that British aircraft production would not be able to keep pace with that of Germany and that it would be possible to continue harrassing the British with night bombing raids "during a short eastern campaign."⁸⁵ The Field Marshal's question evidently irritated Hitler, perhaps because it aroused some uneasiness in his own mind and because it suggested that the generals doubted his determination to adhere to the decision of July. He reminded them that the inferiority of the Soviet army made the present time "especially favourable" for a German attack, and gave a comforting description of a swift and victorious campaign culminating in the establishment of a row of buffer states

⁸⁴ KTB OKW, I, 204; Halder KTB, II, 211-13, 5 December 1940.

⁸⁵ KTB OKW, I, 205.

from the Ukraine to Finland.⁸⁶ In order to leave no doubt about his grand strategy for 1941, he finished by summing up the main operations: "Felix" (Gibraltar) was to be carried out as soon as possible, preparations for "Marita" (Greece) and the eastern campaign were to go ahead as ordered, and "Sea Lion" was "no longer possible."⁸⁷

The generals did not argue. Jodl had told his staff two days earlier that if economic difficulties made it necessary to choose between the continuation of the siege of Britain and the invasion of Russia then the latter "would and could be postponed because it is not a dire necessity for the victory over Britain."⁸⁸ However, he was not the man to question the decisions of the Fuehrer, especially in the presence of von Brauchitsch and Halder. Similarly, Halder gave no expression to his recently recorded views that Operation "Marita" threatened to delay the opening attack on Russia, or that Operation "Sea Lion" was ". . . the most certain way of hitting at Britain."⁸⁹ Halder, like the

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 207.

⁸⁷ Op. cit.; Halder KTB, II, 210, 5 December 1940.

⁸⁸ Thomas, 437; KTB OKW, I, 981.

⁸⁹ Halder KTB, II, 188, 18 November, 191, 24 November 1940.

other German military leaders, was well aware that Hitler's policy was founded upon the concept of eastern conquest. Thus, he may well have suspected even then that the Fuehrer could not be persuaded to delay the attack on Russia until after Britain's defeat.

In July when Hitler announced his decision to attack Russia in May 1941, he had also accepted the possibility that Britain might still be fighting on and made provisions for sufficient forces to hold the West. Thus, the prior defeat of Britain was clearly not a prerequisite for the attack on Russia. Secondly, in spite of the inference he gave to his military leaders, events between July and November 1940 had shown that he did not regard operations against the British Isles or against Britain's Mediterranean bases as alternatives to the attack on Russia. His "definite decision to finish off Russia" in May 1941 was made on 31 July 1940 before either of those operations had begun. His long-range economic planning was geared to this decision. The priorities given to the operations in the West and the South were short-term, limited measures to meet a stop-gap strategy designed to fill a period of time made available because an attempt to carry out an invasion of Russia in 1940 might not be completed before winter. But significantly

Hitler admitted that he would have preferred to attack Russia in 1940 if more time had been available.

What made the Russian operation so urgent that it was to be carried out as soon as possible irrespective of the situation in the West? The main factor was probably Hitler's desire to take advantage of the military weakness of the Soviet Union before the Russian leaders could modernise their forces and retrain them in the light of their experiences in Finland and their observations of the Blitzkrieg. Hitler was also anxious to establish his great empire dominating Europe before the United States entered the war. On 5 December 1940, General Halder was not yet convinced that these factors justified the risks of a two front war. Nevertheless, he dutifully presented the General Staff's operational plan for the campaign in the East.

CHAPTER IV

GERMAN MILITARY STRATEGIC PLANNING

JULY - DECEMBER 1940

Operational Plan or Formula?

Military plans usually follow an accepted sequence of development and presentation. Their first stage is an appreciation, or assessment, of the situation and the definition of aims. The relevant factors are set out. These include the forces available to both sides, time, distance, terrain and logistics. From them are derived the courses open. The planner then makes a choice of action and develops a written plan. This presents a summary of the situation, the strength and state of the forces on both sides, a statement of the aim, and an outline of the method to be used for its attainment. In the following examination of the operational plan for the invasion of Russia the same sequence will be observed. It will be noted that each element of this sequence in the German military strategic planning contained serious omissions or defects which contributed to the failure of the Blitzkrieg in the East.

Normally military strategic planning is based upon information and tasks defined by the grand strategic planners. The first duty of the military strategists must be to ensure that the tasks set are possible with the available means. If they are not it is their responsibility to advise their superiors and recommend alternatives. Once the grand strategic aims have been adjusted to the means by this process, the military strategic planners define their aims which in turn set the tasks to be passed on to the operational level in the form of an operational plan. The entire procedure of which this forms a part should involve the careful assessment and reassessment of the relevant factors at each level from policy through grand and military strategy to operations and tactics, for it is upon such assessments that the feasibility of the aims and methods of plans must rest.

The plan for the German invasion of Russia did not, however, result from the careful assessment of the relevant factors. It was based upon a serious underestimation of the strength of the Soviet Union and of the problems presented by its terrain and climate, and upon a crass over-confidence in the invincibility of the Wehrmacht. The aims were defined, not upon the basis of what was feasible, but upon arbitrary

expressions of what was desirable. The economic and logistic factors were almost completely ignored until after the operational plan was completed. The operational method consisted of the repetition of Blitzkrieg techniques which had succeeded elsewhere under very different circumstances. This choice was made inevitable by the nature of the equipment, organisation and experience of the Wehrmacht, but any attempt to adapt the Blitzkrieg to the more difficult conditions and greater spaces in Russia was ruled out by Hitler's insistence on the achievement of victory in one campaign of five months' duration.¹

The flaws in German military strategic planning in the East cannot, however, be blamed entirely on Hitler on the grounds that he imposed arbitrary decisions upon a row of helpless subordinates. Even before he had announced his decision to attack Russia in 1941 the Army leaders had defined their own military strategic aims and ordered their operational planners to conduct studies for a campaign in the East. Their basic approach to the problem differed little from Hitler's. Thus they later accepted his aims, timing and

¹Halder KTB, II, pp. 49-50, 31 July 1940.

methods because they shared his optimistic assumptions about the weakness of Russia and the invincibility of the Wehrmacht.

Since the assessments of the enemy and their own troops, the aims and methods of the campaign were accepted without question by the operational planners, they considered that they had little to do but apply the Blitzkrieg doctrine to the terrain of the Soviet Union. Their approach to military planning differed little from that of military staffs in the age of von Moltke or Napoleon, when operational decisions were less dependent upon administrative considerations. They selected the best ground on which to concentrate their forces for the battle of destruction and the best routes over which to pursue and envelop the shattered remnants of the enemy army. Administrative details they left to the Quartermaster General. Yet the feasibility of their operational plans depended upon logistics. The maintenance of the advance of the motorised and armoured forces in Russia presented problems of supplying gasoline and diesel, lubricants, spare parts, replacements, ammunition and food on a scale which the German General Staff had never experienced. But these problems were not studied in detail until the objectives, lines of advance and timing of the campaign had been decided upon.

In retrospect it seems incredible that the operational plan for a vast mobile campaign should have been completed without a careful examination of the economic and logistic difficulties. However, it must be remembered that the great majority of the senior German generals and staff officers had little or no technical training or experience in mechanised warfare. The only large scale manoeuvres involving Panzer divisions had been carried out in 1937.² Since then the Army had been too pre-occupied with the operational tasks in Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland and the West to extend training in the direction of mechanised formations beyond the small group of senior officers directly involved in their development. Most of the German generals had conducted their soldiering on horseback, and had led units and formations in which the guns and transport had been horsedrawn. In the German Army of 1940 they still did; only the Panzer and motorised divisions and certain anti-tank artillery regiments, engineer, signals and supply units were motorised. Thus the problem of supplying and maintaining great mechanised forces

²See Hauptmann Martin, "Wehrmachtmanöver, 1937," Jahrbuch des deutschen Heeres, 1938, ed. Walter Jost (Leipzig, 1937), pp. 169-173.

was something new. In Poland a great deal of experiment and reorganisation had taken place on the basis of experience gained. But the senior generals and staff officers still regarded these new-fangled formations and their tactical and administrative improvisations with scepticism. This contributed to their pessimism in 1939 and 1940 when confronted with the task of attacking in the West. The subsequent campaign in France revived their confidence and the mechanised formation commanders gained further experience. However, the very ease of supply there may have encouraged future neglect in the field of administration.³ But the lack of understanding for the logistical problems of modern mobile warfare still prevailed among the conservative, equestrian minded senior officers.

The men responsible for the initial planning of the eastern campaign were all from the artillery or the infantry.⁴ Only with the appointment of General Paulus as Oberquartier-

³See Guderian, p. 113, n. 1: "During the campaign in France there was no lack of fuel - good staff work can avoid this calamity. . . it was only a question of transport and easy to solve."

⁴Field Marshal von Brauchitsch and Generals Halder and Marcks had served in the artillery, General von Greiffenberg and Colonel Kinzel were from the infantry.

meister I did the General Staff acquire a senior planner with experience in the operational and administrative problems of Panzer and motorised forces.⁵ But by that time the basic concepts of the operational plan had already been established by Hitler and the OKH, and Paulus was not the man to question or reject what they had done and begin again. He had a reputation for patient devotion to duty, for meticulous attention to detail, but he lacked the flair and insight which had led von Manstein to criticise the unimaginative planning of von Brauchitsch and Halder before the campaign in the West. He accepted the approach to the problem taken by General Marcks, amending it in detail, but not questioning the feasibility of defeating Russia in a single campaign. In contrast, von Manstein later criticised his superiors for having produced "nothing more or less than a strategic or even a tactical formula" which, he continued:

could never replace an operations plan . . . which, in view of the relative strengths of the opposing armies and the tremendous distances involved,

⁵ General Paulus succeeded Guderian as Chief of Staff of the Panzer Troops Command in 1935. He served as Chief of Staff of the 10 Army in Poland and the 6 Army in the West, both of which contained Panzer and motorised formations. See Goerlitz, Paulus, pp. 16-19, 21-4.

accepted the premise that it might take two campaigns to destroy the Soviet armed forces.⁶

This was not the first time that German leaders had committed such an error. The Schlieffen Plan in 1914 and Ludendorff's offensive in 1918 were based upon military strategic and tactical doctrines which became rigid formulae. Like the plans of von Schlieffen and Ludendorff, the Blitzkrieg formula of Hitler and his generals also became sacrosanct. After the completion of the plan for the invasion of Russia, disconcerting changes in the grand strategic situation and inadequacies in the German war economy and military supply systems came to light. These cast considerable doubt upon the feasibility of Operation "Barbarossa" as Hitler now entitled the plan.⁷ Nevertheless, it remained unamended. Later, marked increases in the assessed strength and potential of the Soviet Union were also reported. But again there was

⁶Manstein, Lost Victories, pp. 177-78. General von Manstein played no part in the planning for the Russian campaign. He was preparing XXXVIII Army Corps for Operation "Sea Lion" at this time. See Ibid., p. 150 ff.

⁷The code name "Barbarossa" was adopted by Hitler in December 1940 in place of "Otto" and "Fritz" used by the OKH. It was the nick-name of the Emperor Frederick I, who, according to legend would return at Germany's hour of greatest need. He drowned in a Balkan stream while on his way to a crusade.

no reassessment of the German plan. The only major changes were those necessitated by the increased German commitments in the West, the Mediterranean, and the Balkans which led to a reduction both in the time and the strength available for the defeat of the Soviet forces.

The Underestimation of Soviet Strength

The basic error in German planning for Operation "Barbarossa" was the underestimation of the strength of the Soviet Union. This was mainly due to two factors: the paucity of accurate information on the Russian armed forces and war potential, and the poor use which was made of what little information was received. The first factor was explained quite simply by General Koestring, the German Military Attaché in Moscow, when he told the head of the Abwehr, Admiral Canaris, that "it would be easier for an Arab in flowing burnous to walk unnoticed through Berlin, than for a foreign agent to pass through Russia!"⁸ Thus, apart from a few agents in the new Baltic republics and eastern Poland and the staff of the German Embassy in Moscow, the Germans

⁸ Hermann Teske (ed.), General Ernst Koestring. Der militaerische Mittler zwischen dem deutschen Reich und der Sowjetunion, 1921-1941. Profile bedeutender Soldaten, herausgegeben vom Bundesarchiv/Militaerarchiv (Frankfurt a.M., 1966), p. 93.

had no reliable internal sources of information on Russia.⁹
 The files of the intelligence services of Poland and France revealed that they, too, had been baffled by Soviet security.¹⁰
 The external means of surveillance, radio listening and air photography by the "Rowehl" squadron, were limited to a range of 300 kilometers.¹¹

The reasons for the poor use made of information about Russia were more complex. In Nazi Germany the traditional West European tendency to regard Russia as a primitive, semi-Asiatic country was reinforced by the Nazi racial and ideological attitudes towards the Slavs and Bolshevism, which prevailed in spite of the Russo-German Pact. The Army leaders were also influenced by their desire not to repeat the pessimistic over-estimation of the enemy which had brought Hitler's scorn and anger upon the General Staff in 1938 and 1939. In fact, there was at first little apparent reason for pessimism. In 1937 and 1938 Stalin had inflicted upon his officer corps a crippling blow in the form of a purge un-

⁹See Louis de Jong, The German Fifth Column in the Second World War, trans. C.M. Geyl (Chicago, 1956), p. 235. See also Teske, 89 ff.; IMT, XXXVI, C-170, 690; Paul Leverkuehn, German Military Intelligence, trans. R.A. Stevens and Constantine FitzGibbon (London, 1954), p. 155 ff.

¹⁰See Bor, p. 191; Leverkuehn, p. 156.

¹¹See Helmuth Greiner, Die Oberste Wehrmachtfuehrung (Wiesbaden, 1951), pp. 312-3; Halder KTB, II, 120, 1 October 1940, 419, 17 May, 426, 22 May, 448, 7 June 1941; Plocher, p.11.

equalled in modern history.¹² The view that the Red Army would need years to recover seemed confirmed by the inept leadership displayed in the Winter War against Finland.¹³

Under these circumstances it was understandable that the German generals, fresh from their victories in Poland, Norway and the West, viewed the task of attacking Russia with equanimity.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the estimate given to Hitler on 21 July 1940 that Russia had only 50 to 75 good divisions and could therefore be defeated in the autumn by a German force of 80 to 100 divisions, reflected a remarkable departure from the caution shown hitherto by the OKH. Even when the inaccuracy of this estimate of Soviet strength was acknowledged the general staff planners continued to underestimate Soviet combat capabilities, equipment, and war potential. General Marcks, for instance, based the plan which he produced in late July and August 1940 upon the

¹²See Erickson, p. 504 ff.; Leonard Schapiro, "The Great Purge," The Soviet Army, ed. B.H. Liddell Hart (London, 1956), p. 65 ff.

¹³See Halder KTB, II, 86, 3 September 1940; 395, 5 May 1941; see also p. 382, 26 April 1941; KTB OKW, I, 297, 3 February, 393, 8 May 1941. Cf. Teske, pp. 102, 107, for Koestring's rather different post-war view of the effect of the purge.

¹⁴See Goerlitz, Paulus, p. 129.

assumption that the forces of the two sides would be numerically equal because the subtraction of the Russian divisions tied down on frontiers facing the Japanese, Turks and Finns would leave only 96 infantry divisions, 23 cavalry divisions and 28 mechanised brigades to face a German attack by 24

Panzer, 12 motorised 110 infantry and 1 cavalry divisions.¹⁵

He stated that the Russians would not be able to increase their strength appreciably by next spring and, though the creation of a strong mobile reserve of armoured, motorised and cavalry forces was possible, there was no sign of such a force. He therefore predicted optimistically that:

Because the Russians no longer possess the superiority of numbers they had in the (First) World War it is likely that once the long, extended line of their forces has been broken through they will be unable to concentrate or coordinate counter measures. Fighting in isolated battles they will soon succumb to the superiority of the German troops and leadership.¹⁶

Similar over-confidence caused Marcks and the subsequent planners to underestimate the strength of the Soviet industrial potential. They focused their gaze upon the narrow

¹⁵ See Appendix I, The Marcks Plan. The total of 24 Panzer divisions was ordered by Hitler in June but later reduced to 20.

¹⁶ Ibid.

strip of western Russia about which they were better informed and in which they assumed the decisive battles would be fought. Reports of what lay beyond were mostly discounted.¹⁷ It was assumed that the Blitzkrieg would again achieve a swift defeat of their opponents' field forces and the early capture of the main Soviet industrial centres. The remaining Soviet war potential in the Urals could be neutralised by bombing raids.¹⁸ The Germans showed little concern about the possibility that Russia might mobilise replacement armies from her enormous reserves of manpower, and equip them from the current production of her war industries in the interior. In this respect their thinking seems to have been influenced by their own Blitzkrieg economy which stock-piled the required armaments and munitions by a short burst of high production before each campaign.¹⁹ They knew that much of the Soviet war industry would lie outside the reach of their ground forces during the early phases of the campaign, and that the Luftwaffe would lack the strength to attack it.²⁰ Yet the

¹⁷ General Koestring stated after the war that he warned Marcks that Soviet resistance would continue in the interior. But it seems doubtful whether his warnings were really as clear as he later claimed. See Blau, p. 12; Halder KTB, II, 86, n.2; Hillgruber, Hitlers Strategie, p. 228, n. 93.

¹⁸ See KTB OKW, I, 208, 5 December 1940.

¹⁹ See Milward, pp. 7-9, 16.

²⁰ See Halder KTB, II, 468.

German Army leaders seem to have assumed that from the moment of their onslaught the Soviet political and military authorities, industry and communications ^systems would be seized with a sort of paralysis.

Hitler was eager to encourage such views to counter any revival of the caution he had witnessed in his Army leaders prior to earlier campaigns. On 5 December he assured von Brauchitsch and Halder that the Russian Army once struck ". . . would suffer an even greater collapse than that of France."²¹ But he was quite capable of sounding a different note if it suited his purpose. A month later he stressed the temporary nature of the Soviet weaknesses as a further justification for his choice of the spring of 1941 for the attack. "The Russian armed forces," he told his military chiefs,

were indeed a clay colossus without a head, but their future development could not be safely predicted.

. . . the Russians should not be underestimated even now. The German attack must therefore be delivered with the strongest forces.²²

²¹KTB OKW, I, 205, 5 December 1940.

²²Ibid., p. 258, 9 January 1941.

The Strength of the Wehrmacht

The size of the forces available for the invasion of Russia was influenced by both economic and strategic factors. The German reliance on a limited war economy restricted the quantity of equipment and ammunition available for the campaign to what could be produced by a concentrated spate of production in the winter of 1940-41.²³ Shortages of oil, gasoline and vehicles imposed limits on the number of mechanised formations which could be put in the field. Thus hopes of raising 24 Panzer and 12 motorised divisions were not fulfilled. The demands of the war against Britain further reduced the forces available in the East. As a result the German planners were able to reckon with only two thirds of their field divisions.²⁴ These included nineteen Panzer divisions, with a total of 3,350 tanks, ten motorised divisions and six S.S. divisions, supported by 2,000 of the total of 3,340 combat aircraft available to the Luftwaffe.²⁵

²³ See Milward, pp. 40-43. See also Appendix V.

²⁴ See Halder KTB, II, 50, 31 July 1940. Hitler suggested that of the 180 divisions planned, 7 should go to Norway, 50 France, 3 Holland and Belgium and 120 to the East. The actual distribution on 22 June 1941 was: 7 Norway, 39 France and the Low Countries, 1 Denmark, 1 Germany, 8 Balkans, 2 Africa, 149 East. See Mueller-Hillebrand, Das Heer, II, 186-191.

²⁵ The remaining aircraft were distributed as follows: 370 Mediterranean, 660 West, 120 Norway. See Flocher, p.23 ff.

The German Navy was able to allocate only 28 fast motor boats, five submarines, ten mine sweepers and a few other small vessels to the Baltic and Black Seas.²⁶ None of the surviving heavy warships could be permanently stationed in the Baltic. Nevertheless, even after reassessments of the Soviet forces revealed far greater numbers of tanks, aircraft and warships than the Wehrmacht could muster, the German leaders believed that they could compensate for their numerical inferiority by means of the superior equipment, tactics and leadership which had served them so well in Poland and the West.²⁷ In taking this view they forgot the improvised nature and narrow economic basis of the Blitzkrieg doctrine which had made Hitler's strategy seem so risky in 1938 and 1939. They also ignored the vast differences between their previous campaigns and that which confronted them now in Russia.

The Problems of a Blitzkrieg in the East

The German victories in 1939 and 1940 had been won over nations which were vulnerable to the Blitzkrieg because

²⁶See Alfred Philippi and Ferdinand Heim, Der Feldzug gegen Sowjetrussland, 1941-1945 (Stuttgart, 1962), p. 37.

²⁷See Hermann Hoth, Panzer Operationen (Heidelberg, 1956), p. 146.

the amount of psychological pressure, industrial damage, military failure and territorial loss they could endure was limited. Thus the degree and duration of violence necessary for their defeat could also be limited. Much could be achieved by propaganda and bluff while the real military effort could be concentrated into short periods of time and directed against specific vital objectives. Under these circumstances the Blitzkrieg had great advantages. It provided a tactical means to overcome the military stalemate of the First World War and achieve a "battle of destruction" which was not also suicidal. Psychologically it had all the sound and fury of total war but only the material cost and duration of limited war. But in Russia the Blitzkrieg was confronted with a state whose totalitarian regime, economic and human resources, and territorial extent gave it the ability to wage total war.²⁸ Thus to defeat Russia the

²⁸The expression "total war" is used in the sense described by Erich Ludendorff in Der totale Krieg (Munich, 1935). It is summarised by Hans Speier, "Ludendorff: The German Concept of Total War," Makers of Modern Strategy, ed. E.M. Earle (Princeton, 1943), p. 315, as follows: Total war (1) extends over the whole territory of the belligerents; (2) involves the active participation of the whole population and national economy; (3) uses propaganda to strengthen the morale at home and weaken that of the enemy; (4) must be prepared before the outbreak of hostilities; (5) must be directed by one supreme authority. The Soviet Union was able to meet all these requirements.

Germans had to achieve a decisive military success so swiftly that it would prevent the Soviet regime from completing the mobilisation of its full human and material resources.

The swiftness of the operational and tactical successes in Poland and the West resulted mainly from the Germans' skilful use of surprise, economy and concentration of force and mobility. However in Russia the psychological and physical effects of these factors were reduced by the great depth of the theatre of operations, and the primitive state of its roads, the size of the Soviet armed forces and the fact that the Russian soldier's mind was less open to German propaganda vaunting the strength and invincibility of the Wehrmacht.

By the summer of 1941 the Germans' tactical innovations in the use of armoured, motorised and airborne forces had been demonstrated. Apart from the employment of submersible tanks for crossing rivers and the use of detachments of the special "Brandenburg Regiment" in Russian uniforms to seize bridges there was nothing new in the Blitzkrieg operations planned for the East. Surprise could be achieved by striking without warning, but the difficulty of assembling an army of such size undetected on the frontiers of so notoriously suspicious a neighbour left the planners with little

hope of taking the Russians completely off guard.²⁹ Nevertheless, they hoped that the concentration, direction and speed of their armoured spearheads would enable them to surprise and overwhelm the defenders in the opening surge of the attack.

The concentrations of force which had delivered the main German thrusts in Poland and the West were made possible by reducing to a minimum the number of formations in the static defences of the Ostwall facing central Poland, and in the Westwall facing the heavily garrisoned Maginot Line. But in Russia the Germans were not able to achieve a comparable economy of force by the use of defensive positions. On the contrary the vulnerability of the Rumanian oilfields and East Prussia to Soviet counter thrusts from the territories they had acquired under the terms of the secret protocol to the Non-Aggression Pact of August 1939 made it necessary to advance on both flanks. As a result the German forces were extended across a wide front which, due to the diverging directions of the Baltic and Black Sea coasts, would become

²⁹ See Erickson, pp. 574, 585-6. Shortly before the campaign a Luftwaffe photographic reconnaissance aircraft crashed in bad weather near Vinnitsa. The crew was captured and released a few weeks later by the advancing German troops. See Plocher, p. 17.

wider as they advanced eastwards. Furthermore, the need for the deep penetrating thrusts which characterised the Blitzkrieg operations added the problem of dispersion in depth to that of extension in width.

Nevertheless, in the mood of optimism prevailing after the triumph in the West, the German planners expected even greater successes from vast enveloping movements in the East. The studies produced by Colonel von Greiffenberg and Lieutenant-Colonel Feyerabend in the last week of July suggested a single major thrust cutting off a large part of the Soviet forces in the Ukraine in a manner similar to that achieved in the Low Countries in May 1940.³⁰ General Halder preferred a major thrust towards Moscow with its flank on the Baltic coast turning south to make the Soviet armies in the Ukraine fight with an inverted front, just as the French armies in the Maginot Line had been forced to do in June.³¹ These concepts failed to take into account the difference in the distances involved between swinging a flanking operation across northern France and a similar movement covering over

³⁰See Halder KTB, II, 39, 27 July 1940.

³¹Ibid., pp. 37, 26 July, 39, 27 July 1940.

a thousand miles between the Baltic States and the Black Sea.

This error prevailed throughout the German planning for the East. On 9 January 1941 Hitler stated that "the distances in Russia are indeed great, but no greater than those distances which the German Armed Forces have already mastered."³² However, this statement ignored the facts. The initial thrust to the English Channel in May 1940, a distance of about 250 miles, had lasted ten days and had been followed by a few days of sporadic fighting and a long pause for recuperation and redeployment lasting until 5 June, when the second phase of the campaign began. The pursuit following the collapse of the Weygand Line was sustained over distances of 200 to 300 miles for a further period of about ten days.

In Russia the distances were not only much greater, but the chances of long pauses for recuperation were reduced by the need not only to penetrate the defences on the border but also to cut off the retreat of the Soviet forces outflanked and prevent the creation of new lines of defence.³³ Furthermore, the maintenance of a rapid advance over longer distances would increase the gap between the Panzer spear-

³²KTB OKW, I, 258, 9 January 1941.

³³See Hoth, p. 146.

heads and the infantry divisions following them on foot. Thus there was a considerable danger that the mobile formations would often be isolated from their infantry support and from each other by large tracts of marsh and swampy forest. The resultant dispersion of force in rough terrain compounded the physical problem of containing the enemy in vast envelopment operations and of inducing in him a psychological collapse similar to that of his Western counterpart, who was more imaginative and susceptible to a sense of isolation, and who had been subjected to Blitzkrieg propaganda without the counter-influence of any strong political indoctrination.

This problem could only have been solved by the provision of adequate mobile forces. But, considering the size of the enemy forces, the distances to be covered, the obstacles to be overcome and the poor state of the roads, the relative striking power of the German Panzer and motorised forces available for the Russian campaign was much lower than in the West. The increase from six motorised, four Waffen SS divisions and ten Panzer divisions with 2,570 tanks employed in France to ten motorised, six Waffen SS

divisions and nineteen Panzer divisions with 3,350 tanks was quite inadequate to meet the greater demands of the mobile operations required in the East.³⁴

The primitive Russian road network added to these problems. Competition for road space between the infantry divisions and the motorised supply columns following the Panzer spearheads was bound to lead to congestion because inadequate maps and unpredictable combat and weather conditions limited the value of meticulous staff planning.³⁵

The comparative reduction in the striking power and flexibility of the Blitzkrieg forces on the ground was matched by similar limitations in the air. In Poland and the West the Luftwaffe had concentrated first upon the winning of air supremacy by destroying the enemy air force and its bases. Then the weight of the air attacks shifted to the direct support of the ground forces and the disruption of

³⁴The Waffen SS divisions were organized as motorised infantry divisions until 1942 when they were converted into Panzer Grenadier divisions. See German Order of Battle (The War Office, London, 1944), pp. F7-9.

³⁵Bad maps were to prove a severe handicap to the Germans in Russia. Some use was made of air photographs but the situation was only eased when quantities of Russian maps were captured and reproduced. See Karl Allmendinger, Terrain Factors in the Russian Campaign, U.S. Army Pamphlet No. 20-290 (Washington, 1951), p. 13; Halder KTB, II, 279, 13 February 1941. Cf. Paul Carell, Unternehmen Barbarossa. Der Marsch nach Russland (Frankfurt a.M., 1963), p. 363.

road and rail communications behind the enemy front. In the final stage, the air offensive was extended to industrial targets and the cities for the purpose of breaking the morale of the government. By means of a carefully planned concentration of effort on vital targets in each phase the Luftwaffe had achieved considerable success. But it had been less effective in large-scale interdiction and had failed to prevent the withdrawal of the British Expeditionary Force from Dunkirk. Later its failure over Britain further demonstrated its limitations in range, flexibility and striking power. In the Eastern campaign the Luftwaffe appeared to be reverting to the role for which it was designed. But whereas in the West it had employed 3,530 aircraft, most of which operated over an area about 200 miles square, in Russia only 2,000 aircraft were available in a theatre 1,000 miles wide and of such depth that many important industrial targets were beyond the range of the standard bombers. The OKH, therefore, warned the field commanders in its Deployment Directive that since it was unlikely that complete air superiority could be won they must expect greater interference from the enemy air force than in previous

campaigns.³⁶ Nevertheless, neither this factor nor the others mentioned above were sufficient to foster any doubt that in the course of a single summer the aims of the campaign could be achieved.

The Aims of the Russian Campaign

The initial operational planning for the eastern campaign began on 3 July when General Halder ordered Colonel von Greiffenberg of the Operations Branch of the General Staff to study ". . . how to deliver a military blow at Russia which will force her to recognize Germany's dominant role in Europe."³⁷ More specific goals and military objectives were presented at the Fuehrer conference on 21 July. Hitler added the Rumanian oilfields to the areas to be protected against Soviet bombing and asked what operational objectives should be set. In the subsequent discussion thrusts through the Baltic States to Finland and through the Ukraine were mentioned.

The political, military, strategic and operational aims presented to Hitler on 21 July were confirmed by him at the Fuehrer conference ten days later. To them he added

³⁶Halder KTB, II, 468; Hoth, 146. See also Appendix II of this study.

³⁷Halder KTB, II, 6, 3 July 1940.

the grand strategic aim of depriving Britain of her last hope on the continent.³⁸ But this attempt to give the operations in the East some relevance to the war already being fought in the West was a rationalisation for the ears of the generals. The true purpose of the campaign was the fulfilment of Hitler's Lebensraumpolitik. However, Hitler clearly recognised that from the military view-point the "winning of a certain area would not be enough."³⁹ The military strategic aim must be "the destruction of Russia's vital power."⁴⁰ Furthermore, Hitler stated that the operation would make sense only if this aim was achieved in a single campaign completed in five months. Not content with these arbitrary decisions, which simultaneously set the aims on every level of political and strategic planning without any consideration of feasibility, he proceeded next to suggest the lines of operation to be followed.

Operational Lines and Objectives

There should be two main thrusts, Hitler proposed, one towards Kiev and down the Dnieper and a second through

³⁸ Ibid., p. 49, 31 July 1940.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

the Baltic States and towards Moscow. These thrusts should then turn inwards to meet in the interior of Russia.

Finally a subsidiary operation should be directed towards the Baku oilfields.⁴¹ The only significant difference between these ideas and those developed by the Chief of the General Staff at this time was their comparative moderation.

Five days earlier, after examining the outline of Soviet dispositions presented by Colonel Kinzel of the Foreign Armies East Branch, General Halder concluded that the most favourable operation would be a thrust along the Baltic coast swinging south via Moscow to attack the Russian forces in the Ukraine and Black Sea in the rear.⁴² This manoeuvre would have covered a distance of over a thousand miles, but when Colonel von Greiffenberg and Lieutenant-Colonel Feyerabend presented their recommendations for a more cautious operation with the main blow in the Ukraine, Halder repeated his preference for the enormous swinging operation traversing the whole of European Russia.⁴³ On 29 July Halder decided to seek a further opinion and summoned General Marcks, Chief of Staff of the 18 Army, who had not

⁴¹Ibid., p. 50, 31 July 1940.

⁴²Ibid., p. 37, 26 July 1940.

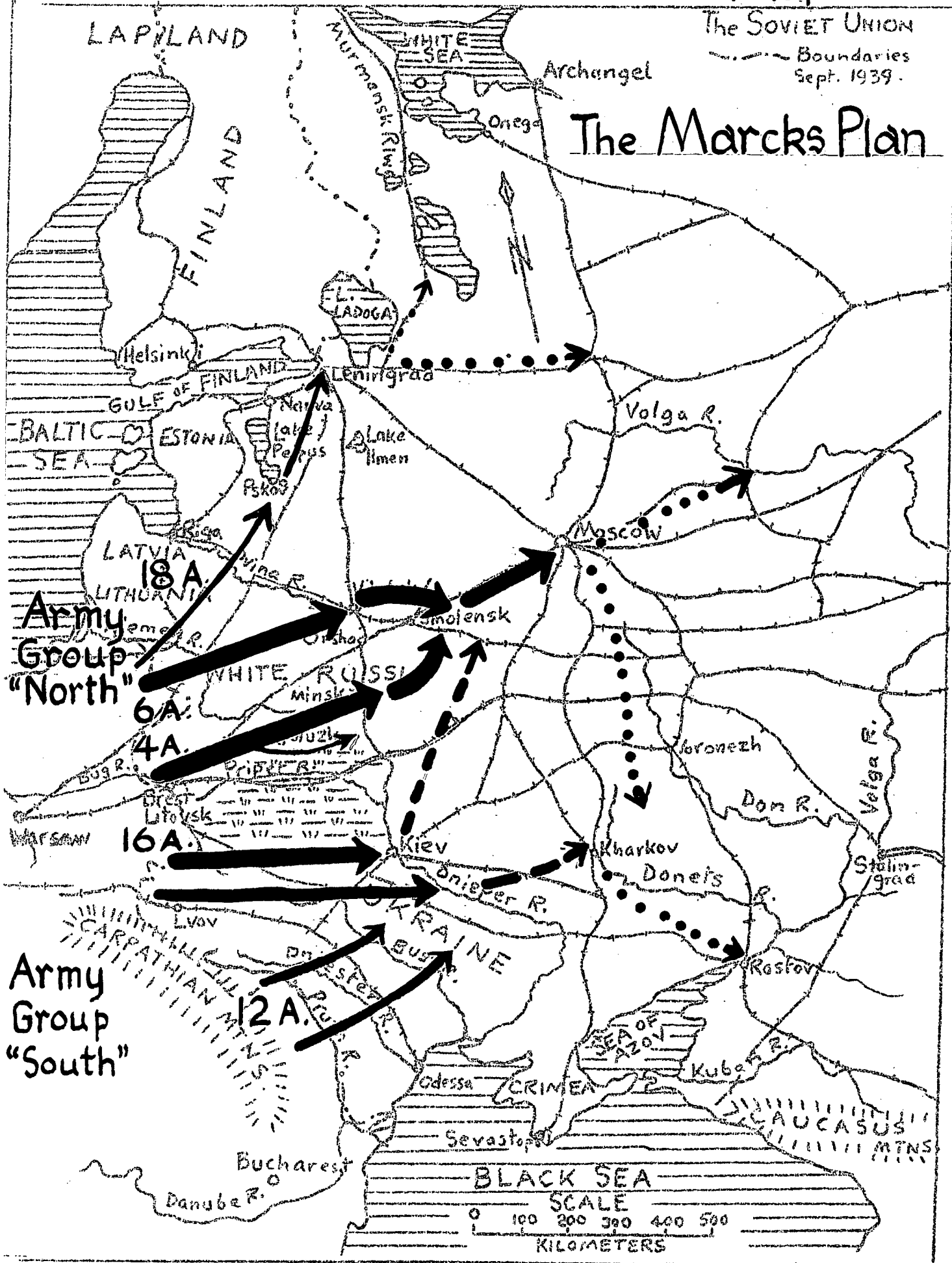
⁴³Ibid., p. 39, 27 July 1940.

Map 1

The SOVIET UNION

Boundaries
Sept. 1939.

The Marcks Plan



yet departed for his new headquarters in the East, and charged him with the conduct of an independent study of the eastern campaign.⁴⁴ The draft plan produced by Marcks on 1 August rejected the concept of a single thrust and came very close to the ideas presented by Hitler at the conference on the previous day.⁴⁵

The military strategic aims of the "Marcks Plan"⁴⁶ were, first, to strike the Russian armed forces, second, to protect Germany against Soviet air attacks by occupying Russia up to the line Rostov - Gorki - Archangel.⁴⁷ Marcks assumed that the Russians would be forced to stand and fight west of the rivers Pruth, Dniester, Dnieper and Dvina in order to defend their main centres of supply, the Ukraine, Donets Basin, Leningrad, and above all, Moscow. Since the capture of the capital, ". . . the economic, political and spiritual centre of the USSR . . .," would ". . .

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 41, 29 July 1940.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 51, 1 August 1940.

⁴⁶Extracts from the Marcks Plan are attached in Appendix I. They are translated from Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, 1939-1945. Der Zweite Weltkrieg in Chronik und Dokumenten (Darmstadt, 1962), pp. 142-47.

⁴⁷These aims were derived from the earlier General Staff studies as presented at the Fuehrer conference on 21 July. See Halder KTB, II, 32-3, 22 July 1940.

destroy the coordination of the Soviet States,"⁴⁸ Marcks made it his main operational objective. The best approach to the city was the most direct because a good road system extended from Warsaw and East Prussia to Moscow via Sluzk, Minsk and Vitebsk, over the "Orsha Corridor" between the Dvina and Dnieper and through the narrowest part of the great swampy forest region extending from the White Sea, passing south of Leningrad to the Pripet Marsh. An approach from the Baltic States would have to pass through the worst part of this region north and south of Lake Ilmen. Nevertheless, the size of the front and its division by the Pripet Marsh and the presence of strong Soviet forces in the Ukraine prompted Marcks to plan two separate offensives, one directly towards Moscow with a special force directed via Pskov towards Leningrad, and the second towards Kiev which should join the right flank of the northern force east of the Pripet Marsh.

Since it was virtually a frontal attack the enemy was to be enveloped by the deep penetration and pincer movements of armoured thrusts. But by increasing the depth of the battle-field this solution also compounded the problem

⁴⁸ Jacobsen, op. cit., p. 143.

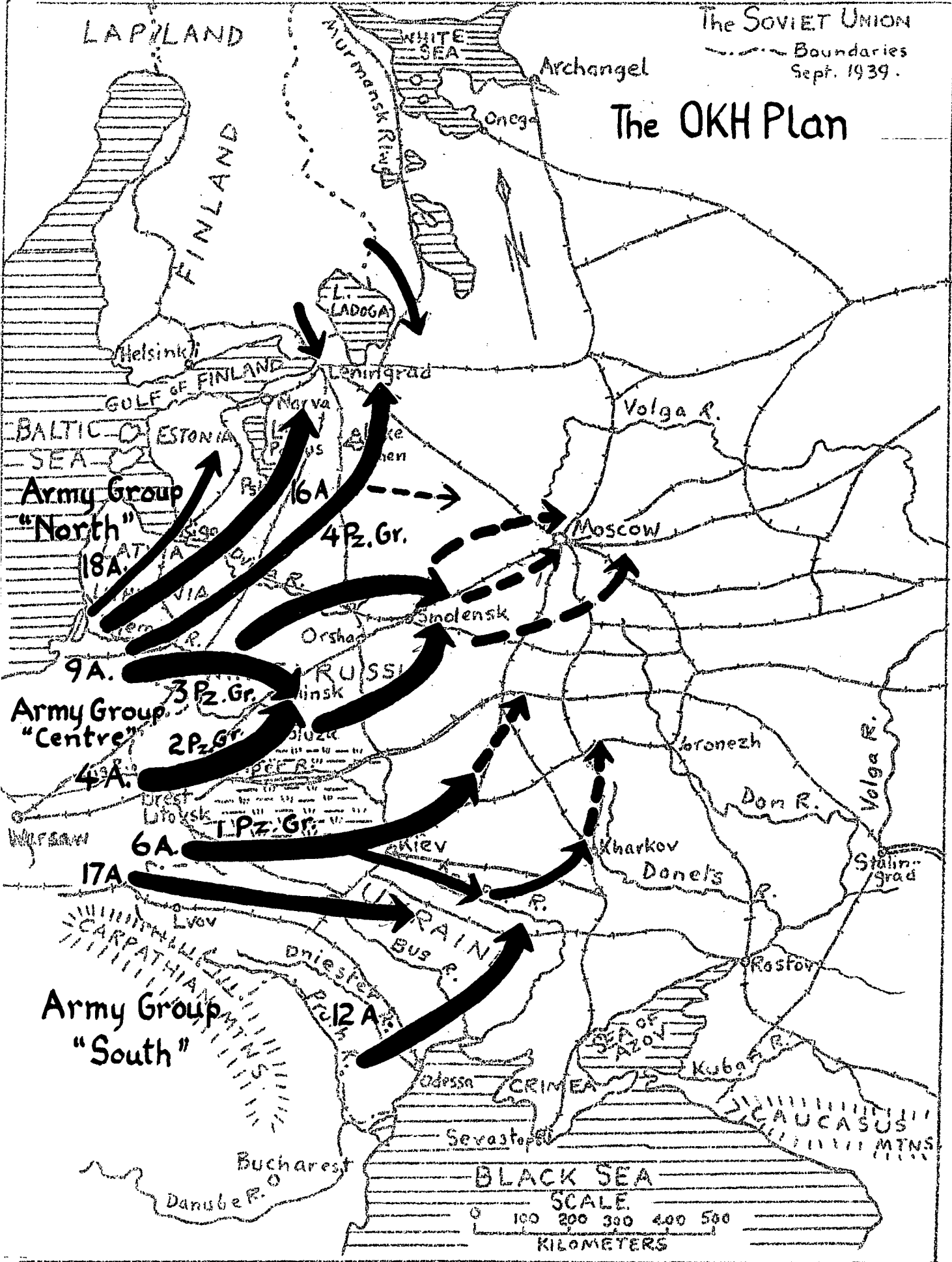
of the relationship between space and the forces available. Marcks sought to overcome this by allocating a third of the 110 available infantry divisions, as well as four Panzer and four motorised divisions to a large reserve. This was to be committed to protect the flanks of the armoured thrusts, to enclose the Soviet forces which they outflanked and to maintain the advance to the line Rostov - Gorki - Archangel.

After reading the "Marcks Plan" Halder accepted the concept of thrusts north and south of the Pripet Marsh. He was probably influenced too by Hitler's choice of a similar solution. But he still stressed the danger of relying upon "politically unsafe" Rumania as the concentration area for the thrust on Kiev.⁴⁹ He also warned against extending the group directed towards Moscow too far northward. Instead he proposed a subsidiary operation in the Baltic States independent from the main thrust through White Russia.

Halder's views were confirmed by General Friedrich Paulus, who on taking up the appointment of Deputy Chief of the General Staff, Oberquartiermeister I, on 3 September was given the task of coordinating all the operational

⁴⁹ Halder KTB, II, 51, 1 August 1940. On 17 March 1941 Hitler cancelled the plan to launch a major thrust from Rumania. See Ibid., pp. 319-20, 17 March 1941.

The OKH Plan



planning for the operation in the East. To give each of the thrusts towards Moscow, Kiev and Leningrad sufficient strength to operate independently Paulus reduced the number of divisions which Marcks had allocated to the reserve and divided most of the available forces into three army groups, "North", "Centre" and "South", each of which was to conduct a separate envelopment battle in the first stage of the invasion.⁵⁰

The main striking forces of each army group lay in the Panzer groups. Field Marshal von Bock's Army Group "Centre" was allocated Panzer Group 2, commanded by General Guderian, and Panzer Group 3, under General Hoth. These were to drive eastward on the flanks of the Bialystok salient and meet in the area of Smolensk to enclose the Soviet forces around Minsk. The infantry divisions of the 4 and 9 Armies were to follow the armoured columns and surround the enemy. Field Marshal von Leeb's Army Group "North" was to direct its Panzer Group 4, commanded by General Hoepfner, via Dvinsk towards Leningrad, while the 18 and 16 Armies defeated the Russians cut off between the armoured drive and the Baltic coast. Field Marshal von Rundstedt's Army Group "South" was to achieve a double

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 103, 17 September, 155, n. 5, 29 October 1940.

envelopment of the Soviet forces in the Ukraine by attacking towards Kiev and down the Dnieper with the 6 Army and Panzer Group 1, under General von Kleist, to meet the advance of the 12 Army from Rumania. The 17 Army had the task of pinning down the Soviet forces between the two enveloping arms.⁵¹

In November and December General Paulus conducted a General Staff war game to test the plan. He later admitted that in the exercise ". . . the exchange of views was confined purely to questions of (military) strategy. . ."⁵² Although ". . . consideration was to be given to the effect of the supply situation on the time table,"⁵³ the logistic difficulties of the campaign were apparently not yet fully recognized. Cooperation with the Navy was not discussed at all. As before, the Russian forces were assumed to be ". . . inferior in armour, artillery and, particularly, in the air."⁵⁴ The first objective to be attained after the

⁵¹ See Goerlitz, Paulus, pp. 109-10; Halder KTB, II, 464 ff. The OKH Deployment Directive, dated 31 January 1941 is attached as Appendix II.

⁵² Goerlitz, Paulus, p. 100. In the original, Paulus used the phrase "rein strategische Fuehrungsfragen," (Ich stehe hier auf Befehl, ed. Walter Goerlitz, Frankfurt a.M., 1960), p. 110).

⁵³ Ibid., p. 101.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 105.

first twenty days was the general line between Upper Dnieper - Dvina River - Lake Peipus. This line was selected:

. . . partly for reasons of the terrain and partly because it was recognised that the troops would require a breathing space and the opportunity to organise a defensive line, before embarking on the imminent and decisive battles before them.⁵⁵

The pause for recuperation was to last for almost three weeks so that on about the fortieth day "the decisive advance on Moscow " could be resumed.⁵⁶

During the course of the exercise it became clear that the diverging advance of the three army groups would lead to the creation of dangerous gaps between them in the areas Lake Ilmen - Veleiki - Luki and south of Gomel. Nevertheless, in view of the "paramount importance" of keeping Army Group "Centre" at maximum possible strength for the attack on Moscow,"⁵⁷ it was decided that the other two army groups should clear these gaps of the enemy with their own forces. Thus Army Groups "North" and "South" were to concentrate their weight on the flanks of Army Group "Centre" for the "ultimate and decisive advance on Moscow" which was

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 103.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 116.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 117.

to take place "at the latest on X + 40 days."⁵⁸ General Halder confirmed that the capture of the Don Basin and of Leningrad ". . . would depend on the progress of the general offensive against Moscow."⁵⁹ The General Staff felt that this attack ". . . should be delivered on as wide a front as possible, in order to prevent massive Russian counter-attacks on individual and perhaps isolated formations."⁶⁰ Paulus stated that "this was not to be interpreted as meaning that the whole front would advance simultaneously."⁶¹ But earlier in the exercise the General Staff had regarded as an "extreme solution" the idea expressed by the OKW and the Panzer generals that ". . . the Panzer arm was an independent entity, to be used in independent operations at long range."⁶² Thus there was a real danger that the second phase of the campaign would deteriorate into a broad, frontal advance and merely push the Russians back into the interior.

The cause of this tendency was revealed in the general conclusion to the exercise, which was ". . . that the German

⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 118, 120.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 120.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 118.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ibid., p. 106.

forces were barely sufficient for the purpose."⁶³ Since the army groups were already over-extended in width, the planners hesitated to expose the flanks of the thrusts on Moscow by over-extending the depth of the Panzer groups' attacks.

Under these circumstances, Paulus admitted in retrospect, the final objective, Volga - Archangel, was ". . . far beyond anything the German forces available could hope to achieve."⁶⁴ But although he blamed this on the "megalo-maniac extravagance of National Socialist political thinking,"⁶⁵ he made no attempt to modify these aims or to question the feasibility of their achievement in the course of a single campaign. Instead he relied upon the achievement of a decisive victory by means of ". . . the final and ultimate onslaught on Moscow."⁶⁶

The Importance of Moscow

The General Staff war game was still in progress when Field Marshal von Brauchitsch and General Halder took the

⁶³Ibid., p. 106.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 117.

Army plan to the Fuehrer conference on 5 December 1940.⁶⁷ The generals had no cause to doubt that Hitler would accept their proposals because they had turned out to be remarkably similar to the operational suggestions which he had made on 31 July.⁶⁸ But although he first expressed agreement with the Army plan, his subsequent remarks revealed that he did not share the view that Moscow was the key objective. He stated that "Moscow is not very important" and stressed that the primary aim was to envelop the Soviet forces before they could withdraw.⁶⁹ For this reason he suggested that part of Army Group "Centre" should be turned north to assist in cutting off the enemy in the Baltic States. Similarly, the main envelopment in the Ukraine should be achieved by a strong thrust southwards. Thus, in contrast to the Army's plan, the operation which he described involved a dispersion of the main effort, initially concentrated in the centre, towards the Baltic and Black Seas.

⁶⁷See Halder KTB, II, 210-11, 213-14, 5 December 1940; KTB OKW, I, 208-9.

⁶⁸See Halder KTB, II, 50, 31 July 1940.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 211, 5 December 1940.

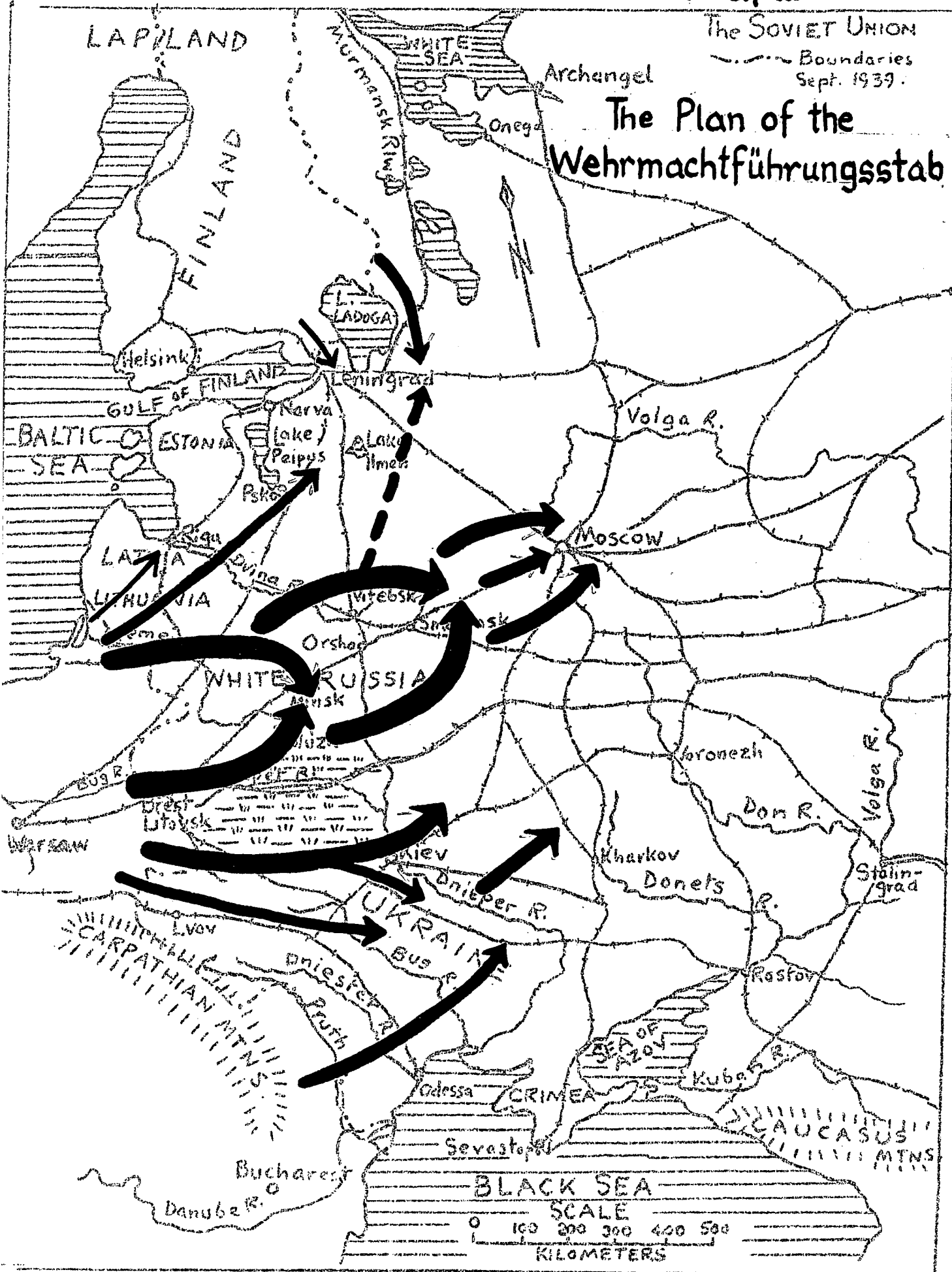
Map III

The SOVIET UNION

Boundaries

Sept. 1939.

The Plan of the Wehrmachtführungsstab



It seems probable that the source of this idea was General Jodl, who had ordered Lieutenant-Colonel von Lossberg of the Wehrmachtfuehrungsstab to carry out an independent study for his information.⁷⁰ In this plan von Lossberg allocated even stronger forces to the advance on Moscow than had Marcks and Paulus. But he was uneasy about the contrast between the strategic importance of Leningrad and the weak forces available for its capture. He attempted to overcome this deficiency by concentrating all Finnish forces for a southerly drive from the Lake Ladoga sector. However, he suggested that if Army Group "North" still made insufficient progress, Army Group "Centre" should halt and turn forces to assist it.⁷¹

Hitler's adoption of this idea and the resultant departure from the Army leaders' proposals has been cited by

⁷⁰ See George E. Blau, The German Campaign in Russia - Planning and Operations (1940-1942), Department of the Army, Pamphlet 20-261a (Washington, 1955), p. 13; Philippi/Heim, p. 43; Hillgruber, Hitlers Strategie, p. 230; Uhlig, p. 173; Greiner, p. 322. Greiner states that von Lossberg's study was never shown to Hitler. However its contents probably reached him through Jodl. See Warlimont, pp. 138-9, 151. In the summer of 1940 the Wehrmachtfuehrungsamt was renamed the Wehrmachtfuehrungsstab.

⁷¹ See Blau, p. 13.

many former generals and historians as an example of the way in which a meddling and fanatical amateur ruined a sound strategic plan. Such critics assert that Hitler was drawn away from strategic realities by his psychological aversion to treading "the same path as Napoleon,"⁷² by his ideological desire to capture Leningrad because it was "the cradle of Bolshevism,"⁷³ and by the attraction of economic gains in the Don Basin and the Caucasus.⁷⁴ These opinions were not without some justification, especially in view of the importance with which Hitler regarded the psychological factors in war. Nevertheless, his objection to the direct thrust towards Moscow was based on strategic considerations. His intention was the same as that of the Army leaders, to envelop and destroy the Russian forces. But he believed that this was more likely to be achieved by large turning operations than by the frontal thrusts proposed by the Army.⁷⁵ At this time

⁷²Heusinger, p. 133; see also Warlimont, p. 189.

⁷³Manstein, Lost Victories, p. 176. See also Goerlitz, Paulus, p. 107; Halder, Hitler as Warlord, p. 41.

⁷⁴See Guenther Blumentritt, "Moscow," The Fatal Decisions, eds. William Richardson and Seymour Freidin, trans. Constantine FitzGibbon (London, 1956), p. 40; Bor, p. 199; Kurt Assman, "The Battle for Moscow, Turning Point of the War," Foreign Affairs, XXVIII (January 1950), p. 310.

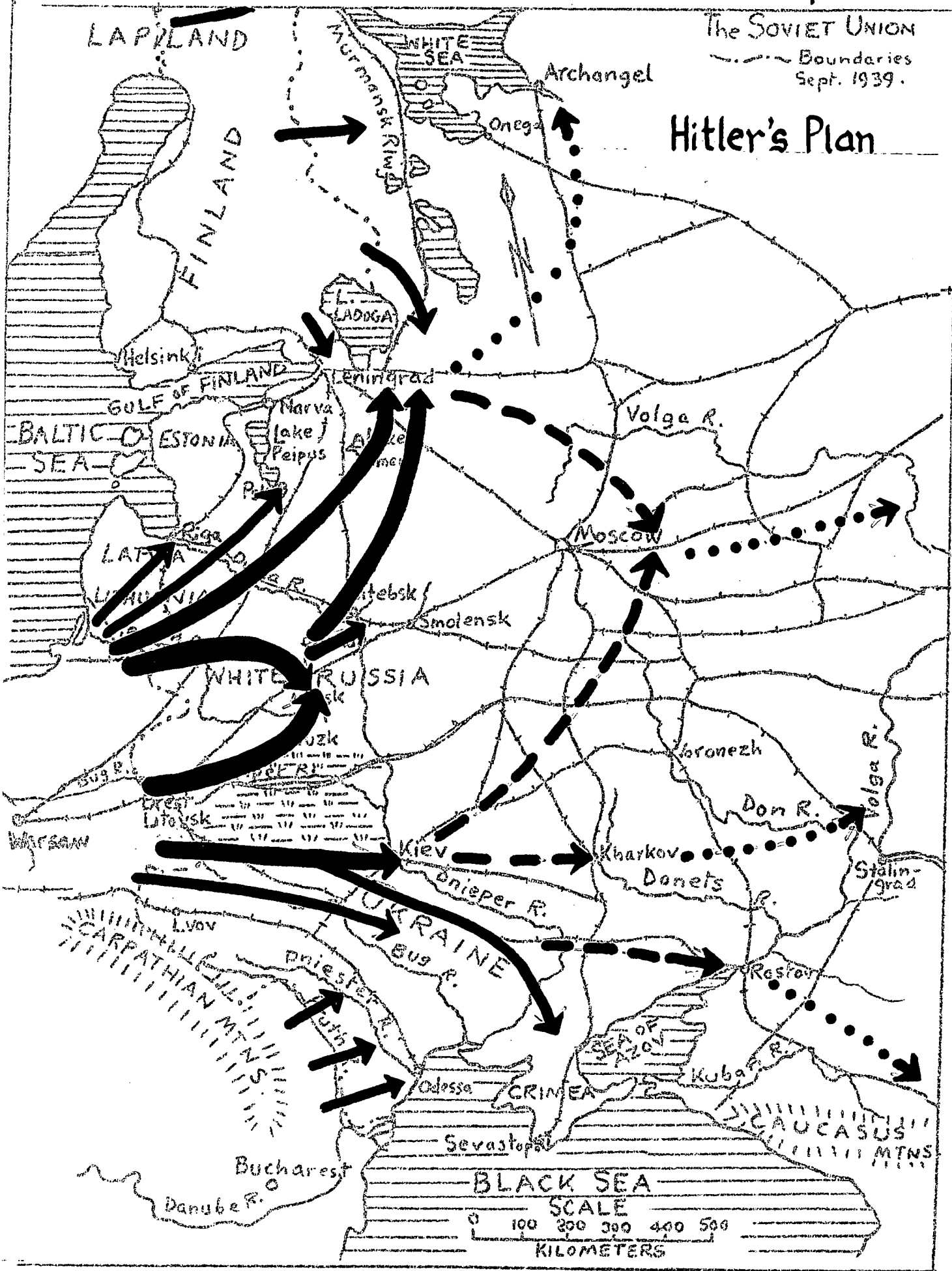
⁷⁵See KTB OKW, I, 996; see also p. 258, 9 January 1941.

Map IV

The SOVIET UNION

Boundaries
Sept. 1939.

Hitler's Plan



Hitler showed no hesitation in subordinating his political and economic aims to the prior achievement of the military strategic aim.

Hitler's refusal at the conference on 5 December to make Moscow the main operational objective was accepted by the OKH without protest.⁷⁶ On the 18th December he amended Directive No. 21, to state that after the initial battles in White Russia, strong mobile formations would swing north to cooperate in the destruction of the Soviet forces in the Baltic States and in the capture of Leningrad and Kronstadt. Only after the completion of these tasks were further operations towards Moscow to be undertaken in order to destroy the remaining Soviet forces and seize the industries in the area.⁷⁷ Hitler confirmed his views on 9 January when he told von Brauchitsch that the attack

. . . should on no account turn into a frontal pushing back of the Russians. Therefore the most brutal break-throughs are necessary. The most important task is the swift envelopment of the Baltic area, thus the right flank of the German forces thrusting north of the Pripet Marsh must be made especially strong. The aims of the operation must be the destruction of the Russian Army, the seizure of the most important industrial areas and the destruction of the remaining industrial areas . . . , in addition the Baku area must be occupied.⁷⁸

⁷⁶Halder KTB, II, 211, 5 December 1940.

⁷⁷See Hubatsch, p. 96 ff; Warlimont, pp. 138-9; KTB OKW, I, 996.

⁷⁸KTB OKW, I, 258, 9 January 1941.

With the exception of Baku, these aims and the new operational objective, Leningrad, were duly incorporated into the Deployment Directive issued by the OKH on 31 January 1941.⁷⁹

According to General Paulus, the OKH continued to regard the capture of Moscow as the principal objective.⁸⁰ However, Hitler's proposal for the prior capture of Leningrad was accepted, and with it the diversion of the Panzer forces of Army Group "Centre", in order to

deprive the Baltic fleet of its main base, the Russian war effort of the armament production of the city and, above all, the Russian Army of a strategic assembly area for a counter-offensive against the flank and rear of the German forces advancing on Moscow. For this last reason alone it was essential that Leningrad should be the first objective.⁸¹

Nevertheless, the manner in which the Army leaders later directed operations towards Moscow casts some doubt on this view. It is by no means clear whether in accepting Hitler's demand for a turning movement towards Leningrad von Brauchitsch really abandoned the OKH plan for a direct thrust on Moscow, only to revive it in July when such an operation

⁷⁹See Appendix II.

⁸⁰See Goerlitz, Paulus, p.127. See also Liddell Hart, On the Other Side. . . , pp. 263-65; Hoth, p. 40; Uhlig, p.175.

⁸¹Goerlitz, Paulus, p. 127.

seemed opportune, or merely concealed his intention to adhere to the Army plan in spite of Hitler's views. Certainly he was guilty of either inconsistency or deception when he attempted to change the "Barbarossa" plan agreed upon in December and caused a serious delay in the course of the campaign. As on so many occasions in the planning of the Russian operation, arrogant over-confidence was probably the true cause of von Brauchitsch's failure to settle this question before the opening of the attack. It appears that the choice between Leningrad and Moscow as the operational objective for the second phase of the campaign was regarded as unimportant during the planning. The Army Commander-in-Chief was confident that the decision would be reached west of the Dvina and Dnieper Rivers. "The great frontier battles . . . of up to four weeks duration," he assured General Warlimont, would be followed by a mopping-up operation against "slight opposition."⁸² The sequence in which cities were occupied in the course of this process seemed perhaps a

⁸²IMT, XXVI, 873-PS, 400. See also IMT, XXXVIII, 221-L, 94; Cf. Assmann, "Moscow," p. 311. General Heusinger confirmed in a post-war statement that in the second phase of the campaign "armoured thrusts" (Panzerstiche) would suffice to ". . . push over the crumbling remnants and occupy important centres." Hillgruber, p. 373.

matter to be settled according to the situation at the time, and of no more importance than the choice between Paris and Cherbourg as the initial objective of the final phase of the German Blitzkrieg in the West. Only in July 1941 did von Brauchitsch perceive the need for a decisive operational objective for the second phase in Russia, because by then the difficulties and delays in completing the first envelopment battles, the dogged resistance of the Soviet troops, the quality of the new Soviet tanks and the size of the Soviet reserves began to open the eyes of the Army Commander-in-Chief to his terrible underestimation of the enemy.

The Final Operational Objectives

The confidence of the OKH that a decisive victory would be won in the initial phases of the campaign, the envelopment battles west of the Dvina and Dnieper, caused them to accept the view that the capture of Moscow would present little difficulty. It also made them careless in planning the final phase. Marcks defined the final operational objective as the line "Rostov - Gorki - Archangel."⁸³ In the "Barbarossa" Directive of 18 December 1940, it was

⁸³Jacobsen, 1939-1945, p. 145.

"Volga - Archangel."⁸⁴ Presumably Rostov was omitted to allow for the "subsidiary operation" to seize the Baku oil fields which Hitler had mentioned on 31 July.⁸⁵ However, Marcks did not expect that the attainment of this line would result in an end of hostilities. He warned that the offensive might have to be extended to the Urals and that a Soviet Government in Asia might continue the war indefinitely.⁸⁶ Hitler shared this view. He envisaged the political disintegration of Western Russia into separate states with which peace could be made.⁸⁷ But further east a force of 40 to 50 German divisions would be required as a "shield against Asiatic Russia," while an air fleet of the Luftwaffe launched raids on the remaining Soviet war industrial centres in the Urals.⁸⁸ Later, when Field Marshal von Bock expressed doubt about the ability of the Wehrmacht to force the Russians to make peace, Hitler replied that, if necessary,

⁸⁴Hubatsch, p. 97.

⁸⁵Halder KTB, II, 50, 31 July 1940.

⁸⁶See Blau, p. 12.

⁸⁷Halder KTB, II, 341, 3 March 1941.

⁸⁸See KTB OKW, I, 209, 5 December, 258, 9 January 1941. See also Hubatsch, p. 97, 152. Directive No. 32 dated 11 June 1941 increased the land force required to 60 divisions.

German motorised forces would have to advance to the Urals.⁸⁹ These vague aims involving operations of indefinite duration and territorial extent were hardly compatible with Hitler's earlier insistence that the Soviet State must be "... heavily defeated in a single sweep,"⁹⁰ or with the opening sentence of Directive No. 21 which called upon the Wehrmacht to be prepared "to defeat Soviet Russia in one rapid campaign."⁹¹ About a third of the Wehrmacht would be tied down in Russia under winter combat conditions even if Operation "Barbarossa" attained its full objectives. Some attempt was made to prepare winter clothing, equipment and shelter but it was inadequate even for the needs of an army of occupation.⁹² Throughout the operational planning the assumption persisted that the campaign would be decisively ended before the onset of winter. In making this assumption, the Germans conducted their planning, in the words of Marshal Eremenko, as if "... they thought they would 'overfulfil' their plan."⁹³

Thus, the German military strategy in the East was characterised by a lack of caution, of imagination, of

⁸⁹Blau, p. 30.

⁹⁰Halder KTB, II, 49, 31 July 1940.

⁹¹Hubatsch, p. 96. Italicised in original.

⁹²Guderian, pp. 151, 267; Blumentritt, "Moscow," pp.62-3.

⁹³A. Eremenko, The Arduous Beginning, trans. Vic Schneierson (Moscow, 1966), p. 319.

flexibility and of attention to logistical problems. Any one of these omissions would seem remarkable in the general staff which since 1870 has been regarded as a paragon of military methods and skills. But the presence of all of them demands a reassessment of the reputation for efficiency which the heirs of Moltke have attempted to uphold.

The Responsibility of the Chief of the General Staff

One of the most remarkable features of German history in the Twentieth Century is the extent to which the German General Staff has continued to maintain its reputation for efficiency in spite of its terrible errors in both world wars. This has often been achieved by shifting the blame for military failures on to the political leadership of Germany. The defeat of the invasion of Russia has been no exception, and Adolf Hitler was the natural scapegoat on which to push the errors of its planning and execution. After the Second World War the most unabashed writer in this endeavour was the former Chief of the General Staff, General Franz Halder. His pamphlet Hitler as Warlord and the book of conversations edited by Peter Bor were obvious attempts to clear the General Staff of all responsibility

for the defects in the planning for the East.⁹⁴ In their pages Halder blamed the major mistakes or omissions of the German operational plan on Hitler, a man "to whom the artistry of a modern General Staff map was a complete mystery."⁹⁵

According to Halder, on 3 February 1941. Hitler "brushed aside" arguments stressing the strength of the Soviet Union.⁹⁶ Yet the contemporary evidence of Halder's own notes and those of the OKW War Diary suggest that on this occasion he presented not "arguments" but a report indicating that the German forces had qualitative superiority over those of Russia.⁹⁷ It has been shown above that this optimism in fact typified the attitude of the Army leaders from the start of the planning. Similarly, it was evident that the military planners completely shared Hitler's confidence that Russia could be defeated in a single campaign. Yet Halder described this belief as ". . . in contrast to that of the General Staff."⁹⁸

⁹⁴See Introduction, n. 4.

⁹⁵Halder, Hitler as Warlord, p. 23.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 19.

⁹⁷See Halder KTB, II, 266-67; KTB OKW, I, 297, 3 February 1941.

⁹⁸Bor, p. 199.

In an attempt to explain away the erroneous German assessment of what was feasible in Russia, Halder resorted to the excuse that there was a marked difference between the limited aims of the Army and the over-ambitious predatory aims of Hitler, who ". . . had never made known his intentions in these clear terms to the men who were charged with the command of the operation."⁹⁹ According to Halder, the military leaders believed that the German forces were ". . . just about sufficient to defeat the Russian levies facing them" and thus to win ". . . a strategic foreground . . . by the occupation of sizeable parts of the Ukraine, of White Russia and of the Baltic States - thereby providing a bargaining counter for peace."¹⁰⁰ Yet it is again Halder's own contemporary notes which show that there were no basic disagreements over the territorial and political aims of the campaign. Those proposed by von Brauchitsch on 21 July 1940 were very similar to those described by Hitler ten days later. The only major difference lay in Hitler's addition of the Caucasus to the territories to be conquered.¹⁰¹ The

⁹⁹ Halder, Hitler as Warlord, p. 40.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Halder KTB, II, 50, 31 July 1940.

Army planners evidently preferred to postpone consideration of the "subsidiary operation" required to reach the Baku oilfields, but they were not allowed to forget it altogether because Hitler took care to remind them of it in January 1941.¹⁰²

Halder's mendacious statements about the military leaders' ignorance of Hitler's real aims in the East were matched by a gross misrepresentation of Hitler's concept of the operation plan. He envisaged, Halder stated, an ". . . enormous, completely fantastic pincer (movement) with the jaws on Leningrad and Stalingrad."¹⁰³ However, Hitler's statements at the planning conferences for the campaign of 1941 made no mention of Stalingrad. As suggested above, his main concern was to achieve the envelopment of the Soviet forces, and he was not without justification in fearing that the Army's concept of the campaign would deteriorate into a frontal advance.

Halder also managed to blame Hitler for the failure of the Army to prepare sufficient winter clothing for the troops. This was not a question upon which Hitler needed

¹⁰²See KTB OKW, I, 258, 9 January 1941.

¹⁰³Bor, p. 199.

to be consulted since it was a matter of internal army administration to provide suitable clothing for the large number of formations which would have to garrison Russia and hold the eastern boundaries even if "Barbarossa" was successful. Nevertheless, he stated that:

When the Commander-in-Chief asked for immediate preparations for the provision of special winter clothes, he received a curt refusal with the remark that by the beginning of winter, the fighting would long since have been over.¹⁰⁴

What Halder failed to point out was that if this request was indeed ever made, the readiness of von Brauchitsch to accept such a reply was due entirely to his agreement with it.¹⁰⁵

The German neglect in the administrative preparations was not confined to their winter equipment. But Halder carefully evaded the fact that the crucial factors of supply and transportation, indeed the whole logistic and economic foundations of the campaign, were ignored by the Army leaders until after the operational plan had been completed.

The man chiefly responsible for the errors in the operational plan was of course the Chief of the General

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 198.

¹⁰⁵See p. 173, footnote 82.

Staff, General Halder himself. His performance as a strategist had been unimpressive in previous campaigns. When planning the invasion of Czechoslovakia in September 1938, he had provoked Hitler's anger by allocating the Panzer and motorised divisions to supporting roles which made little use of their mobile striking power.¹⁰⁶ The success of the invasion of Poland reflected no great credit on Halder because as von Manstein said in retrospect ". . . the Germans were bound to win this campaign by virtue of their superiority and the infinitely more favourable starting conditions."¹⁰⁷ Halder's operational plan for an offensive in the West was an unimaginative repetition of the initial phase of the Schlieffen Plan of 1914, which could have led only to a "partial victory."¹⁰⁸ The German success in 1940 was due to Hitler's decision to adopt a rival plan produced by the Chief of Staff of von Rundstedt's army group, von Manstein. Thus by the summer of 1940, in spite of his "remarkable grasp of every aspect of staff duties,"¹⁰⁹ Halder

¹⁰⁶See IMT, XXV, 338-PS, 429-32, 441-5, 463-4, 466-9.

¹⁰⁷Manstein, Lost Victories, p. 62.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 99.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 79.

had not demonstrated any great flair or insight as a strategic planner.

Halder's limitations in this respect were made worse by the very nature of the German high command organisation, which prevented him from concentrating effectively upon matters of strategy. It is interesting to compare his diaries with those of the British Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Sir Alan Brooke, who was ". . . freed . . . from a host of unnecessary distractions and enabled . . . to concentrate on his main task of formulating and guiding strategy."¹¹⁰ In contrast to those of Brooke, Halder's daily notes are mainly concerned with the minutiae of tactical, technical, administrative and personnel matters. Of course, Halder's position was not strictly equivalent to Brooke's because, as von Manstein later complained, Hitler had failed to create a "Reich Chief-of-Staff responsible for grand strategy."¹¹¹ Nevertheless, this omission made it all the more necessary that the German

¹¹⁰ Arthur Bryant, The Turn of the Tide, 1939-1943, A Study based on the Diaries and Autobiographical Notes of Field Marshal The Viscount Alanbrooke, K.G., O.M. (London, 1957), p. 263.

¹¹¹ Manstein, Lost Victories, p. 153.

Army Chief of Staff should endeavour to take the widest possible responsibility for military strategy. Thus it is curious that Halder should have chosen to involve himself in a mass of staff detail and to delegate so important a task as the planning of the Blitzkrieg in the East to a number of his subordinates. Perhaps, he was prompted by an awareness of his own limitations as a strategist.¹¹² But it seems more likely that his action was merely a further example of the German tendency to reduce strategy into an exercise in staff procedures. As Chief of the General Staff, Halder was free to organise his daily work and that of his subordinates as he wished. His choice reflected a bureaucratic diligence which had lost sight of priorities.

The decision to delegate and divide the planning of the eastern campaign undoubtedly contributed to the omissions, errors and lack of unity which, as indicated above, characterised the final plan. The studies of von Greiffenberg, Kinzel, Marcks, Paulus and Wagner and the proposals of Hitler were not combined into a consistent whole, and for

¹¹² This is implied in von Manstein's remark that this delegation of the planning was due to his " . . . high sense of responsibility." Ibid., p. 79.

this General Halder must bear the main responsibility. For, as von Manstein later commented, ". . . the fact remains that the basic concept of a campaign plan should be born in the mind of the man who has to direct the campaign."¹¹³

¹¹³Ibid.

CHAPTER V

STRATEGIC, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL PROBLEMS,

DECEMBER 1940 - MARCH 1941

Grand Strategic Doubts

The German operational plan for the invasion of Russia which General Halder presented to Hitler on 5 December was amended and issued to the three services on 18 December in Directive No. 21.¹ On 31 January, the field commanders received it in the form of "Deployment Directive Barbarossa" issued by the OKH.² During and after this process, the German military leaders became increasingly doubtful about embarking upon a major operation in the East before ending the war in the West. Nevertheless, there were no strong or unified attempts by the service chiefs to present a concerted argument against the attack in the East. Instead, they showed an ambivalent attitude of confidence in the operational feasibility of the Russian campaign and doubt about its grand strategic wisdom or political necessity. These doubts increased as the economic difficulties of the campaign

¹See Hubatsch, p. 96 ff.

²See Appendix, II.

became apparent. But they found little expression because they lay outside the narrow confines of military strategic competence which the service chiefs had accepted. Inter-service jealousy and rivalry between the OKH and OKW prevented a frank and searching discussion between the military leaders of the problems of the grand strategy of the war, especially of the relation between the war in the West and the proposed attack in the East. Hitler dominated the grand strategic level of planning and decision making, and the generals were seldom permitted to discuss political or economic factors at Fuehrer conferences. If they were mentioned, they were used by Hitler as evidence of a deteriorating situation. Since the political and economic position of Germany could only become worse in relation to those of Britain, the United States and Russia, he argued, the blow for the completion of a German hegemony over Europe must be launched as soon as possible. Furthermore, it must also be as brutal as possible in order to ensure a swift and decisive result. Confronted by the sweeping confidence of their Fuehrer, most of the military leaders had little difficulty in subduing their doubts. Nevertheless, between December 1940 and February 1941 they passed through a phase of disturbing uncertainties.

In July 1940 when the OKH began the operational planning for the Russian campaign, the grand strategic situation appeared to be very favourable for such an undertaking. In the West the only surviving enemy had been flung off the continent and was threatened with air assault and, perhaps, invasion. To the South, Italy had joined the war and Spain had offered to follow suit. France, resentful towards her former ally who had deserted her army and sunk her fleet, seemed prepared to comply with the conqueror's demands. But by December the picture had greatly changed. The British had successfully defended their island and struck back at the Axis. In so doing they had discouraged Spain from entering the war.³ Italy had suffered serious reverses on the sea, in Greece and North Africa. These had encouraged an independent attitude in the French leaders, especially General Weygand, and this, in turn, had necessitated preparations for a German occupation of Vichy France, Operation "Attila."⁴

When called upon to discuss this situation with Hitler on 9 December, General Halder took the opportunity to stress

³See Halder KTB, II, 218, 8 December 1940.

⁴See Ibid.

the need to concentrate all means for the invasion of the British Isles, and, secondly, to counter the possibility of a strengthening of the British position in North Africa or the formation of a Balkan front. Hitler expressed agreement with his views but apparently nothing was said about a postponement of the Russian operation.⁵ Four days later Halder gave the chiefs of staff of the army groups and armies an outline of the situation. Ostensibly this was based upon the views presented by Hitler at the conference on 5 December, but Halder's own opinions, especially his preference for an attack on Britain, intruded upon his discourse. He stated that Operation "Sea Lion" might be carried out if the internal weakening of Britain presented the opportunity for a "death blow."⁶ This was hardly an accurate account of Hitler's view at this time. Similarly, Halder's remarks about the Russian campaign reflected the ambivalent attitude of the OKH. Though he echoed Hitler's assertion that "the decision over the hegemony in Europe would be achieved in a struggle with Russia," he also stated that preparations should

⁵See Ibid., p. 219, 9 December 1940.

⁶Ibid., p. 226, 13 December 1940.

be made to permit an attack "if the political situation demands it. . . ." ⁷ "We do not seek a conflict with Russia," he continued, "but from the spring of 1941 we must be ready for this task also." ⁸ He then gave the Operations Branch a list of possible future operations: "Sea Lion", Gibraltar, Vichy France, Bulgaria, Russia, and he warned that "Political uncertainty is possible for a long while yet, therefore (we must be) flexible." ⁹

Directive No. 21 which Hitler issued on 18 December left little room for flexibility. Nevertheless, at the OKH there was still an unwillingness to believe that Hitler was determined to go ahead with the eastern campaign irrespective of the situation in the West or of the attitude of the Russians. Field Marshal von Brauchitsch even asked Major Engel, Army Adjutant to the Fuehrer, ". . . to establish whether Hitler really intended to resort to force or was only bluffing." ¹⁰ The attitude of the Army leaders at this

⁷ Ibid., p. 227.

⁸ Ibid., p. 228.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ G. Engel, Tagebuch, 18 December 1940, quoted by Hillgruber, Hitlers Strategie, p. 369.

time was the result of a number of factors. They were not opposed to the campaign in Russia on principle. They were hostile towards Bolshevism, suspicious of Stalin's intentions, and eager to end Slavic rivalry for the domination of eastern Europe. Furthermore, they were convinced that the Army could beat the Russians and that they had adequate land forces for the tasks in both the East and the West. Indeed having pushed Britain off the continent, they claimed that for the Army the war in the East could be regarded as a single front war. But in spite of this they were nagged by the uneasy feeling that the British should be completely defeated before the campaign in the East began. This feeling was strengthened by the naval and military defeats inflicted on Italy in November and December 1940. But just as the British could not strike at them, so they were forced to admit that they could not inflict a death-blow on the British. For this they needed air superiority and there was no immediate prospect of achieving it.¹¹ Thus, while clinging stubbornly to "Sea Lion", the OKH had no real hope of carrying it out.

¹¹See Halder KTB, II, 226, 13 December 1940.

The Army's dependence upon the support of the Luftwaffe was also a cause of uneasiness in the East. The only note of pessimism or even caution in the operational planning for Russia arose from the likelihood that the Luftwaffe would be unable to fulfil its primary tasks of winning air superiority and providing support to the ground troops. But the brusque manner in which Hitler had dismissed the doubts of von Brauchitsch on this point on 5 December, made it clear that he would not tolerate any interference from the Army in Reichsmarschall Goering's sphere of competence.¹²

Goering's attitude towards the decision to attack Russia was also one of mixed feelings. According to General Schmid, Chief of the Luftwaffe Intelligence Branch, he dreaded ". . . the boundless extension of the war, the unending size of Russia, and, on the other side, America's entry into the war."¹³ But in view of his confidence in German technical superiority, his long adherence to the Nazi

¹²KTB OKW, I, 205, 5 December 1940.

¹³Quoted by Hillgruber, Hitlers Strategie, p. 396, n.17.

policy of eastern conquest, and his loyalty to Hitler, it is unlikely that warnings which he claimed to have made against the Russian operation were strongly worded.¹⁴ His Chief of Staff, General Hans Jeschonnek, who had served in Russia in the period of cooperation between the Reichswehr and Red Army in the 1920's, had a low opinion of the Soviet Union and was definitely in favour of striking in the East, even though the Luftwaffe Chief of Operations, von Waldau, and Chief of Intelligence, Schmid, disagreed with him.¹⁵

Like Goering, Field Marshal Keitel also stated at Nuremberg after the war that he expressed his opposition to a two-front war. But when Hitler refused to accept the arguments of the memorandum which he drew up in August 1940 and also the resignation which he offered, Keitel resumed his normal obsequious role.¹⁶

The most serious military criticism of the attack on Russia came from Admiral Raeder. On 27 December, he told Hitler that it was "absolutely essential to recognise that

¹⁴See IMT, IX, 59 ff., 386; X, 493, 590 ff.

¹⁵Op. cit. See also Flocher, p. 6.

¹⁶Goerlitz, Keitel, pp. 243-4.

the greater task of the hour is to concentrate all our resources against England."¹⁷ But Hitler insisted that this could not be done until the last continental enemy had been eliminated, after which production priorities could be shifted to the Luftwaffe and Navy.¹⁸ From this reply, Raeder concluded that further warnings "were completely useless."¹⁹

Since the service chiefs most directly concerned with the problem of a two-front war were unwilling or unable to make any impression on Hitler, von Brauchitsch and Halder were discouraged from voicing grand strategic arguments against Operation "Barbarossa". They were even less inclined to question its political origins.

The Political Danger of Russia

Between July and December 1940, Hitler was able to assemble an impressive array of evidence of Soviet hostility with which to justify his resolve to attack Russia. Further

¹⁷ FCNA, 1940, pp. 138-9.

¹⁸ See IMT, XXXIV, 170-C, 674 ff.

¹⁹ IMT, XXXIV, 066-C, p. 276 ff. A warning similar to Raeder's was expressed by State Secretary von Weizsaecker, who was a former naval officer. See NSR, pp. 333-34.

Soviet expansion in Finland and Rumania had apparently been averted only by demonstrative German troop movements in August and September. After the meeting with Molotov, Hitler, in a conversation with Field Marshal von Bock, began to revive the idea of liaison between Russia and Britain and to this he added hints of "contacts between Russia and America."²⁰ The note replying to the proposals placed before Molotov in Berlin was treated by Hitler as proof of the expansionist tendencies of that "incomparable and imperturbable blackmailer, Stalin, who was trying to gain time in order to consolidate his advanced bases in Finland and the Balkans."²¹ Hitler admitted that the Russian leader was wise enough not to "start anything openly with Germany."²² He would, however, do all he could to make Germany's situation more difficult.

Very similar views had already been expressed by General Halder on 13 December when he told the senior staff

²⁰Fedor von Bock, Tagebuch, MS., Bundesarchiv-Militaerarchiv H08-22/8, 3 December 1940, quoted by Hillgruber, Hitlers Strategie, p. 361, n. 50.

²¹Hitler's Testament, p. 97. See also FCNA, 1941, pp. 8-13.

²²KTb OKW, I, 257, 9 January 1941.

officers that:

Every weakening of the position of the Axis leads to a Russian advance. Russia cannot take the initiative of her own accord, but she will use every opportunity to weaken our position.²³

After the war, General Halder continued to describe the German attack on Russia as a response to a "long but steadily rising political danger."²⁴ He preferred, however, not to go into details, because, as he put it, politics was "not my area."²⁵ Halder's evasiveness is understandable for any delusions he had about the reasons for Hitler's decision to attack Russia must have been dispelled on 17 February when von Etzdorf, the liaison officer from the Foreign Office, reported Hitler as saying that "if Britain were defeated, then he would no longer be able to rouse the German people against Russia. Thus, Russia would have to be attacked first."²⁶ From then on Halder well knew that Hitler's aggressive aims in the East were inflexible, and that the Soviet

²³ Halder KTB, II, 227, 13 December 1940.

²⁴ Bor, p. 194.

²⁵ Ibid. See also Guenther Blumentritt, Von Rundstedt, the Soldier and the Man, trans. Cuthbert Reavely (London, 1952), p. 41, for a further example of the incredible political naïveté from a senior officer of the German General Staff.

²⁶ Halder KTB, II, 283, 17 February 1941.

Union had good reason to seek means of improving her own strategic position and weakening that of Germany.²⁷ Thus the deterioration of Russo-German relations was a result rather than the cause of the German preparations for the invasion of Russia. Nevertheless, until 17 February 1941 Halder and several other German military leaders remained unwilling to accept the inflexibility of Hitler's grand strategy, especially when they became aware of the enormous economic and logistic difficulties of the campaign in the East.

The Economic and Logistic Planning for the East

As already described, the operation plan for "Barbarossa" was completed with very little consideration of the economic and logistic factors involved. Thus the administrative plan was developed by General Eduard Wagner, the Quartermaster General of the Army, in cooperation with the

²⁷ The belief that the conflict with Russia was the result of a steady deterioration of Russo-German political relations persisted. Admiral Assmann, for instance, collected in 1943 from the files of the Naval Staff an account of this process. His illusions were shattered in 1944 when Admiral Raeder bluntly informed him that Hitler was ". . . firmly resolved on a surprise attack against Russia, regardless of what was the Russian attitude to Germany." IMT, XXXIV, 066-C, p. 278. Cf., IMT, XXXIV, 170-C, 674 ff.

Luftwaffe and Naval Staffs, to conform to the needs of the operational plan. Meanwhile, other major staffs also worked independently on administrative and economic preparations for the East. On 29 July Section "L" of the Wehrmachtfuehrungsstab was given the task of preparing the communications system, accommodation and supply services required in the concentration and deployment areas.²⁸ In August the Reichs Defence Council and War Economy and Armament Office of the OKW began to make economic plans to equip the field army for the campaign, and, at the same time, to make necessary increases in the strength of the Luftwaffe and the Navy.²⁹

The economic planners were well aware of the size of their task. On 14 August Goering told General Thomas, Head of the War Economy and Armament Office, that "only now was real rearmament production starting."³⁰ A few days later, Field Marshal Keitel expressed doubt that the new demands could be met because the Blitzkrieg economy was already extended to full capacity. Nevertheless, manpower and raw materials would have to be made available by ruthless cuts

²⁸See Warlimont, p. 112.

²⁹See KTb OKW, I, 76-77E; Thomas, pp. 420, 432.

³⁰Thomas, p. 512.

in the civil and consumer goods sectors and by the employment of women, prisoners of war and foreign workers.³¹ In short, Keitel felt that the time had come to place the economy upon a total war footing.³² These ideas were, however, rejected by Hitler.³³ He regarded the maintenance of the civilian economy as essential to morale, and for racial and social reasons he opposed employment of women.³⁴ Since the Blitzkrieg economy had succeeded in providing the necessary armaments and munitions for the earlier campaigns, he saw no reason to doubt that it would also meet the requirements of a victory in the East. Thus Keitel had to be content with an increase in foreign workers and an attempt to offset raw material deficiencies by concentrating upon essential elements in each of the services: armour and motorised artillery, fighter aircraft and anti-aircraft guns, and U-boats.³⁵ Nevertheless, Keitel's fear proved fully justified.

³¹KTb OKW, I, 76-77E.

³²For Keitel's views on Ludendorff's total war concept see Goerlitz, Keitel, p. 154 ff.

³³Keitel, while urging the adoption of a total war economy, also, according to his own account, attempted to dissuade Hitler from his eastern plans. Ibid., pp. 243-4.

³⁴See Rauschning, pp. 207-8; Milward, pp. 12, 28-30, 34-5, 46; Klein, pp. 140-41.

³⁵See Thomas, p. 432.

Aircraft production declined throughout the second half of 1940,³⁶ and the doubling of the number of Panzer divisions was achieved only by halving the tank strength of each division and using captured French cars and trucks.³⁷

General Jodl was also doubtful about the economic basis of the war in the East. On 3 December 1940 he wrote a note stating that if the armament situation required it, the Russian campaign "can and must be postponed because it is by no means necessary for the victory over Britain."³⁸ Furthermore, he was very critical of the reduction of the strength of the Panzer divisions and commented that:

If this great campaign has to be fought soon, then it can be done just as well with 12 Panzer divisions as 24 Panzer brigades, because there won't be any more by the spring (of 1941). We would thus save a mass of (units from) the supporting arms and rear services.³⁹

There is, however, no evidence that Jodl expressed these critical views to Hitler or to the Army General Staff, which

³⁶ See Milward, p. 42.

³⁷ See Guderian, pp. 138, 143; Walter Krueger, The Conduct of Operations in the East, 1941-1943, U.S. Army Historical Division, MSC-050 (HQ U.S. Army Europe, 1949), p. 2; Mueller-Hillebrand, Das Heer, II, p. 105 ff; Hoth, pp. 44-5.

³⁸ Thomas, p. 437; KTB OKW, I, 981.

³⁹ Ibid.

at this time was beginning its first major examination of the logistical problems of the eastern campaign.⁴⁰

On 23 December General Fromm, the Commander-in-Chief of the Reserve Army drew the attention of General Halder to the shortages of steel, non-ferrous metals and rubber, and warned him that food requirements could be met only by "cheating our way through 1941."⁴¹ On returning from leave a month later, General Halder summoned the senior administrators of the Army and Luftwaffe to a conference on 28 January.⁴² He began by emphasising the strain which the speed and distances of the campaign in Russia would place upon the supply system. Demolitions and the difference in gauge between the German and Russian railways would rule out their early use. Therefore, motor transport would have to provide an uninterrupted flow of supplies to support an advance of 600 miles.⁴³ General Thomas then pointed out

⁴⁰See Blau, p. 20.

⁴¹Halder KTB, II, 240, 24 December 1940; Cf. IMT, XXXI, 2718-PS, 84.

⁴²It was attended by General Fromm, Commander-in-Chief, Reserve Army, Generals Thomas and Hannecken of the War Economy and Armament Office, General Emil Leeb, Chief of the Army Armaments Office, General Seidel, Quartermaster General of the Luftwaffe. See Halder KTB, II, 256 ff., 28 January 1941.

⁴³Ibid., p. 258.

out that there was a deficiency of almost 50 per cent in tyre requirements, and sufficient fuel oil only for the concentration of the forces and two months of combat.⁴⁴

The purpose of this conference was to find an "adequate solution" to the supply problems in the East, or, failing this, to present a clear basis upon which "a decision could be requested from the Fuehrer."⁴⁵ So Halder immediately went to von Brauchitsch to discuss the effect of the morning's revelations on the grand strategic situation. Afterwards, he noted in his diary:

The purpose (of Barbarossa) is not clear. We do not strike at the British and our economic potential will not be improved. The risk in the West should not be underestimated. It is even possible that Italy might collapse after losing her colonies and we find ourselves with a southern front through Spain, Italy and Greece. If we are then committed against Russia our position will become increasingly difficult.⁴⁶

They resumed this unusually broad discussion of the economic and strategic risks of the eastern operation next day.⁴⁷

⁴⁴Op. cit. See also KTB OKW, I, 997.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 259.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 261, 28 January 1941.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 262, 29 January 1941.

Their desire to avoid a rigid commitment was reflected in the opening words of the Deployment Directive for Operation "Barbarossa" which they issued on 31 January:

In case Russia should change her present attitude towards Germany all preparations are to be taken as precautionary measures to make it possible to defeat the Soviet Union in a quick campaign even before the end of the war against Britain.⁴⁸

At a gloomy luncheon meeting that day von Brauchitsch and Halder discussed "Barbarossa" for the first time with all three army group commanders designated for the East; Field Marshals von Leeb, von Bock and von Rundstedt.⁴⁹ They confirmed that they too had misgivings about the operation. It appears, however, that von Brauchitsch was loath to resume the task of carrying such misgivings to the Fuehrer, and it was Field Marshal von Bock who, two days later, sought an audience with Hitler.

The lean, austere Field Marshal explained as tactfully as possible that he had no doubt that the Russians would be

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 464; Appendix II. The German sentence structure is deliberately retained to convey the laboured attempt to give the statement a conditional basis.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 264, n. 1, 31 January 1941.

defeated if they chose to give battle. But he expressed concern at Germany's ability to wage a long war if the Russians simply refused to make peace. Hitler replied that he was confident that the loss of Leningrad, Moscow and the Ukraine would force them to abandon the struggle. If not, then German motorised forces would have to drive on to the Urals. "In any event", he continued,

I am happy that our war production is equal to any demand. We have such an abundance of material that we had to reconvert some of our war plants (to civilian production). The armed forces now have more trained manpower than at the beginning of the war, and our economy is in an excellent condition.⁵⁰

He dismissed any thought of dissuading him from the operation with the blunt assurance, "I shall fight."⁵¹

This categorical rejection of criticism on economic grounds ended the matter as far as the Army leaders were concerned. On the next day, 3 February, at a conference with Hitler, General Halder referred to the difficulties of supply in the East, but omitted those details which made the whole operation seem a questionable risk. Instead, he described methods by which he hoped the transportation problems

⁵⁰Blau, p. 30.

⁵¹Ibid. See also Heusinger, p. 122.

might be overcome: the concentration of supply columns on centralised delivery points, cooperation between the Army and the Luftwaffe to ensure the fullest use of all available truck space. He also accepted Hitler's suggestion that the Baltic coast as far as Leningrad should be occupied as soon as possible in order to provide the supply base for further operations, thus seeming to confirm his agreement with the decision to give the capture of Leningrad priority over that of Moscow.⁵²

The establishment of a firm base on the Baltic coast was also favoured by Field Marshal von Rundstedt. But he thought that the subsequent development of thrusts southward from Leningrad towards Moscow might have to be postponed until the following year.⁵³ However, the concept of an operation extending over two summer seasons was compatible neither with Hitler's demand that Russia should be defeated in a single campaign nor with the recent discovery that there was sufficient fuel oil only for two months of fighting. As

⁵²KTb OKW, I, 298-9.

⁵³See Blumentritt, Rundstedt, pp. 103-4; "Moscow", p. 41. See also Liddell Hart, On the Other Side. . . , p. 277. Guderian after the war came to express similar views. See Guderian, pp. 149-50.

a result, while paying lip service to Hitler's idea of building up "the most favourable supply base" on the Baltic, the Army leaders neglected to conduct any detailed planning for such a base, from which the Dvina and Narva river systems could have been used as major supply arteries for a southward advance. Instead they continued to hope that the success of the initial attack would be so great that the problems of supplying the subsequent operations would disappear. This attitude evaded the crucial question of whether victory could be won in a single campaign and was the root cause of the attempt by von Brauchitsch to depart from the "Barbarossa" plan in the midst of the operation in order to revert to the idea of a swift, direct thrust on Moscow. It was also the cause of the Army's failure to make adequate and timely preparations for operations under winter conditions.

Although on 3 February von Brauchitsch and Halder had shown greater confidence in Operation "Barbarossa" than von Bock, Hitler did not ignore the warnings of the army group commander. On 5 February he called for a study of the various major Soviet industrial areas to test their ability to sustain centres of resistance even as far east as the

Urals.⁵⁴ To this the OKW replied that Field Marshal Keitel had requested such a study and that the War Economy and Armament Office had already submitted material on the subject to General Jodl. Three days later Keitel summoned General Thomas to discuss the matter further. In his notes on the interview Thomas stated that he informed the Chief of the OKW that if operations in the East took place, the fuel situation would be as follows:

Aircraft fuel will last until autumn 1941 . . .
 Vehicle fuel only sufficient for the deployment
 and two months of combat The same situation
 applied to diesel oil⁵⁵

He also warned Keitel that rubber production of about 7,500 tons per month could be maintained only until the end of March. If there were no further imports in April, Germany would be left with a reserve of 2,600 tons.⁵⁶ These and other economic statistics related to the operation in Russia were included in a written report which Thomas gave Keitel to pass on to Hitler. However, Keitel brusquely told him

⁵⁴KTB OKW, I, 306, 5 February 1941.

⁵⁵Thomas, p. 17.

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 17-18.

that "the Fuehrer would not allow himself to be influenced in his planning by such economic difficulties."⁵⁷ Thus, it is unlikely that this report ever reached Hitler.

On 13 February, General Thomas completed a bigger study entitled "The Effects of an Operation in the East on the War Economy."⁵⁸ This document presented statistics from which Thomas and his staff attempted to predict the outcome of the occupation of European Russia excluding the Urals. During the first few months, Germany's economic position would be relieved in the field of nutrition and raw materials if a rapid conquest should succeed in preventing the destruction of stocks, capturing the oil fields of the Caucasus intact, and solving the transport problem. In the case of a longer war, effective relief would depend on the following: the solution of the transport problem; the prevention of the evacuation of the population which would have to be won over to collaboration; the prevention of the

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 18. See also KTB OKW, I, 316-7, 11 February 1941.

⁵⁸ Thomas, p. 515 ff. Confusion over the date of this document (13 February 1941) has arisen through Thomas' references to it at conferences before and after the date of its completion. See Hillgruber, Hitlers Strategie, pp. 265-9; Fabry, pp. 389-90; IMT, XXX, 2353-PS, is not dated.

destruction of Russian motor transport; the replacement of Russian tractors by a resumption of production; the seizure of fuel supplies and power stations; the securing of the delivery of raw materials not existing in European Russia. The resumption of supplies of rubber, tungsten, copper, platinum, tin, asbestos, and manila hemp would depend on the re-establishment of communication with the Far East.

General Thomas also stated that the area south of the mouths of the Volga and Don must be included in the operation because the oil of the Caucasus would be essential for the exploitation of the rest of occupied Russia. His final conclusion was that the campaign would lead to the capture of 75 per cent of the Soviet war industry and almost 100 per cent of the precision tool and optical instrument industries.

Later, Thomas stated that from his report emerged

. . . the clear recognition that a collapse of the Soviet Union on purely war economic grounds could be expected only with the loss or destruction of the industrial areas in the Urals.⁵⁹

Furthermore, the report has been described as a deliberate attempt to discourage Hitler from attempting an attack on

⁵⁹Thomas, p. 270.

Russia.⁶⁰ However, Thomas himself admitted in retrospect that it was too optimistic, and the prediction that the campaign would overrun all but 25 per cent of the Soviet war industry was hardly discouraging. In spite of the obvious difficulties of capturing Soviet economic resources and industrial plants intact, the urgent needs which the report reflected served to justify an invasion of Russia as a solution for Germany's economic problems.

This was indeed the attitude taken by Goering on 26 February when Thomas submitted the report to him as head of the Four Year Plan Organisation.⁶¹ He showed no sign of wishing to avoid the Russian operation but began to cast about wildly for means to overcome the problems involved. Ignoring the limited range and striking power of his Luftwaffe⁶² he spoke of seizing the Baku oil fields by means of an airborne attack, and later called for plans for the bombing of the war industries in the Urals.⁶³ He expressed vague hopes

⁶⁰Fabry, p. 390.

⁶¹Goering ordered Thomas to begin work on the report in November 1940.

⁶²For an indication of the weakness of the Luftwaffe in 1941, see KTB OKW, I, 1016.

⁶³KTB OKW, I, 346, 6 March 1941.

of persuading the Japanese to cooperate in "re-opening the Trans-Siberian railway as quickly as possible."⁶⁴ He also claimed that he had constantly warned Hitler that the failure of the supply organisation could endanger the entire operation. To ease the strain, he suggested that the number of divisions committed in the East should be restricted. He evidently envisaged that as in France the brunt of the fighting would be borne by the mobile forces and the infantry would play only a "walking-on" part, for he suggested that ". . . only a portion of them would come under fire."⁶⁵

When Thomas repeated the warning that there was sufficient fuel only for two months of operations, Goering replied that he would suggest to Antonescu that Rumanian oil production should be increased. In the same vein, he ordered General von Schell, the Plenipotentiary for Motor Transport, to find a way to produce synthetic tyres for heavy trucks. "It would be unthinkable," he added, "to allow our last rubber supplies to be wasted on the bad Russian roads."⁶⁶

The opinions of Keitel and Goering that the weakness of the German war economy was a very real proof of the urgent

⁶⁴Thomas, p. 18.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 19.

⁶⁶Ibid.

necessity for Operation "Barbarossa" was later confirmed by the Economic Staff East, formed by General Thomas in April 1941 under the command of General Schubert. Its three main inspectorates covered the areas of the three army groups extending as far East as Vologda, Gorki and Stalingrad. A special inspectorate was responsible for the Caucasian oil-fields. A memorandum issued by this staff on 2 May left no doubt about the nature of their task. It opened with the statement:

The war can only be continued if all the armed forces are fed by Russia in the third year of the war (1941-1942). There is no doubt that many millions of people will starve to death in Russia if we take out of the country the things necessary to us.⁶⁷

Thus, ultimately, the War Economic and Armament Office merely confirmed the views expressed on 28 July 1940 in the Naval Staff's memorandum "Observations on Russia." This had stated:

The future safety of our homeland requires the build-up of a spatial impregnability, i.e. an expansion which will prevent an unhindered, surprise entry into vital parts of German territory, a buffer zone so to speak Further it requires if possible an autarkic economy especially in goods vital in war time (e.g. oil, foodstuffs). The build-up of Germany requires raw materials and, to the

⁶⁷ IMT, XXXI, 2718-PS, 84. Cf., Fromm's statement on 23 December 1940; Halder KTB, II, 240.

same degree, markets for its products. For both Russia is . . . well suited. . . . 68

Such views on the establishment of an autarky by means of conquest in the East were completely in accordance with Hitler's ideas. Two days before the opening of "Barbarossa" he stated that:

The course of the war shows that we have gone too far in our efforts to set up an autarky. It is impossible . . . to try to produce by synthetic means all those things we lack . . . We must follow another course and conquer that which we need . . . So the aim must be to secure by conquest all areas which are of special importance to our war industry. 69

On an earlier occasion, he told his military leaders that after the destruction of Russia Germany would be "unassailable." "The vast Russian space," he continued, "heaped up immeasurable riches. Germany must dominate it economically and politically. . . ." 70

Political Warfare in Russia

In the interview with General Thomas on 26 February Goering dismissed the warning that the Russians would destroy all industrial machinery and railways in the wake of their

⁶⁸Hillgruber, p. 221.

⁶⁹IMT, XXXVII, 1456-PS, 220.

⁷⁰KTB OKW, I, 258, 9 January 1941.

withdrawals. He shared the view of the Fuehrer that ". . . with the entry of German troops into Russia, the entire Bolshevist State would collapse."⁷¹ To speed this, Goering stated, it would be necessary "swiftly to wipe out the Bolshevist leadership."⁷²

Thus the programme of ideological warfare directed against the Communist intelligentsia and bureaucracy was intended to form part of the campaign. It would add a further element of terror to the Blitzkrieg which would speed its effect and help to achieve the rapid victory essential to prevent the Soviet Union from either mobilising its full resources or from destroying them before the Germans could seize them. The ideological war in the East, which the German Army leaders have attempted to depict as a distasteful element imposed upon them against their will, had, in fact, an important relationship to German military strategy and economic policy in Russia.

Detailed planning for this process began early in March when Hitler rejected the draft of a directive for a military administration in the East prepared by the Wehr-

⁷¹Thomas, p. 18.

⁷²Ibid.

machtfuehrungsstab. He returned it with a long commentary which opened as follows:

The coming campaign is more than a mere clash of arms; it is also a conflict between two ideologies. In view of the extent of the space involved, the striking down of the enemy armed forces will not suffice to bring about an end to the war. The whole area must be divided into (separate) states each with its own government with which peace can be made.⁷³

This, Hitler explained, would require great "political skills and well-prepared principles." The socialist idea, he admitted was too deeply entrenched in Russia to be just "washed away." It would constitute the basis for the foundation of new states and governments. "The Jewish-Bolshevist intelligentsia" and the former "middle class and aristocratic intelligentsia" including that of the Baltic states and emigrés would, therefore, have to be "removed," and a revival of Russian nationalism prevented. The task of establishing dependent "socialist states" in the East was so difficult that Hitler ". . . could not entrust it to the Army."⁷⁴ Three days later, he stressed that the German political leadership must be established in the East as soon as possible

⁷³KTb OKW, I, 341, 3 March 1941.

⁷⁴Ibid.

". . . in order to conduct the ideological struggle simultaneously with the military struggle."⁷⁵ An annex to Directive No. 21, outlining the relationship between the political, economic and military administrations in Russia, was accordingly issued by Keitel on 13 March.⁷⁶ Field Marshal von Brauchitsch immediately attempted to counter it with the suggestion that the occupied territories in the East should be controlled by a military administration similar to those in Belgium and France. This was sharply refused by Hitler on the grounds that "a military administration is useless . . . the Army understands nothing of politics."⁷⁷

Nevertheless, Hitler intended to ensure that the Army played an active role in the political terror campaign which was to increase the impact of the Blitzkrieg in the East. At the Fuehrer conference on 17 March he told von Brauchitsch, Halder, Heusinger, Keitel and Jodl that:

The leadership structure of the Russian empire must be destroyed . . . the most brutal use of force would be necessary. Ideological bonds did

⁷⁵ Ibid., 346, 6 March 1941.

⁷⁶ Hubatsch, pp. 101-5.

⁷⁷ Engel, Tagebuch, 16 March 1941, quoted by Hillgruber, Hitlers Strategie, p. 524, n. 34.

not yet hold the Russian nation firmly enough together. It would fall apart with the removal of the (communist) functionaries.⁷⁸

The same theme was stressed on 30 March when Hitler told a large assembly of senior generals that the aim of the coming struggle between two ideologies must be the total destruction of Bolshevism and the establishment of a German "protectorate" embracing the Baltic States, White Russia and the Ukraine. The Army officers would have to sacrifice their scruples and play a leading role on the elimination of Bolshevist commissars and the communist intelligentsia.⁷⁹

At the Nuremberg Trial von Brauchitsch described the generals crowding round him in outraged remonstrance when Hitler left the hall at the close of this speech.⁸⁰ In fact the scene was very different. According to Halder, the generals had lunch with Hitler and spent the afternoon presenting to him the plans of the various army groups and armies. To this Halder added the comment "Nothing new,"

⁷⁸Halder KTB, II, 320, 17 March 1941.

⁷⁹Ibid., 337, 30 March 1941.

⁸⁰IMT, XX, 581-2.

which Warlimont later regarded as an indication that ". . . none of those present availed themselves of the opportunity even to mention the demands made by Hitler in the morning."⁸¹ Warlimont is probably correct in this assumption, but his explanation of the generals' failure to protest is far-fetched. The majority of them, he stated, had probably

. . . not followed Hitler's long diatribe in detail, . . . others had not grasped the full meaning of his proposals and others . . . thought it better first to look into these questions more deeply or to follow normal military practice and await the reaction of their superiors.⁸²

There can be little doubt that Halder grasped the full meaning of Hitler's words. After his account he noted "C. in C. Order" as a reminder for future action,⁸³ and early in May a draft order entitled "General Instructions for dealing with Political Leaders and for the Co-ordinated Execution of the Task allotted on 31 (sic) March 1941" was sent to the OKW.⁸⁴ This document stated that any Russian

⁸¹Warlimont, p. 162. See also Reitlinger, p. 68 ff.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Op. cit.

⁸⁴See Warlimont, p. 163. See also ND, 1471-PS; Vollmacht des Gewissens, p. 358 ff.

identified as "a political personality or leader (commissar)" would be executed. On the day of its dispatch Halder told General Mueller and the Judge Advocate General that "during the eastern campaign the troops must be aware of the ideological struggle."⁸⁵ On learning that von Brauchitsch and Halder had accepted Hitler's "brutal and uncontrolled measures . . . against the Bolsheviks," Ulrich von Hassell wrote in his diary that ". . . the Army must assume the onus of the murders and burnings which up to now have been confined to the S.S."⁸⁶

In an attempt to mitigate the effect of the "Commissar Order" von Brauchitsch issued a further order on 24 May 1941 calling for the traditional discipline and restraint in the East.⁸⁷ Field Marshal von Bock used the latter as an excuse for ignoring the "Commissar Order," but neither von Leeb nor von Rundstedt followed his example in their army groups. The readiness of the Army leaders to issue this order was partly due to their wish to prevent political interference

⁸⁵ Halder KTB, 399, 6 May 1941.

⁸⁶ Hassall, p. 181.

⁸⁷ See Reitlinger, p. 72; IMT, XXI, 25, XX, 582.

in the battle zone. When General Warlimont expressed his surprise at the decision of the OKH to send out the "Commissar Order" in writing, General Wagner, the Quartermaster General, categorically refused to withdraw it on the grounds that ". . . there was a danger that Hitler would send the SD right up into the forward areas so that it could be used to carry out his wishes."⁸⁸

However, the main reason for the acceptance of Hitler's ideological policies by the generals was that they welcomed them as a means of increasing the effects of terror and paralysis of the Blitzkrieg in the East. After the war, Field Marshal von Kleist stated that:

Hopes of victory were largely built on the prospect that the invasion would produce a political upheaval in Russia. Most of us generals realised beforehand that if the Russians chose to fall back there was very little chance of achieving a final victory without the help of such an upheaval.⁸⁹

Not all Germans agreed that Hitler's policy was the best way to achieve an internal collapse. Particularly in

⁸⁸Warlimont, p. 165; see also p. 151. Cf. Hubatsch, p. 102.

⁸⁹Liddell Hart, On the Other Side. . . , p. 259. Von Kleist's statement is not the result of hindsight. Early in 1941 when asked if the Russians would give battle west of the Dvina and Dnieper Rivers, Halder admitted "it might easily turn out different (sic)", see Blau, p. 26. See also von Bock's question to Hitler on 2 February 1941 (Ibid., p. 30).

the Army there was support for the formation of anti-Bolshevist movements in Russia, especially in the Ukraine and in the Baltic States. But such ideas were discouraged because they were incompatible with the Nazi racial policy and with the vague and often contradictory schemes for dependent "socialist" states in the East described by Hitler and by his Minister for Eastern Territories, Alfred Rosenberg.⁹⁰

The "Directive for Handling Propaganda for Operation Barbarossa" issued in June 1941⁹¹ outlawed appeals to nationalistic sentiments or ambitions of ethnic minorities, and references to new pro-German national governments. Instead vague assurances were to be made that the Wehrmacht was entering Russia to free the Russian people from Jewish-Bolshevist rule. Nevertheless, civilians should not attempt to take part in the fighting but remain "calm and orderly." The importance of "work as usual" was stressed and warnings were to be issued that looting, waste or the destruction of industrial machinery would lead to famine. For the same

⁹⁰See Reitlinger, pp. 128 ff., 160 ff; Dallin, pp. 44 ff., 107 ff.

⁹¹See Edgar M. Howell, The Soviet Partisan Movement, 1941-1944, Department of the Army Pamphlet 20-244 (Washington, 1956), pp. 22-3.

reason the break-up of collective farms and distribution of land would be delayed to a later date. The Russian press and radio were to be used to exert a calming influence and to discourage acts of sabotage. This negative approach combined with the ruthless extermination of the Communist intelligentsia and Jewish people was hardly likely to sustain enthusiasm for the new German rule. Still less would it stir Russian people into a "political upheaval" against Stalin only to exchange one form of terror for another.

The success of terror policy depended, like the German military strategy and economic policy, upon swift and decisive results. If the Soviet state collapsed under the impact of the initial blow, the long-term adverse effects on Russia and German morale would be of no immediate consequence. But if the war in the East deteriorated into a protracted struggle then brutal ideological warfare and immediate economic exploitation would prove double-edged weapons.

For this reason the crucial question was whether twenty years of communist ideology, organisation and discipline had given the Soviet state the strength and resilience to withstand the shock of the Blitzkrieg. Later, Hitler

admitted his doubts on this point when he told his aides

. . . at the moment of our attack, we were entering upon a totally unknown world. . . .

On the 22 June a door opened before us, and we didn't know what was behind it . . . the heavy uncertainty took me by the throat. Here we were faced by beings who are (sic) complete strangers to us.⁹²

There is evidence that this was not mere self-dramatisation.

On the day before the attack Himmler gave Heydrich the impression that ". . . the Fuehrer is not so optimistic as his military advisers."⁹³

In spite of Hitler's warning that "the struggle in the East will be very different from the struggle in the West,"⁹⁴ only a few of his generals showed any sign of recognising the true extent of the risks involved in all aspects - military, economic and ideological - of the campaign. Their plans remained based upon a repetition of 1940 on a grander scale. They spoke of the difficulties in terms of their experiences as junior officers on the Eastern Front in the First World

⁹²Hitler's Secret Conversations, pp. 59, 94. See also Joachim von Ribbentrop, The Ribbentrop Memoirs, trans. Oliver Watson (London, 1954), p. 153.

⁹³Schellenberg, p. 223.

⁹⁴Halder KTB, II, 337, 30 March 1941.

War.⁹⁵ Recognition of the enormity of their error came late, for some incredibly late. Field Marshal Keitel, with the air of one confidentially revealing a surprising discovery told an American psychiatrist at Nuremberg in 1946 that Hitler ". . . talked as if the Russian campaign were a sure thing. . . . But now that I look back, I am sure it was just a desperate gamble."⁹⁶

At the root of the military, economic and political problems which made the campaign in Russia such a gamble lay the flaws in Hitler's original grand strategy for the conquest of Lebensraum. The basic assumption that a conflict between Germany and Britain could be avoided had caused Hitler to neglect the German navy and to develop a Wehrmacht for short-range Blitzkrieg operations on land. Thus, in 1940 and early 1941, the resistance of Britain confronted the Germans with a military problem for which they were ill-equipped. They were unable to wage a war of attrition in the West while maintaining a large land army for a possible

⁹⁵ See Liddell Hart, On the Other Side. . . , pp. 256-7; Blumentritt, "Moscow", pp. 31, 38.

⁹⁶ G.M. Gilbert, The Psychology of Dictatorship (New York, 1950), p. 222.

conflict in the East. By the time the full extent of this problem had become apparent Hitler had already decided to attack Russia. Thus the German military leaders accepted his solution as the only way out of their dilemma, in spite of the fact that it involved the deliberate acceptance of a two-front war.

But the German hope of winning a quick victory and making immediate economic gains in Russia was reduced by the second basic flaw in Hitler's Lebensraumpolitik, the belief that for racial reasons the Soviet State would be internally rotten. This made it seem unnecessary to back the invasion of Russia with any positive political appeal to the Russian people. Thus in Russia their contempt for the enemy caused the Germans to abandon their skilful use of propaganda and subversion and to rely instead upon the hope that the Soviet state would succumb to the mere application of force. Thus the anxiety which some of his closest advisers observed in Hitler was probably due to his awareness that under the circumstances prevailing in 1941 "Barbarossa" was not far removed from the "wildly enthusiastic adventure in the footsteps of Alexander the Great" against which he had warned in Mein Kampf.⁹⁷

⁹⁷MK, p. 557.

CHAPTER VI

CHANGES IN THE OPERATIONAL PLAN

Military Strategy

The growing anxiety which lay behind Hitler's attitude towards Operation "Barbarossa" was not sufficiently great to cause a basic reassessment of German grand strategy in the spring of 1941. Nevertheless, it prompted him to subject the operational plans of the Wehrmacht to constant scrutiny and amendment. In December 1940 the reply which Major Engel gave to von Brauchitsch's query about the seriousness of Hitler's intention of attacking Russia revealed the doubts behind the outward show of confidence. He reported that:

The Fuehrer doesn't yet know himself how things should go. He is constantly preoccupied with mistrust towards his military leaders, uncertain over the Russian's strength and disappointed at the toughness of the British.¹

Hitler's main fear was that his generals would conduct the operations in the East as a frontal attack towards Moscow

¹Engel, Tagebuch, 18 December 1940, quoted by Hillgruber, Hitlers Strategie, p. 369, n. 93.

and allow the Russians to elude the German spearheads and withdraw into the interior.² He suspected that the OKH underestimated the ability of the Soviet army to strike at the flanks of the German advance, especially from the Pripet Marsh. Furthermore, he was not fully convinced by the encouraging reports given by General Koestring on the weakness of the Soviet war industry.³ He also expected that the British would react with great vigor when he moved his forces eastward and attempt to land on the coast of Norway or to support the Russians through the Arctic port of Murmansk. Later in March, he feared that the coup d'etat of General Simovich in Yugoslavia would result in a strengthening of the British position in the Balkans. Hitler's fears had contradictory effects. His effort to increase the power of the thrusts in Russia was offset by the dispersion of force on the coast of Norway and in Finnish Lapland and by the postponement of "Barbarossa" necessitated by the

²See Halder KTB, II, 210-11, 5 December 1940; KTB OKW, I, 209, 5 December 1940.

³Engel's statement (Op. cit.) that Hitler was reassured on this point by General Koestring's reports is not correct. On 5 February, Hitler requested a special study of the Soviet war industries' ability to sustain Russian resistance. See KTB OKW, II, 306, 5 February 1941.

decision to attack Yugoslavia. To make matters worse, German intelligence estimates of Soviet strength began to rise sharply in the spring of 1941. So when the Germans attacked on 22 June 1941 they had less time for the operation and a lower relative strength than they had expected when planning commenced. Thus, Hitler had greater cause to demand quick, decisive successes by the audacious use of mobile and air forces in the opening phase of the campaign.

Hitler's restless anxiety about the ability of his generals to conduct Operation "Barbarossa" with sufficient daring and determination was apparent at all the major military conferences in the early months of 1941. On 9 January he lectured the Army leaders on the need to envelop and destroy the Russian forces in bold encircling operations.⁴ This theme was repeated on 3 February when General Halder presented the operational plan for "Barbarossa." "It is important," Hitler warned,

to destroy the greater part of the enemy (forces) not just to make them run. This will only be achieved by occupying the areas on the flanks with the strongest forces, while standing fast in the centre, and then outmanoeuvring the enemy in the centre (by attacks) from the flanks.⁵

⁴KTB OKW, I, 258, 9 January 1941.

⁵Ibid., p. 298, 3 February 1941.

On the following day Hitler revealed his intention of following the Army's preparations in detail. He requested copies of the maps used by General Halder during his presentation and also situation maps showing the deployment of German and Russian forces in the East at the middle of each month until deployment was completed.⁶ On 5 February he called for a study of the Pripet Marsh to examine the possibility that it might become a centre of Soviet resistance on the flanks of the German advance.⁷ As described above, he also requested a study on the ability of the Soviet war industries to sustain resistance in the interior of Russia.⁸ The General Staff study on the Pripet Marsh was submitted to Hitler on 1 March.⁹ It concluded that only cavalry divisions and other formations of up to a regiment in strength could operate there against the flanks of the German advance and recommended air patrols in order to locate such forces.

A few days later Hitler's anxiety was again aroused when the British carried out a successful raid on the

⁶Ibid., p. 303, 4 February 1941.

⁷Ibid., p. 306, 5 February 1941.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., p. 339, 1 March 1941.

Lofoten Islands.¹⁰ This seemed to justify the demands he had made in February for a reinforcement of the Norwegian coast.¹¹ It also provoked fears of British action in North Finland and Russia after the start of "Barbarossa" and contributed to his decision to reinforce the German formations there with a motorised group including heavy tanks.¹²

The alacrity with which Field Marshal von Brauchitsch allocated forces to meet Hitler's demands for increased security on the coasts of Europe was regarded with scorn by General Halder, who noted that

It is not a matter of ensuring 100 per cent security everywhere, but of making do with the most essential security for the sake of ensuring the full success of Operation "Barbarossa".¹³

The inadequacy of the forces available for "Barbarossa" had become very clear to Halder at a discussion conducted by the Operations Branch on the previous day. The most prevalent problem was over-extension of force, especially in the 12 and 17 Armies in the Ukraine and in the 16 Army in the northern swamps and forests. The 6 and 4 Armies both

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 346-7, 7-8 March 1941.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 317-8, 12 February, 326, 15 February 1941.

¹²Ibid., 349, 8 March 1941.

¹³Halder KTB, II, 313, 15 March 1941.

lacked sufficient flank protection towards the Pripet Marsh, and the 9 and 18 Armies were both required to allocate part of their infantry strength to support the Panzer groups. Halder sought to solve these problems by making greater use of the armies of Rumania, Slovakia and Hungary in support of the 12 and 17 Armies, and by allocating reserve divisions to the 16 Army to give it "added punch."¹⁴ In his notes for the Fuehrer conference scheduled for 17 March, he listed the satellite forces which could be used to reinforce Army Group "South". The OKH Reserve, he noted, was twenty-one divisions, including two Panzer and one motorised divisions. But of these, nine were allocated to the attack on Greece, Operation "Marita", which left "only twelve divisions definitely available, (very few!) of which five were still in the West."¹⁵ Thus he stressed that a further subtraction of force would be impossible without jeopardising "Barbarossa", and that if the operation was to begin as planned on 15 or 16 May then no further forces should be sent to the Balkans.¹⁶

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 312, 14 March 1941.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 316, 16 March 1941.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 314, 316, 16 March 1941. Halder's notes on Soviet strengths were surprisingly inaccurate. His estimate

Hitler was also determined to solve the problems of achieving effective concentration of force, especially in Army Group "South" and of safeguarding the flanks of the advance both sides of the Pripet Marsh. But he was not content to improvise solutions by pushing in reserves or by using satellite armies. Instead he amended the operational plan. This decision was announced at the conference on 17 March attended by Keitel, Jodl, von Brauchitsch, Halder, Wagner and Heusinger.¹⁷

The Conference on 17 March

Hitler opened his comments on Operation "Barbarossa" with the observation that success must be won from the start and that there must be no reverses. Therefore, no operations should include ". . . forces which we cannot count on with certainty."¹⁸ He then proceeded to overthrow Halder's

of 155 Russian divisions was 22 divisions lower than his estimate on 2 February 1941. See Ibid., p. 266, 2 February 1941.

¹⁷See Ibid., pp. 318-21, 17 March 1941.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 319, 17 March 1941.

concept of obtaining substantial help from the satellite states by stating that only German and, to a limited degree, Finnish forces could be relied upon. The Rumanians, he stated, lacked offensive capability. The Hungarians could not be relied upon because they had no reason to attack Russia. The Slovaks, he said contemptuously, were Slavs. They might be used later as occupation troops.

Since little use could be made of Germany's allies greater concentration of force on vital sectors could only be achieved by greater economy in the deployment of German forces elsewhere. Thus once again Hitler stressed that Army Group "North" and "Centre" should advance to the Dnieper and then, using the river as protection, concentrate their strength towards the north. The capture of Moscow he described as "completely irrelevant."¹⁹ The reason for this repetition of a point he had already stressed at three earlier conferences evidently lay in his continued distrust of the generals' ability to resist the temptation to rush headlong into Russia.²⁰ To this was added his anxiety about

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰See KTB OKW, I, 209, 5 December 1940, 258, 9 January 298, 3 February 1941.

the danger of a Soviet attack from the Pripet Marsh on the south side of Army Group "Centre". Contradicting the study made by the General Staff,²¹ he asserted that the Pripet Marsh was really no obstacle to movement and that entire armies could be deployed there.²² Thus he was anxious to avoid the dispersion which might result if Army Group "Centre" allowed its forces to be drawn in a southerly direction to counter this danger.²³

In Army Group "South" Hitler made a drastic change of the operational plan. On the grounds that it was "basically false to attack everywhere,"²⁴ Hitler decided to abandon the concept of a double envelopment in the Ukraine. The German forces in Rumania were to be reduced to those required to safeguard the oilfields and the remainder, including all armoured formations, were to be added to the

²¹See Ibid., p. 339, 1 March 1941.

²²Halder KTB, II, 319, 17 March 1941.

²³In fact both of these fears were proved fully justified in July and August when Guderian's Panzer Group was divided between the effort to extend the advance eastward and to ward off threats to its south flank. See Guderian, p. 183 ff.

²⁴Op. cit.

main striking force north of the Carpathians for a single thrust towards Kiev and down the Dnieper. Hitler further justified this elimination of the 12 Army's offensive role with the assertion that its attacks were bound to have been blocked on the broad lower reaches of the Pruth and Dniester Rivers. Furthermore, he added, "we would drive the Russians away, where we should invite them to stay put (for envelopment)."²⁵

Hitler's decisions on this occasion intruded into the Army's area of operational planning, contradicted the OKH report on the Pripet Marsh and the findings of the war games conducted on the operations of Army Group "South" by Generals Paulus and von Sodenstern.²⁶ Nevertheless, neither these factors nor Hitler's subsequent remarks about the extermination of the Russian intelligentsia provoked any complaint from von Brauchitsch or Halder. Indeed, in spite of Halder's subsequent criticisms of the cancellation of the 12 Army's operation, there was "cheerful agreement between the (Army)

²⁵Ibid.; see also KTB OKW, I, 361, 18 March 1941.

²⁶See Goerlitz, Paulus, pp. 111-112; Halder KTB, II, 272, 5 February 1941. General von Sodenstern was Chief of Staff of Army Group "South".

Commander-in-Chief and Chief of the General Staff and Hitler over the deployment plan and concentrations of force."²⁷

However, the commander of Army Group "South", Field Marshal von Rundstedt, showed himself less disposed to accept the arbitrary abandonment of the plan for a double envelopment battle in the Ukraine. On 30 March he was summoned together with the other army group and army commanders to hear Hitler personally explain the decisions he had announced on 17 March. He could not deny the truth of Hitler's argument that "the endless expanse of the (Russian) space necessitates . . . the massive concentration of the Luftwaffe and Panzer forces."²⁸ Nor could he reject Hitler's warning that "the fate of major German formations may not be made dependent upon the staying power of Rumanian formations."²⁹ Nevertheless, Army Group "South" was confronted by a large Soviet concentration in the centre of its very wide front and von Rundstedt feared that unless it was

²⁷ Engel, Tagebuch, 17 March 1941, quoted by Hillgruber, Hitlers Strategie, p. 504. Cf. Halder KTB, III, 7, 23 June 1941.

²⁸ Halder KTB, II, 336, 30 March 1941.

²⁹ Ibid.

pinned down by Hungarian attacks on the Carpathian sector it might prove a serious threat to the south flank of his main thrust on Kiev. Thus he alone argued against the change of plan. Though von Rundstedt failed to convince Hitler, he evidently impressed Halder with his "very skilful" presentation.³⁰ Later, the Chief of the General Staff encouraged the active participation of Hungarian and Rumanian troops in the campaign. Nevertheless, Hitler's decision to concentrate the main striking force of Army Group "South" in the northern sector was maintained and was later justified by the difficulties experienced by the 6 Army and Panzer Group 1 in breaking through the Russian defences and warding off Soviet counter attacks from the Pripet Marsh.

Hitler's efforts to achieve greater concentrations of force on the eastern front were somewhat contradicted by the decision, which he confirmed on 17 March, to reinforce the German garrison in northern Norway with two or three divisions from the West, and at the expense of forces needed in Finnish Lapland.³¹ Here further dispersion resulted from

³⁰Ibid., 338, 30 March 1941.

³¹Ibid., p. 320, 17 March 1941.

the decision to deliver two attacks eastward. In the far north two mountain divisions were to secure Petsamo and, if possible, take Murmansk. Further south, a German infantry division and an S.S. brigade and supporting formations were to drive for Kandalaksha and the Murmansk railway.³² Later, Halder expressed regret that valuable forces had been committed to this "expedition."³³

Halder's efforts to prevent the further dispersion of force to another such "expedition" were more successful in the case of the Afrikakorps. On 17 March Hitler approved his rejection of the appeal by General Erwin Rommel for two motorised divisions in addition to the 5 Light Division and part of the 15 Panzer Division which he was deploying in Libya.³⁴ Nevertheless, the demands of the southern theatre of war, especially the Balkans, had serious effects upon Operation "Barbarossa."

³² See Ziemke, p. 130; KTB OKW, I, 362, 18 March 1941.

³³ Op. cit., p. 411, 14 May 1941.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 315, 16 March, 320-21, 17 March 1941. Halder's distaste for the African "expedition" was increased by his personal antipathy for Rommel. See Ibid., pp. 377-8, 23 April 1941.

The Effects of the Balkan Campaign

Planning for an operation in the Balkans began on 4 November, seven days after Italy had attacked Greece and four days after the British had responded by occupying Crete and Limnos.³⁵ The German invasion of Greece then became part of the plan which Hitler had developed since late September, to deprive Britain of all her Mediterranean bases. Even when the operations for the capture of Gibraltar and Suez were postponed until after "Barbarossa,"³⁶ Hitler remained determined to eliminate the British air bases in Greece because they were a threat to the Rumanian oil fields and to the Italian mainland. For this reason, he issued Directive No. 29, Operation "Marita" on 13 December 1940.³⁷

Even in November, General Halder had expressed concern that this operation might cause a postponement of the attack on Russia, especially if Turkey entered the war against Germany.³⁸ However, changes in the date and deployment for

³⁵ See Ibid., p. 164, 4 November 1941. See also Burckhard Mueller-Hillebrand, The German Campaigns in the Balkans, Spring 1941, U.S. Army Pamphlet No. 20-260 (Washington, 1953), p. 4.

³⁶ See Halder KTB, II, 223, 12 December 1940, 315, 16 March 1941.

³⁷ Hubatsch, pp. 91-3.

³⁸ Op. cit., 188, 18 November, 191, 24 November 1940.

Operation "Barbarossa" did not result until 27 March, when Hitler decided to invade Yugoslavia. To provide the necessary forces, nine divisions and two corps headquarters were diverted from their assembly areas in the East.³⁹ The effects of this on "Barbarossa" were discussed in the General Staff on the same day,⁴⁰ and on 7 April 1941 an OKH Order was issued stating that the opening of the attack on Russia would have to be delayed by about four weeks.⁴¹ Directive No. 21 set 15 May 1941 as the date by which all preparations were to be ready and although the "end of May" was mentioned on 5 December, General Halder wished to start sooner.⁴² However, there was agreement among the generals that the weather and ground conditions would not have been favourable earlier than the first week of June.⁴³ Thus, the

³⁹See Mueller-Hillebrand, Balkans, p. 150.

⁴⁰Halder KTB, II, 331, 27 March 1941.

⁴¹See DGFP(D), XII, Doc.217, 374. USNA, Microfilm Guide No. 30, Serial T78-335, frame 6291357, OKH Order 7 April 1941.

⁴²See Op. cit., 201, 5 December 1940, 315, 16 March 1941.

⁴³Interview with Lieutenant-General Mueller-Hillebrand, 18 July 1965. See Guderian, p. 145; Philippi/Heim, p. 49; Blumentritt, "Moscow," p. 36; Rundstedt, p. 101, 457; Halder KTB, II, 457, 19 June 1941; Hillgruber, pp. 506-7; Plocher, p. 37; Mueller-Hillebrand, Balkans, p. 150.

Balkan campaign cannot be regarded as causing a delay of more than three weeks in the opening of Operation "Barbarossa."

Although the postponement of the start of "Barbarossa" was prompted by the decision to attack Yugoslavia, the campaign there had less effect on the availability or condition of the forces required for Russia than the operations in Greece. Six of the nine divisions diverted to Yugoslavia were replaced by OKH reserves, so the infantry used there virtually became the reserve for "Barbarossa." All combat divisions had been withdrawn from Yugoslavia to their assembly areas for "Barbarossa" by the end of May.⁴⁴

The situation was very different in the Greek campaign, which involved longer approach marches and lengthier operations, and thus cost more in wear and tear and time. The long return journey to Poland by road and rail via Yugoslavia, Austria and Bohemia-Moravia or Germany caused further delays so that the 2 and 5 Panzer Divisions and the "Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler" failed to arrive in time for the opening of the Russian campaign on 22 June. Their absence was especially felt by Army Group "South" which thus

⁴⁴ Mueller-Hillebrand, Balkans, p. 149.

lacked about a third of its tank strength in the initial attack.⁴⁵

Although the tank losses in the Balkans were few, the damage incurred through bad road conditions placed a heavy demand on spare parts and gave the tank repair depots in Germany and Poland considerable work right up until the start of Operation "Barbarossa." In spite of their efforts the effects of the Balkan campaign must have contributed to the high fall-out rate due to engine and track wear in the summer of 1941.⁴⁶

The attack on Crete, which was improvised late in April,⁴⁷ delayed the return to Poland of the VIII Air Corps. It also had other far-reaching effects. The loss of 170 transport aircraft and over four thousand of the 22 thousand parachute and airborne troops of the XI Air Corps discouraged

⁴⁵ See Appendix III.

⁴⁶ See Halder KTB, II, 481; III, 109, 29 July 1941; Blumentritt, "Moscow", p. 36; Burckhard Mueller-Hillebrand, German Tank Maintenance in World War II, U.S. Army Pamphlet No. 20-202 (Washington, 1954), p. 1; Blau, p. 72; Guderian, p. 190; Wolfgang Werthen, Geschichte der 16. Panzer Division, 1939-1945 (Bad Neuheim, 1958), p. 40; Liddell Hart, On the Other Side. . . , p. 251.

⁴⁷ See KTB OKW, I, 411-12, 28 May 1941; Halder KTB, II, 408, 12 May 1941; Hubatsch, pp. 134-5.

Hitler from making further use of large scale airborne operations.⁴⁸ Thus the XI Air Corps was never employed on the Russian Front, though there were many occasions during the deep advances towards river crossings when this force might have been invaluable.

The long-term effects of the conquest of the Balkans were similar to those of the Norwegian campaign, in that the Wehrmacht was obliged to commit considerable strength to garrison the peninsular and yet lacked the sea power to exploit its strategic advantages. The ruthless Blitzkrieg unleashed on Yugoslavia, instead of having the paralysing effect intended by Hitler, provoked hatred in the population which contributed to the bitter partisan warfare in the following years. In their haste to return to the assembly areas for Operation "Barbarossa", the Germans failed thoroughly to disarm the Yugoslav forces or to destroy stocks of arms before they were hidden in the mountains.⁴⁹ The security forces which replaced the combat divisions never

⁴⁸Rise and Fall of the German Air Force, p. 125; Liddell Hart, On the Other Side. . . , p. 242.

⁴⁹See Robert M. Kennedy, German Anti-Guerilla Operations in the Balkans, 1941-1944, U.S. Army Pamphlet No. 20-243 (Washington, 1954), pp. 16-17.

regained full control of the situation and the struggle against the partisans remained a constant drain on German military resources throughout the war.

Comparative Strengths, April - June 1941.

As a result of events in Norway, the Balkans and the Mediterranean in the spring of 1941 General Halder was unable to make any substantial reduction in the sixty German divisions which had been allocated to the Western, Scandinavian and Mediterranean theatres on 31 July 1940. Although on 17 March Hitler had dismissed the danger of a British landing in the West, he insisted on retaining 39 divisions in France and the Low Countries. Together with eight in Norway and Denmark, eight in the Balkans, two in Africa and two in Germany, this left 149 for "Barbarossa."⁵⁰ But although this number exceeded the requirement of 130 to 140 estimated in December, marked increases in Soviet strength gave cause for concern. The hopes expressed in the early plans that the two sides would be approximately equal in numerical strength were abandoned as the estimated number of Soviet formations in European Russia rose from 141 in

⁵⁰ See Mueller-Hillebrand, Das Heer, II, pp. 186-91.

July 1940 to 226½ in June 1941.⁵¹ Nevertheless, the German military leaders clung to the conviction that the disparity would be off-set by their experience and superior equipment and tactics.

In fact the bold tactics of armoured warfare by which the Germans had won such successes were gradually overshadowed by caution in the spring of 1941. The small size of the mobile forces in relation to the extent of their tasks in Russia led to a revival of conservative attitudes towards their tactical deployment. Von Brauchitsch and Halder and infantry generals like von Kluge, Strauss and Busch urged that the Panzer divisions should be held back during the initial phase of the attack in order to save their strength for the exploitation phase. They also supported the subordination of the Panzer groups to infantry army commanders so that the armoured thrusts could be prevented from outrunning the infantry divisions following them on foot. To the Panzer group commanders, Guderian, Hoth, Hoepfner and von Kleist, these proposals sounded like the death-knell of the Blitzkrieg.⁵² The speed of the infantry advance for which they

⁵¹See Appendix IV.

⁵²See Halder KTB, II, 312, 14 March, 323, 19 March, 325, 21 March, 330, 27 March, 420, 19 May, 438-9, 4 June, 445, 6 June 1941; Guderian, p. 149; Hoth, pp. 49-50; Goerlitz, Paulus, p. 100.

would have to wait was reduced by the shortage of supply trucks which meant, General Halder warned, that "regular and complete supply of all troops would not always be possible" and that the infantry divisions would have to make "extensive use of the land."⁵³ The problem was finally settled by placing one or two infantry corps under the operational command of each Panzer group for the initial attack. The Panzer groups were in turn subordinated to an infantry army commander in the same period. Once the break-through had been achieved, the Panzer groups would be divested of the slow moving infantry and freed for the deep thrusts in the rear of the enemy. It was in these mobile operations that the Germans expected the superiority of their equipment would prove decisive in countering the numerical superiority of the Russians.

Such optimism could have been justified only if the German intelligence estimates had been based upon reliable statistics. They were not. Yet such was the reputation of the General Staff that even rumour and optimistic guesswork took on the sanctity of truth once it had passed through the

⁵³ U.S.N.A., Microfilm Guide No. 30, Serial T78-335, Frame 6291349, "Anordnung fuer die Versorgung," signed Halder, no date.

hands of the Foreign Armies East Branch. Belatedly and ruefully, General Halder recorded the admission of this error in his diary on 11 August 1941, the fifty-first day of the campaign.⁵⁴ It was the same story with tanks and aircraft. The Germans had expected large numbers of obsolete models, ten thousand and eight thousand respectively.⁵⁵ But soon after the opening of hostilities it became clear that these figures fell far short of the true totals, and in the following months the Germans literally wore themselves out in the process of destroying enormous quantities of inferior Russian equipment.⁵⁶

The fact that the quality of the new Russian tanks, the T34 and KV, also came as a surprise to the German Army

⁵⁴Halder KTB, III, 170, 11 August 1941.

⁵⁵See USNA, Microfilm Guide No. 30, Serial T78-335, Frames 6291302-3, Intelligence Summary, 15 January 1941; Halder KTB, II, 267, 2 February 1941; Blau, p. 42; Plocher, p. 30; Raymond L. Garthoff, How Russia Makes War (London, 1954), p. 429.

⁵⁶See Halder KTB, III, 32, 1 July, 36, 3 July 1941. By the end of 1941 the Germans claimed to have destroyed or captured 11,627 tanks. See Richard Weber and Karl Korbe (eds.), Kartenskizzen zum Weltkrieg und zum Grossdeutschen Freiheitskampf fuer den Unterricht in Kriegsgeschichte, OKH (Berlin, 1944), p. 30. See also USNA, Microfilm Guide No. 30, Serial T78-464, Frame 6443755; Plocher, pp. 39-42; Halder KTB, III, 32-3, 2 July 1941.

was hardly justified.⁵⁷ In view of the obsolescence of the standard Russian models, the T26, T28, BT and T35, and the lead already taken by the Red Army in tank technology, rumours of new Soviet tanks should have been given more credence.⁵⁸ On 2 February Halder admitted that in the field of armour "surprises were not impossible."⁵⁹ Yet, the OKH continued to base its judgements on the equipment used by the Red Army in the occupation of eastern Poland and the war in Finland. The German Ordnance Office ignored Hitler's instructions about the improvement of tank guns and the German anti-tank units retained the 3.7cm gun which proved inadequate against the T34 and KV.⁶⁰ The use of 8.8cm and 10cm anti-aircraft guns in the anti-tank role was limited by orders which stated that in view of the commitment of a large part of the Luftwaffe in the West and the size of

⁵⁷ See Guderian, p. 162.

⁵⁸ See R.M. Ogorkiewicz, "Soviet Tanks," The Soviet Army, p. 300; Philippi/Heim, p. 39; Guderian, p. 143; Halder KTB, II, 336, 30 March 1941; V. Mostovenko, "History of the T34 Tank," Soviet Military Review, 3 (1967), pp. 38-9.

⁵⁹ Halder KTB, II, 267, 2 February 1941.

⁶⁰ See Guderian, pp. 143-4.

Soviet air force anti-aircraft guns would be used against ground targets only in emergency.⁶¹

Throughout the spring Hitler continued to stress that once struck the Soviet forces and state would collapse, and that the blow must not be delayed because the condition of the Soviet forces could only improve.⁶² Thus, he treated evidence of any growth in Russian strength not as a reason for caution but as a justification for acting as swiftly and ruthlessly as possible. Normally, Hitler emphasised the obsolete equipment and poor leadership of the Soviet forces.⁶³ But on 30 March 1941, when he wanted to demonstrate the need for brutal methods in Russia, he deliberately drew the attention of the generals to the strength of the "respectable" Soviet tank arm, its numbers and its good guns, and a "new giant type with a long 10cm gun. . . ."⁶⁴ But he considered a short dose of the truth sufficient for the Army, and when

⁶¹USNA, Microfilm Guide No. 30, Serial T78-335, Frame 6291346; see also Halder KTB, II, 465.

⁶²See Engel, Tagebuch, 10 August 1940, quoted by Hillgruber, Hitlers Strategie, pp. 226-7; KTB OKW, I, 205, 5 December 1940, 208, 9 January 1941.

⁶³Halder KTB, II, 214, 5 December 1940.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 336, 30 March 1941. Cf. Engel, op.cit., p. 504.

the German Embassy in Moscow obtained permission for a group of German army officers to visit Soviet war plants Hitler promptly cancelled the arrangement.⁶⁵

Nevertheless, the German Army's estimate of Soviet industrial potential also rose considerably. In December 1940 Colonel Heusinger reported to Halder that only 24 per cent of Soviet war industry was located in the Urals and the Far East.⁶⁶ This was confirmed by the report completed by General Thomas on 13 February.⁶⁷ But an OKH intelligence survey issued a month later indicated that a third of the most important small arms and artillery works and 40 per cent of the tank factories were located in the Urals alone.⁶⁸ This led, however, only to the guarded conclusion that "it is not possible to predict whether the supply (of the Red Army) can be maintained by longer and more intense use of the entire war industry."⁶⁹ This report caused grave misgivings among the intelligence officers to whom it was distributed,

⁶⁵ See Uhlig, p. 172.

⁶⁶ Halder KTB, II, 236, 17 December 1940.

⁶⁷ See Thomas, pp. 525-7, 532.

⁶⁸ USNA, Microfilm Guide No. 30, Serial T78-335, Frames 6291302-3, Intelligence Summary, 15 January 1941.

⁶⁹ Ibid., Frame 6291302.

especially in view of the acknowledged inability of the Luftwaffe to bomb the industries of the Urals effectively.⁷⁰

Improvements in the Soviet Air Force also caused concern. On this subject Hitler displayed the same ambivalence he had shown towards the Soviet tank arm. On 17 March he encouraged the optimism of von Brauchitsch and Halder with references to the Russians' "obsolete equipment and especially few (modern) aircraft."⁷¹ But if it suited his purpose he justified his decision to attack Russia by pointing out the vulnerability of Berlin, Silesia and the Rumanian oil-fields to Russian bombers. When Colonel Aschenbrenner, the Air Attaché in Moscow, returned from a tour of Russian aircraft factories in April 1941 and delivered a report which exposed "the myth of Soviet deficiencies in the area of workmanship" Hitler greeted it with the comment, "well, there you see how far these people are already. We must begin immediately."⁷²

⁷⁰Interview with Baron von Hahn, 17 July 1967.

⁷¹Engel, Tagebuch, 17 March 1941, quoted by Hillgruber, Hitlers Strategie, p. 504.

⁷²Plocher, pp. 17-18.

By this time even the pedantic Halder began to speculate on the implications of the strength and deployment of the Soviet army. On 7 April he noted that:

If one frees oneself from the accepted belief that the Russian wants peace and will not attack of his own accord, then one must admit that the Russian organisation would very easily permit a quick change-over to the offensive, which could be very uncomfortable for us.⁷³

However, such fears were eased a month later when Colonel Krebs, the acting Military Attache in Moscow reported that "Russia will do everything possible to avoid a war."⁷⁴ On 20 May the Foreign Armies East Branch of the General Staff stated that a Russian preventive offensive was unlikely in view of the weakness of the Soviet Army which was undergoing an extensive reorganisation on the basis of lessons learned in the Finnish War.⁷⁵

Subsequent studies have shown this view to have been correct. The Soviet forces, which had been trained and organised in accordance with the doctrine that "attack is the best defence," were thrown into a state of confusion by

⁷³Halder KTB, II, 353, 7 April 1941; see also p. 382, 26 April 1941.

⁷⁴Ibid., pp. 396-7, 5 May 1941.

⁷⁵Erickson, p. 583.

Stalin's determination to avoid any military measures which could be judged "provocative." Thus the Soviet leaders had neither the wish nor the ability to launch a major offensive in 1941, and it is doubtful whether they had even worked out any comprehensive defensive strategy before the German attack.⁷⁶

Nevertheless, the German military leaders were aware that the armed forces of the Soviet Union were more formidable than their assessments had indicated in 1940 when they conducted their operational planning. By the spring of 1941 they had allocated as much of the Wehrmacht as Hitler would allow to reduce the numerical disparity between their forces and those of Russia. The only remaining possibility was to force the Russian leaders to disperse their forces further by threatening the Soviet Union from every side with a well-coordinated coalition grand strategy making full use of all the possibilities offered by the Axis alliance.

⁷⁶ Ibid.; see also Alexander Werth, Russia at War, 1941-1945 (London, 1964), p. 133 ff.

CHAPTER VII

THE WEAKNESS OF THE COALITION STRATEGY IN THE EAST

The Axis and Operation "Barbarossa"

By the early spring of 1941 Hitler appeared to be in an excellent position to establish a great coalition against the Soviet Union. On 27 September 1940 Japan had signed the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy, thus strengthening the worldwide influence of the Axis. The subsequent adherence of Slovakia, Hungary, Rumania and Bulgaria to the Tripartite Pact had given Germany a dominant position on the south-western borders of the Soviet Union and the opportunity to exert pressure upon Turkey. In the North, military liaison between the Germans and the Finns had developed cautiously but firmly during the winter.

Yet Hitler failed to take full advantage of these possibilities. Though founded upon the Anti-Comintern Pact of 1936, the Axis alliance had stemmed mainly from Hitler's desire to neutralize France and, later, to counter Britain's hostility to Germany.¹ Now that Germany was turning to the

¹See Burkhard Mueller-Hillebrand, Germany and Her Allies in World War II, U.S. Army Historical Division MS P-108, 2 vols. (1954), I, p. 11 ff.

great task of conquest in Russia Hitler still looked to the Axis alliance to cover his rear by threatening the British in the Mediterranean and Far East and by discouraging the United States from entering the war. Thus, no provision was made in German planning for the active participation of either Italy or Japan in the war against the Soviet Union. The governments in Tokyo and Rome were officially notified of the German attack only in the early hours of 22 June 1941.

Although Mussolini was the last of Hitler's allies to be informed of "Barbarossa" he succeeded in being the first to declare war on Russia and insisted that the legions of the modern Rome should be represented on the battlefields of the Ukraine. Hitler permitted his fellow dictator to indulge his foolish wish and send a corps of 40 thousand men to the eastern front, but he shared the view of the German and Italian generals that it would have been of more value committed against the British.² The presence of the Italian Expeditionary Force in Russia in 1941 was of negligible value and its subsequent losses in a campaign which promised no direct gains to Italy only added to the war-weariness of the Italian people.

²See Halder KTB, III, 53, 8 July 1941.

It was typical that the whims of the dictators should have decided this question, for no joint planning staff or committee was established to direct Axis coalition strategy. Keitel's attempts in 1938 to prepare the groundwork by means of high-level staff discussions were discouraged by Hitler³ and later foundered on Italian lack of readiness for war.⁴ There was no further meeting between the Chiefs of the German and Italian High Commands until 14 November 1940, five months after Italy's entry into the war, and two weeks after the opening of Mussolini's disastrous "parallel war" against Greece.⁵ But still no attempt was made to replace the loose system of meetings and exchanges of correspondence between Hitler and Mussolini with a more closely coordinated system. Finally, in December the critical situation of the Italian forces in Greece and Libya led to the commitment of German air and land formations to assist them. As a result, German-Italian discussions on military strategy in the Mediterranean were held in January 1941 and closer coor-

³See DGFP(D), VI, Appendix I.

⁴See Mueller-Hillebrand, Germany and Her Allies, II, pp. 1-2; Taylor, Origins, p. 14.

⁵See Mueller-Hillebrand, Ibid., p. 9; KTB OKW, I, 195E.

dinating activity between the military attachés of the two countries followed. Nevertheless, Hitler's acceptance of the Italian contribution to the Russian campaign and its subsequent employment in roles of secondary importance reflected the uneasy mixture of consideration for Mussolini's prestige and mistrust of Italian military capabilities which typified the Germans' attitude toward their ally.

While the presence of an Italian corps in Russia was of little value, the Italian war effort in the Mediterranean proved a serious liability. Italy's entry into the war merely gave the British direct means of striking at the Axis, and forced Germany to tie down mobile and air formations in North Africa and Sicily and to conduct the Balkan operation at the cost of valuable time and effort. From the German viewpoint, a neutral Italy, hostile to Britain, might have been of more value. She would have forced Britain to keep considerable forces idle in the Mediterranean and Africa merely to discourage her from entering the war, yet she would not have required the support of German forces which could have been used in Russia.

There were even greater obstacles to the formulation of a coalition grand strategy between Germany and Japan. The main Japanese advocates of the Tripartite Pact, Yosuke

Matsuoka, the Foreign Minister, and General Oshima, the Japanese Ambassador in Berlin, never commanded the lasting support of the government in Tokyo. Their temporary ascendancy resulted from the success of the former in persuading Prince Konoye and his colleagues late in 1940 that Britain was beaten and that the United States could be intimidated into remaining neutral.⁶ But until late in 1941 there was little agreement in the Japanese cabinet or even between the Army and the Navy on how best to take advantage of the events in Europe and the Axis alliance. A military commission, headed by General Yamashita visited Germany in the first half of 1941, but it confined its activities to studies of the tactical and operational aspects of the Blitzkrieg. In spite of his enthusiasm for the Axis, General Oshima was unable to obtain any clear strategic direction from Tokyo because there was none to give. Thus it was left to Hitler to take the first step in defining aims for a coalition strategy.

These appeared on 5 March 1941 in Directive No. 24, "Regarding Cooperation with Japan."⁷ This stated that the

⁶Sir Robert Craigie, Behind the Japanese Mask (London, 1945), p. 109.

⁷Hubatsch, pp. 121-3.

common war aim was to defeat Britain quickly and so keep the United States out of the war. Hitler specified the capture of Singapore as the best way in which Japan could contribute to this aim. But he concealed the fact that his underlying purpose was to achieve a dispersal of British strength while Germany was invading Russia. He did not consider that he needed the aid of the Japanese in defeating the Soviet Union, and, for security reasons, he felt justified in ordering that they were "not to be given any intimation of the "Barbarossa" operation."⁸

Though he strongly supported the idea of a Japanese attack on Singapore, Admiral Raeder urged Hitler in March also to advise the Japanese Foreign Minister of the German intentions in Russia during his forthcoming visit.⁹ Hitler refused Raeder's request. Nevertheless, a number of broad hints of a possible deterioration in Russian-German relations were dropped in the course of the conversations between Matsuoka and the German leaders. On 27 March von Ribbentrop stated that if some day Russia were to become a threat to

⁸Ibid., p. 123.

⁹FCNA, 1941, p. 37; NCA, VI, 966-67.

Germany she would be totally crushed.¹⁰ He hastened to point out to his guest that "he did not believe that Stalin would pursue an unwise policy,"¹¹ and later Hitler himself repeated this assurance.¹² Two days later, however, von Ribbentrop revived the topic and suggested that "if the Russians should pursue a foolish policy and force Germany to strike "the Japanese Army should not attack Russia." "Japan would best help the common cause," he explained, "if she did not allow herself to be diverted by anything from the attack on Singapore."¹³ This and other statements during the conversations gave the Japanese the clear impression that the main aim of the Axis grand strategy in 1941 was to defeat Britain.¹⁴

The result of this impression was that on 13 April the Japanese Foreign Minister stopped in Moscow on his way home and concluded a Neutrality Pact with the Soviet Union, which made conditions more favourable for a Japanese attack

¹⁰NSR, p. 285.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid., p. 291.

¹³Ibid., p. 309.

¹⁴See Halder KTB, II, 334, 29 March 1941.

on the British Empire. Furthermore, the Japanese probably believed that the pact would improve the contact between Japan and her European allies by assuring her of a safe land route across Eurasia and by giving her a relationship with Russia similar to that negotiated by Germany in August 1939.

For his part, Stalin was delighted with this development which seemed to reduce the danger of an Axis encirclement of the Soviet Union. He made a rare and unscheduled appearance at the Moscow railway station to bid the Japanese a jovial farewell. Then turning to the attendant diplomats, he sought out the German ambassador, Count von der Schulenberg, enveloped him in a hug and told him, "we must remain friends and you must do everything to that end!"¹⁵ Colonel Krebs, acting German Military Attaché, was also singled out for the same treatment and was assured by Stalin that "we will remain friends with you in any event (auf jeden Fall)."¹⁶

Hitler was not perturbed by the Russo-Japanese Pact. On the contrary he welcomed it as a confirmation that the Japanese would meet the German request for an attack on

¹⁵Op. cit., p. 324.

¹⁶Ibid.

Singapore. This attitude confirms that the anxieties he felt at this time about the coming campaign in the East were confined to the operational level. He anticipated some difficulties, but none great enough to cause him to doubt the outcome of the invasion or to attempt to develop a coalition strategy in which Japan would share the task of defeating the Soviet Union. Hitler's view was all the more remarkable in view of the economic need to open up the Trans-Siberian railway as soon as possible which was stressed by General Thomas in his discussion with Goering on 26 February.¹⁷

Hitler's confidence was evidently not shared by the German Military Attaché in Tokyo, General Alfred Kretschmer. Soon after the German attack on Russia opened, he began on his own initiative to urge the Japanese General Staff to impose a blockade on Vladivostok and to tie down Soviet forces by means of military deceptions in Manchuria.¹⁸ The OKH promptly repudiated these requests. But on 28 June, von Ribbentrop, also acting on his own initiative,¹⁹ sent a long

¹⁷See Thomas, pp. 18-19.

¹⁸See Mueller-Hillebrand, Germany and Her Allies, II, 280.

¹⁹See Hillgruber, Hitlers Strategie, p. 485, n. 8.

cable to the German Ambassador in Tokyo, General Eugen Ott, ordering him to appeal to the Japanese to attack the Soviet Union in the rear. Such a move, he asserted, would "convince the United States of the utter futility of entering the war on the side of a Great Britain entirely isolated and confronted by the most powerful alliance in the world."²⁰ The argument was probably designed to appeal also to Hitler who still felt that the main contribution of Japan should be to pin down British forces and to discourage the entry of the United States into the war.²¹ On 10 July von Ribbentrop again cabled an urgent request for efforts to persuade the Japanese to attack Vladivostok. "The natural objective," he told Ott, "still remains that we and the Japanese join hands on the Trans-Siberian before winter starts."²²

The German appeals for a Japanese attack on Russia won support only from Matsuoka and a small faction of Japanese army leaders. In July they suffered a set-back when

²⁰Nuremberg Document NG-3437, Document Book VIIIB, Weizsaecker Case, quoted by Shirer, p. 1148.

²¹For Hitler's attitude towards the Japanese at this time see Hillgruber, Staatsmaenner, p. 600 ff.

²²IMT, XXXI, 2896-PS, 261.

Matsuoka was manoeuvred out of office. Furthermore, General Yamashita returned and reported the aversion for Operation "Barbarossa" expressed by "a high ranking officer of the German General Staff" who had compared the problems of a war with Russia with those of the Japanese struggle in China.²³ Yamashita's report strengthened the doubts of the Japanese about the wisdom of again challenging the Red Army, which had inflicted a sharp defeat on their forces during the Khalkin-Gol incident on the Mongolian border in August 1939.²⁴ Furthermore, their experience in China also made them wary of extending their forces in further operations in pursuit of vague and distant aims on the vast mainland of Asia. The embargo placed by the United States on oil shipments to Japan forced the army and navy leaders to unite in seeking

²³See Mueller-Hillebrand, Germany and Her Allies, II, 281. The officer referred to was probably General Matzky who became Oberquartiermeister IV (Intelligence) on the German General Staff in January 1941, having been German Military Attaché in Tokyo prior to that date. Most of the planning for "Barbarossa" was completed before his arrival, and his criticisms do not seem to have had any effect upon his colleagues.

²⁴See Erickson, pp. 536-7.

strategic objectives which would solve their most acute economic problems. They now began to agree on plans for expansion to the south-west, to the oil-fields of the Dutch East Indies and Burma. Furthermore, the Japanese leaders no longer shared Hitler's belief that attacks could be carried out on British possessions in the Far East without bringing the United States into the war. Their strategic decisions were influenced by the awareness that, if Singapore threatened the flank, the United States' bases on the Philippines dominated the centre of their routes to the essential oil of the East Indies. The conviction that a war with the United States and Britain was unavoidable made the Japanese most anxious to see an end to the Russo-German war and a revival of the war against Britain. On 15 July Hitler had assured General Oshima that he hoped to free a major part of the land and air forces from operations in Russia in three or four weeks and in six weeks he would be ". . . just about ready." But by October the Japanese were becoming impatient. General Tojo, the War Minister, told the German Ambassador, General Ott, that the war in Russia had been a mistake and that Germany should end it as soon as possible, if necessary by negotiation. She should then transfer her main effort to the Middle East to seize the

Suez Canal and the seaways to the East and Japan would strike "in an East Indian direction."²⁵

Later in the month, after the resignation of Prince Konoye and his cabinet, Tojo became prime minister and the concept of a war of expansion south and south-west of the Japanese islands became the policy of the state. With their oil reserves diminishing the Japanese could not wait for the German forces to complete the conquest of Russia and turn to the Middle East. Nor had they any intention of tying down further forces on the mainland of Asia by attacking Russia. Thus the renewal of the Anti-Comintern Pact which took place in Berlin on 25 November 1941 was perhaps the most empty of the many hollow diplomatic gestures ceremoniously conducted by the Axis powers. In spite of its name the pact was not a prelude to a Japanese entry into the war with the Soviet Union. Indeed, on the very day of its signature the Japanese naval task force set sail for the attack on Pearl Harbour.

The Satellite States

Although the attack on Russia could not satisfy the aims of Hitler's main Axis partners, there were two states,

²⁵Op. cit., p. 283-4.

Finland and Rumania, whose territorial aspirations gave them a direct motive for participation. Others were also prepared to contribute forces to the war in the East in order to win the esteem of the German leaders. But Hitler did not form a true coalition in which the partners all met to work out a unified strategy. Instead he controlled them on a unilateral basis through a German military liaison staff in each of their capitals. He manipulated them just as he used his own staffs, taking advantage of their rivalries to keep them divided and dependent upon his support. While encouraging his allies to follow policies which suited his purpose, he entrusted them with the minimum information about his own plans. Their military contributions, even those of Finland, he regarded as of limited value.²⁶ The participation of a large number of European states lent a semblance of reality to the propaganda myth of a "crusade against Bolshevism," but the main value of Rumania, Hungary, Slovakia and Finland lay rather in their road and rail communications, giving access to the Russian southern and

²⁶ Hitler stated "the Finns will fight bravely, but they are numerically weak and have not yet recovered (from the Winter War, 1939-40)." Halder KTB, II, 336, 30 March 1941.

northern flanks. Turkey had this value also, but since she lay on the outer edge of the area of German political and military influence Hitler was uncertain about her participation in the attack. Finland and Rumania were both also of great economic importance to Germany. Since the nickel mines of Petsamo and the oil of Ploesti were vulnerable to Russian counter moves in the event of a German attack, the commitment of German forces to their defence was regarded as a necessity from the very start of the German planning.²⁷

The leaders of Finland and Rumania were receptive to German proposals for military cooperation. They felt themselves to be defenceless against further Russian pressure and were eager not only to recover their recent territorial losses but also to extend their boundaries eastward. Such aspirations were well suited to serve Hitler's purposes. The first steps in preparing for German-Finnish and German-Rumanian military cooperation were taken in 1940,²⁸ but the

²⁷ Ibid., p. 33, 22 July 1940.

²⁸ See Ziemke, p. 115 ff. for an outline of German-Finnish military negotiations and Hillgruber, Hitler, Koenig Carol und Marschall Antonescu, p. 118 ff. for an account of the establishment of the German Military Mission in Rumania.

detailed coordination of plans between the German military staffs and those of the prospective eastern allies was delayed as long as possible for security reasons. On 1 May 1941 Keitel issued an order stating that staff talks with Hungary would commence ". . . in the last ten days of May" and Rumania ". . . as late as possible."²⁹ Finland, on the other hand, was to send staff officers to Berlin "within the next few days."³⁰ Greater trust was placed in the Finns, but the main reason for their preferential treatment was the need to start preparations earlier in the far north because of the lack of good road and rail communications.

Finland

The probable participation of Finland was mentioned in the early planning of the campaign in Russia in July 1940.³¹ One of the political aims defined by Hitler was the extension of Finland to the White Sea. His readiness to encourage the establishment of an independent "Greater Finland" was due entirely to the fact that it suited his own

²⁹ See Hubatsch, p. 106.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ See Halder KTB, II, 33, 22 July, 50, 31 July 1940.

racial and territorial concepts. Hitler considered the lands of the North too cold for settlement by Germans and he preferred to have Finns there rather than Russians.³² In fact, Hitler's policy toward the Finns was based primarily upon deceit. In August 1939 he used Finland as a pawn in his pact with Stalin, and had offered help in blockading her in the Winter War of 1939-40.³³ Even while seeking the cooperation of Finland he considered giving her Aaland Islands to Sweden as a bribe for assistance.³⁴ Early in 1941 he sent a diplomat to describe in Helsinki how he was struggling with Russia's leaders to preserve Finnish independence without having to resort to war. Meanwhile, the military operations to be conducted from Finland were being discussed and planned by the OKW and OKH.

Directive No. 21 Operation "Barbarossa" of 18 December 1940 outlined three main lines of attack from Finland.³⁵ Like the operations on the main front in Russia, they were

³² See Hitler's Secret Conversations, p. 380; KTB OKW, I, 90E.

³³ See Uhlig, p. 163.

³⁴ See KTB OKW, I, 299, 3 February 1941.

³⁵ See Hubatsch, p. 99.

based on what was operationally desirable rather than what was feasible in view of the logistical problems involved. Furthermore, they bore little relation to the aims of the Finns. In the far north, an operation proposed by Hitler in August had as its aims the occupation and defence of the Petsamo nickel mines and later the investment of Mumansk (Operation "Renntier").³⁶ Further south, an attempt would be made to cut the Mumansk railway if Sweden permitted German troops to cross her territory (Operation "Silberfuchs"). It was assumed that the third operation would be conducted by the Finns to tie down Soviet forces on their southern border.³⁷ Staff discussions were conducted on a "hypothetical" basis with the Finnish Generals Talvela, in December, and Heinrichs, in January 1941.³⁸ Between January and April detailed planning for the two northern operations was conducted by General von Falkenhorst's Army of Norway.³⁹

Joint planning became more specific late in May when a Finnish staff delegation headed by General Heinrichs

³⁶ See Op. cit., p. 27, 13 August 1940.

³⁷ See Op. cit.

³⁸ See Ziemke, p. 119.

³⁹ See Ibid., pp. 124-8.

arrived in Berlin. General Jodl greeted the Finns with a speech in which he stated that if attempts through diplomatic channels failed to bring about a reduction of the Soviet troop concentrations on the German border a preventive ~~war~~ attack would be necessary. After the subsequent "crusade against Bolshevism," he said, Russia would "cease to be a great power."⁴⁰

The Finns regarded these blandishments with caution. They had no wish to see their country taken over like Denmark and Norway and used for the furtherance of German aims. In a later talk, Heinrichs bluntly warned the representatives of the Wehrmacht that any attempt to install a "Quisling-type" government would result in an end of Finnish-German collaboration.⁴¹ Furthermore, they were determined to avoid any premature action which might expose them to Soviet counter measures before Germany was ready to help them. On the other hand, a conflict between Germany and Russia would present them with a unique opportunity to

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 132. See also Anthony F. Upton, Finland in Crisis, 1940-1941 (London, 1964), p. 256.

⁴¹Ziemke, p. 134.

regain the territories occupied by Russia after the Winter War, and perhaps even to realise their claim to Eastern Karelia as far as the White Sea.⁴²

For this reason the Finns were eager to undertake offensive operations which would serve their political aims. They were, therefore, disappointed when Jodl allotted them the passive role of merely pinning down the Russian forces in the Lake Ladoga area.⁴³ This was done in accordance with the instructions given by Hitler on 17 March when he stated that the forces of Finland should undertake offensive operations only against the Russian coastal batteries at Hango.⁴⁴

On the following day, however, the wishes of the Finnish delegation received a more responsive hearing when they visited the Army General Staff. Unlike Jodl, General Halder was evidently not prepared to accept Hitler's view that the allied forces should not be committed to offensive

⁴²Ibid., p. 193. See also Charles Lundin, Finland in the Second World War (Indiana, 1957), p. 113 ff., 147 ff.; J. Wuorinen (ed.), Finland and World War II, 1939-44 (New York, 1948), p. 125.

⁴³Ziemke, p. 132.

⁴⁴Halder KTB, II, 319, 17 March 1941.

operations. He urged the creation of a strong striking force which could be employed on either shore of Lake Ladoga.⁴⁵

The Finnish military leaders were eager to concentrate the bulk of the Finnish Army for the attack on the Lake Ladoga front, but at their next conference with the Germans in June it became clear that this was not possible.⁴⁶

The subsequent dispersion of military effort in Finland was the result of a complex division of command which placed demands upon the Finnish forces from three directions - their own general headquarters, the OKW and OKH. The unnecessary and confusing division of the German command in Finland was the result of the jealous hostility between von Brauchitsch and Keitel. The former had long harboured a "smoldering resentment" at the exclusion of the OKH from the Norwegian campaign which had been planned and directed by the OKW.⁴⁷ This was apparently aggravated by the changes in the plans for the Army of Norway ordered by Hitler on 17

⁴⁵See Op. cit., pp. 132-3; Ibid., p. 429, 26 May 1941.

⁴⁶Ziemke, p. 134.

⁴⁷See Warlimont, p. 142.

March, and on the following day von Brauchitsch petulantly declared that "he was leaving it to the OKW to issue all orders"⁴⁸ for the operations in Finnish Lapland. Later the OKW offered the command of all operations in Finland to Marshal Mannerheim, but he refused to take responsibility for the attacks conducted by predominantly German forces to attain Hitler's strategic objectives in the far north. So he retained command only in the south where Finnish formations were in the majority.⁴⁹ As a result the operations in Finnish Lapland were controlled by the OKW through the Army of Norway, the headquarters of which was split into two parts, one in Norway and the other over a thousand miles away in Finland. However, because the OKW lacked the necessary administrative organisations, the supply of all the German forces in Finland was conducted by the OKH. The OKH also advised Marshal Mannerheim, the commander in the South of Finland, on operational matters there through General Erfurth, head of the German Liaison Staff.

⁴⁸Ibid. See also Halder KTB, II, 322, 18 March 1941; KTB OKW, I, 363, 18 March 1941.

⁴⁹See Ziemke, pp. 133-4.

Since neither the OKW nor the OKH could commit sufficient formations in Finland to achieve their respective military strategic aims, they both requested the allotment of Finnish formations to support their attacks. These requests and the demands of their own political and strategic aims forced the Finns to divide their army in June between five separate operations. The main force of thirteen divisions, reinforced by one German division, was to advance from Lake Ladoga to the Svir River. A corps of two divisions was to take part in Operation "Silberfuchs" and a battalion group was committed to Petsamo. In addition, the Finns agreed to occupy the Aaland Islands and seal off the Russian base at Hanko. Later, they launched an attack on the Karelian Isthmus.⁵⁰ Once committed to these operations the Finnish and German forces were prevented from swift or easy concentration by the sparse lines of road and rail communications in Finland. Even if the command structure had made a unified strategic direction possible in this theatre it would have been difficult to implement any major shift

⁵⁰See Ibid., p. 192.

of forces in the short campaigning season in the North.

Rumania

At the other extremity of the great eastern front Rumania presented fewer problems than Finland. German relations with the Rumanian leaders were simpler and even more unscrupulous than those with the Finns. By means of the secret protocol to the Russo-German Pact of 1939 and the Vienna Award of August 1940, Hitler encouraged the annexation of huge portions of Rumanian territory. Then, in September 1940, he took up the role of protector of the shattered remnant. General Antonescu, who had been installed as dictator with German help, eagerly welcomed Hitler's aid and offered military support in the event of a war between Germany and Russia.⁵¹ In return he hoped to recover Bessarabia, Northern Bukhovina and perhaps even some of Transylvania and also to annex the so-called Transnistrian Regions as far east as the Dnieper.⁵² Hitler did not discourage

⁵¹See Hillgruber, Hitler, Koenig Carol und Marschall Antonescu, pp. 118, 127; Jon Gheorge, Rumaeniens Weg zum Satelliten-Staat (Heidelberg, 1952), p. 50 ff.

⁵²See IMT, VII, 317-320.

these hopes, but he secretly admitted that he had no intention of giving Rumania more than "Odessa and a strip of land leading West-North-West from the city."⁵³ Hitler had a low opinion of the Rumanian people and their armed forces, and though he admired Antonescu as a political leader he gave him only ten days' notice of the coming attack on Russia.⁵⁴ Antonescu promptly agreed to take command of the Rumanian 3 and 4 Armies and the German 11 Army.⁵⁵ However, the real control of operations was retained by the 11 Army commander, General Ritter von Schobert. Even before the attack had begun Hitler requested that "in the interests of maintaining a unified and consistent system of command" Antonescu should accept directions for the employment of 11 Army given by Field Marshal von Rundstedt, commanding Army Group "South."⁵⁶

⁵³ KTB OKW, I, 90E.

⁵⁴ See Halder KTB, II, 319, 17 March, 337, 30 March 1941; NCA, VI, 945; Paul Schmidt, Hitler's Interpreter (New York, 1951), p. 244, for Hitler's views on the Rumanians and their leader. Gheorge reveals (p. 143 ff.) that Antonescu evidently guessed Hitler's intention of attacking Russia much earlier.

⁵⁵ See Halder KTB, II, 455, 14 June 1941. The 11 Army headquarters replaced that of the 12 Army under Field Marshal List which had moved to the Balkans.

⁵⁶ Mueller-Hillebrand, Germany and Her Allies, II, 157.

This virtually excluded Antonescu from any real operational function and after a few ineffectual weeks in the field he returned to Bucharest, leaving the Rumanian forces under German command.

Hungary

In spite of its one-sided nature, the growth of co-operation between Germany and Rumania was observed with jealous suspicion by Hungary. In April 1941 Admiral Horthy, the Regent, was prompted by rumours of an impending "preventive war" against the Soviet Union to write to Hitler assuring him that such a blow would win him "not only the inexhaustible treasures of Russia's soil" but also "the blessing of history. . . for centuries to come."⁵⁷ However, he took occasion to warn the German leader not to place trust in the Rumanians, who ". . . in the course of their short history . . . have betrayed and defrauded all their friends and allies."⁵⁸ Nevertheless, Horthy's obsequious arguments could hardly outweigh the importance of Rumania's oil and

⁵⁷Miklós Szinai and Lásló Szücs (eds.), Horthy's Confidential Papers (Budapest, 1965), pp. 180-181.

⁵⁸Ibid.

geographical position. In contrast, Hungary's strategic importance to Germany was limited to her road and rail communications to Rumania. Her mountainous eastern border was not a suitable jumping-off place for a major attack on the Soviet Union. Thus Hitler's revised plans for Operation "Barbarossa" envisaged only a limited, primarily defensive role for the Hungarian Army.⁵⁹

However, as in the case of Finland, General Halder did not agree with Hitler. He sympathised with the view expressed by Field Marshal von Rundstedt that the Hungarians should be encouraged to attack on the Carpathian sector in order more effectively to pin down the Russian forces there.⁶⁰ However, since a request for such an attack was a contradiction of Hitler's orders it had to be made in secrecy through General Hiner, the OKH representative on the Hungarian General Staff, and couched in such terms that the Hungarians would not expect some sort of compensation for their action.⁶¹ The problem of bringing the Hungarians into the war without

⁵⁹ See Halder KTB, II, 319, 17 March 1941; Hubatsch, p. 106.

⁶⁰ See Halder KTB, II, 338, 30 March 1941.

⁶¹ KTB des deutschen Generals beim Oberkommando der Kgl. Ungar. Wehrmacht, 23 June 1941, quoted in Horthy's Confidential Papers, p. 183. See also Ibid., III, 6, 22 June 1941.

offering them a specific reward was overcome when the town of Kassa was bombed on 26 June. An officer of the Hungarian Air Force identified the aircraft as German, but he was ordered by the prime minister, Bardossy, to remain silent. A post-war account suggests that the bombers were of German make but were flown by members of the Slovakian Air Force who were deserting to the Russians and deliberately jettisoned their bombs on Hungary.⁶² Nevertheless, the attack was blamed on Russia, and Hungary declared war next day. In mid-July the Hungarian Mobile Corps was placed at the disposal of Army Group "South" with the request that it should not be deployed beside a Rumanian formation.⁶³

Turkey

Even though the enmity for Russia and Bolshevism displayed by Horthy's Hungary was shared by the Turks, they hesitated to commit themselves to an active role until the success of Germany was assured. Hitler had stated on 31 July 1940 that "it remained to be seen to what degree Finland

⁶² See C.A. Macartney, "Hungary's Declaration of War on the USSR in 1941," Studies in Diplomatic History and Historiography in Honour of G.P. Gooch (London, 1961), p.164.

⁶³ See Halder KTB, III, 20, 27 June 1941; KTB OKW, I, 421.

and Turkey would be interested (in the invasion of Russia)."⁶⁴ On 17 March 1941 he suggested that after its resources had been exhausted, the Caucasus might be given to Turkey,⁶⁵ and he told the Turkish Ambassador in Berlin that in the November conversations with Molotov he ". . . had prevented the liquidation of the Balkans and Turkey by Russia."⁶⁶ But the Turks refused to abandon their neutrality and the German-Turkish Pact of Friendship which was signed in Ankara on 18 June 1941 did little more than prevent Britain from sending aid to Russia over Turkish territory. Though the German attack on Russia was welcomed by the Turks, their leaders held back from any direct involvement.

The "Crusade against Bolshevism"

Few countries in Europe were able like Turkey to avoid commitment. Sweden permitted the transportation of a German division across her territory to Finland. Many felt obliged to win favour with Germany by offering forces for Operation "Barbarossa." Hitler gave orders that such contributions

⁶⁴ Halder KTB, II, 50, 31 July 1940.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 320, 17 March 1941.

⁶⁶ Hillgruber, Hitlers Strategie, p. 496; DGFP(D), XII, Doc. 177.

should be "enthusiastically accepted."⁶⁷ Their participation served, not to strengthen a true coalition, but to support the propaganda of the Fuehrer proclamation issued on the eve of the attack, which closed with an exhortation to the troops to save European civilization and culture.⁶⁸ Later, Hitler stated that the "crusade" in the East was developing for the first time ". . . a feeling of European solidarity."⁶⁹ This, he said, would be most important for the future because a later generation would have to face the problem of a conflict between "the European economic area" and the United States of America.⁷⁰ So contingents from the armies of Italy, Slovakia and Croatia and volunteer formations from France and Spain were sent to fight in Russia and individual volunteers from Norway, Denmark, Finland, Holland and Belgium were formed into Waffen S.S. formations.⁷¹ But none of these was mili-

⁶⁷KTB OKW, I, 409.

⁶⁸USNA, Microfilm Guide No. 30, Serial T78-335, Frame 6291693 ff. See also Domarus, II, 1725 ff.; Bramstead, p. 244 ff.; Dallin, pp. 67-8.

⁶⁹Op. cit., p. 92E.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹See Mueller-Hillebrand, Das Heer, II, 113.

tarilly significant. Indeed some were a liability because their training and equipment were not equal to the rigours of the campaign and their different weapons and vehicles served only to complicate the supply and maintenance systems.⁷²

Many German soldiers would have welcomed the support of anti-Communist Russians.⁷³ But Hitler refused to accept such aid until it was too late. Although the German Army made considerable use of volunteer help from Russian prisoners of war, the recruiting of entire Russian formations began only when the hope of a German victory had disappeared.⁷⁴ The fact that even then an entire army was raised under the command of General Vlassov showed what might have been achieved if such a force had been formed, backed by a positive political movement, in 1941 when the disillusionment with the Soviet regime provoked by the military defeats was at its height.

⁷²To reduce this difficulty, the Spanish and French formations were issued with German equipment for the Russian campaign.

⁷³See Dallin, pp. 515 ff., 533 ff.; Teske, pp. 11-12, 323-4.

⁷⁴See Dallin, p. 535 ff.; Reitlinger, p. 309 ff.

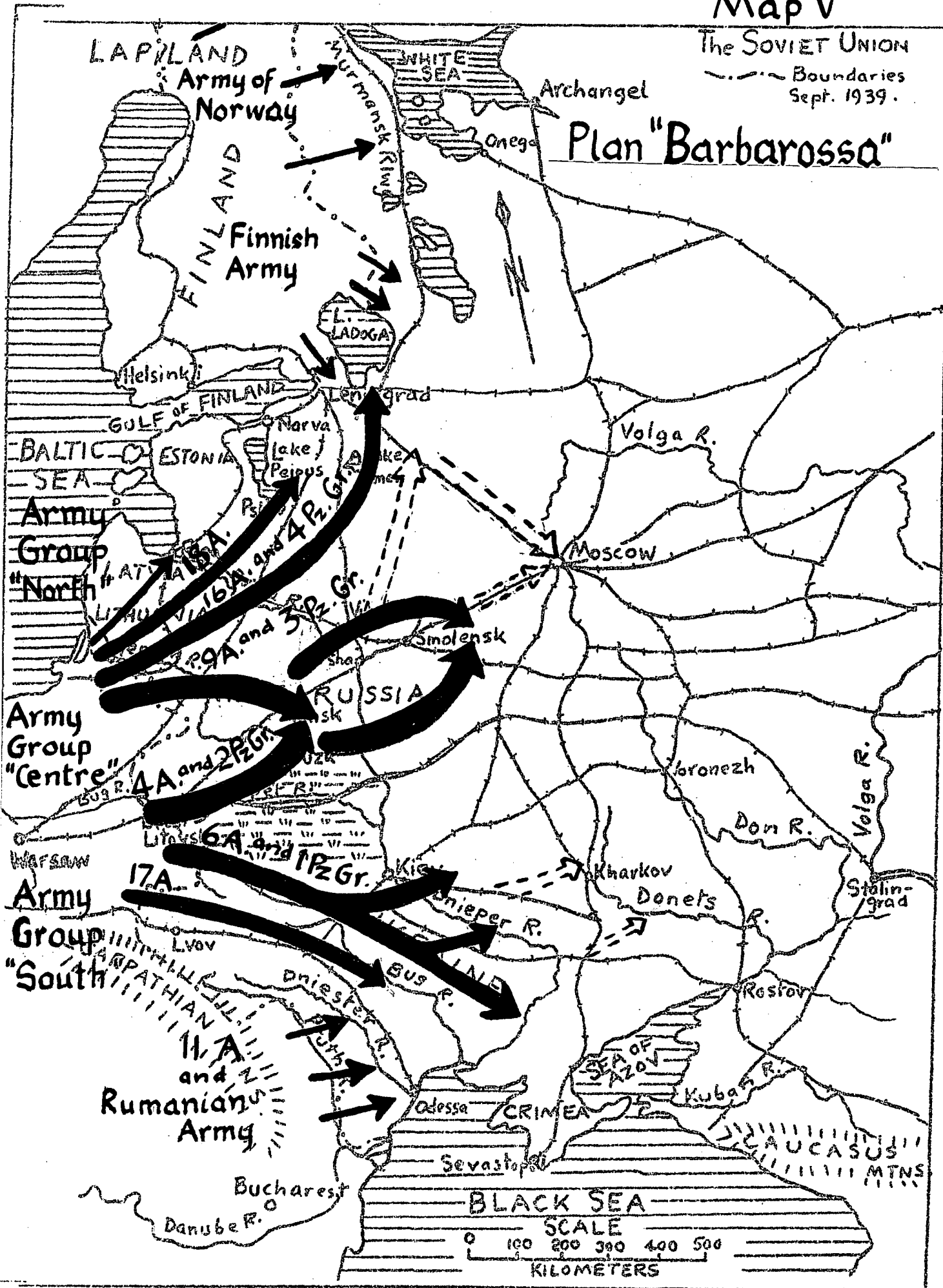
Thus, the German policies towards their allies and potential allies were filled with missed opportunities. In spite of the appearance of a great coalition, the Axis and its satellites did not possess a true coalition strategy and therefore failed to bring their full resources to bear upon their opponents. The lack of any central body for coordinating the efforts of all the members made the Axis somewhat less than the sum of its parts. The dispersion of effort in Finland, the disparagement of the satellite forces in Army Group "South", the failure to involve Turkey and Japan in the war against Russia, all reflect the same arrogant over-confidence which marred German military strategy. Even in periods of success too much effort was diverted into the pursuit of individual aims, and cooperation rested too often upon deceit. These weaknesses not only contributed to the failure of German strategy in the East, but also involved Germany in the war which the Japanese decided to launch upon the United States. Thus Hitler led Germany into the very revival of the great coalition struggle of the First World War which he had always sought to avoid.

Map V

The SOVIET UNION

Boundaries
Sept. 1939.

Plan "Barbarossa"



CHAPTER VIII

THE FAILURE OF THE "BARBAROSSA" PLAN

The Great Gamble

Operation "Barbarossa" began on 22 June 1941 when three million German soldiers advanced across the Soviet frontier.¹ The planning on which their fate depended was based upon a grand strategy which accepted the risks of a two-front war and yet failed to establish a well-coordinated coalition. It was a grand strategy accepted by Hitler because it seemed to lead to the achievement of his main goal, the establishment of a great eastern empire. Most of his military leaders accepted it because they too were lured by the vision of a great autarkic German state, the triumphant victor over Bolshevism and master of Europe. Those who had doubts suppressed them because they could offer no acceptable alternative to the problem of winning

¹The General Staff "Barbarossa" file contained the following strength returns for the Eastern Armies:

Officers and men	3,050,000
Horses.	625,000
Motor vehicles(including armoured cars)	600,000
Tanks.	3,350
Artillery pieces	7,184

the war in the West, and because they were confident that the victory in Russia would be so swiftly won that the risks of a two-front war would be short-lived.

But the hope of a successful Blitzkrieg in the East rested upon the delusion of invincibility fostered by earlier victories and upon an underestimation of Soviet strength and of the terrain factors in Russia. The limited quantity of fuel oil and the lack of winter equipment turned the campaign into a gamble. German military strategy lacked flexibility. If the Blitzkrieg formula failed there was no alternative except an improvised defence. But this would convert the temporary risks of a two-front or multi-front war into a grand strategic problem for which the Wehrmacht, with its inadequate air and naval forces, had no solution. Thus Hitler was not exaggerating when, on 4 July 1941, he stated that the decision required on the future conduct of the operations in the East would be ". . . perhaps the most difficult decision of this war."²

²KTB OKW, I, 1020.

Uncertainty over the Operational Plan

Hitler was confronted by three choices. First, he could adhere to the "Barbarossa" plan, as described in Directive No. 21. Second, he could amend "Barbarossa" so that part of the Panzer forces of Army Group "Centre" would turn south to link up with von Rundstedt's army group. Third, he could revert to the OKH plan and thrust directly towards Moscow.

The "Barbarossa" plan contained four phases: envelopment battles west of the Dvina and Dnieper; the capture of the Baltic states and Leningrad; the envelopment of the remaining Soviet forces around Moscow; and, finally, thrusts to the Volga and the Caucasus. In the development of this sequence, the crucial question was when and where to turn the mobile forces concentrated in the centre of the front toward the Baltic and Leningrad. The success of the second and subsequent phases depended upon the answer. Yet no studies or plans had been made by the OKH to provide it.³

³Allmendinger, Terrain Factors, p. 8, attributes the Army's failure to plan the advance beyond the line Dnieper-Smolensk - Leningrad to "Hitler's belief in the collapse of the Communist regime in the interior of the Soviet Union." This view ignores the fact that it was Hitler who urged the planning of the later stages of the campaign.

As already suggested, the main reason for this omission seems to have been confidence that the "Barbarossa" plan would prove unnecessary. Both Directive No. 21 and the OKH Deployment Directive stated that in the event of a surprisingly sudden collapse of enemy resistance in northern Russia, the Panzer forces of Army Group "Centre" might abandon the turning movement towards Leningrad and drive directly towards Moscow.⁴ The Army leaders were convinced that such a collapse would result from the first battles, and so they assumed that it would be unnecessary to turn strong elements of the mobile forces of Army Group "Centre" northward to assist in the conquest of the Baltic States.⁵

⁴See Hubatsch, 99; Halder KTB, II, 465; Appendix II. See also KTB OKW, I, 298, 3 February 1941: Hitler stated that the quick capture of Leningrad and the Baltic States would be essential ". . . if the Russians succeeded in conducting a large scale withdrawal to a new defensive line further east." This seemed to imply that if they did not conduct such a withdrawal the operations in the Baltic States would be less important.

⁵See IMT, XXVI, 873-PS, 400; Cf. Halder KTB, III, 39, 3 July 1941.

Furthermore, the postponement of the opening of the campaign from May until the 22 June made it doubtful whether it was feasible to complete all four phases of the "Barbarossa" plan before the winter. The movements of the mobile forces north through the swampy forests all the way to Leningrad and then south-east to the area beyond Moscow and thence to the Volga and Caucasus would have taken more time than was available. However, no detailed time-tables or studies of the difficulties of these operations appear to have been made.⁶ Thus on 22 June 1941 the German Army began to carry out an operational plan which had not been completely prepared and which its leaders had every intention of abandoning if they possibly could in order to revert to their own plan for a direct thrust on Moscow after the battles west of the Dvina and Dnieper Rivers.

What followed was a curious half-concealed struggle between the Army and Hitler. At first Hitler refused to abandon the "Barbarossa" plan. Nevertheless, in spite of

⁶See Walter Chales de Beaulieu, Der Vorstoss der Panzergruppe 4 auf Leningrad - 1941 (Neckargemuend, 1961), pp. 132-3.

his efforts to restrain them from over-extending the advance,⁷ the Army leaders conducted operations to prepare the way for an advance on Moscow.⁸ By the first week of July Halder was confident that:

Once we have crossed the Dnieper and the Dvina, it will be less a question of defeating the enemy's formations than of taking over his centres of production and so preventing him from setting up new armed forces out of the enormous potential of his industry and his unlimited reserves of manpower.⁹

He continued with the optimistic assertion that as soon as this stage was reached the Wehrmacht could return to the tasks of the war against Britain. These included operations against the Middle East from Libya, Turkey, and perhaps over the Caucasus into Persia.¹⁰

In the Fuehrer headquarters the success of the German operations had inspired similar optimism and on 8 July,

⁷ See Halder KTB, III, 10, 24 June, 15, 25 June 1941.

⁸ See Ibid., 14, 25 June 1941. When Guderian thrust on towards the Dnieper Halder commented that ". . . had he not done so it would have been a great mistake." He also expressed the hope that the field commanders would ". . . do the right thing on their own initiative without specific orders, which we may not give. . ." (Ibid., p. 25, 29 June 1941). However, next day some Russian forces broke out of the Bialystok pocket through Guderian's over-extended forces (Ibid., 30, 30 June 1941).

⁹ Ibid., pp. 38-9, 3 July 1941.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 39, 3 July 1941. See also KTB OKW, I, 1038; Halder KTB, III, 53, 8 July 1941.

Hitler announced his decision to cancel the turning movement of the mobile forces of Army Group "Centre" towards Leningrad.¹¹ Instead they would conduct a further "pincer attack" to envelop the remaining Soviet forces astride the road to Moscow. However, neither the capital nor Leningrad were to be captured, Hitler stated, but surrounded and levelled ^{to} with the ground by the Luftwaffe so that their populations need not be supported throughout the winter. Meanwhile the mobile forces should be used in "expeditions" towards the Volga to destroy the remaining Soviet industrial centres.¹²

The amended plan which Hitler revealed at this conference was not unlike that developed by Marcks and Paulus between July and December 1940. Yet four days later, instead of welcoming this reversion to the Army plan, Halder told von Brauchitsch,

I am not all that wedded to the idea of hurrying the Panzer groups eastwards. I can well visualize the necessity for turning Hoth with considerable

¹¹ Halder KTB, III, 53, 8 July 1941; KTB OKW, I, 1021.

¹² Plans for "expeditions" beyond the Volga were also prepared later in July. See KTB OKW, I, 1037: "Allocation of Forces for Operations against the Industrial Areas of the Urals," dated 27 July 1941.

portions (of Panzer Group 3) to the north. . .
 Guderian (Panzer Group 2) must turn to the South
 . . . perhaps to drive down even as far as the
 Kiev area. . . .¹³

This statement was remarkable in view of the bitter conflict between the OKH and Hitler which resulted from the latter's decision in August to carry out the very operations described here. But, as will be indicated later, by then Halder had reverted to the belief that only by the swift capture of Moscow could Germany achieve a decisive victory before the winter.

In the next few days the Army arrived at a compromise plan which was incorporated into Directive No. 33 on 19 July.¹⁴ But four days later Hitler produced a supplement to that directive which was in fact a desperate bid to revive the "Barbarossa" plan, including the capture of Leningrad, the envelopment of the Russians around Moscow, the drive to the Volga and the "subsidiary operation" to the Caucasus.¹⁵

¹³ Op.cit., p. 69, 12 July 1941.

¹⁴ Hubatsch, pp. 163-5.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 166-8. Blau was in error when he stated (p. 52) that the supplement was the result of the Fuehrer Conference on 23 July. Halder referred to the supplement at the conference. See Op. cit., pp. 107-8, 23 July 1941. See also Warlimont, p. 183.

Confronted by the reality of the plan they had helped to make before the campaign, the Army leaders refused to recognise, or at least to accept, it. Now at last they openly proposed the adoption of their original plan, and the concentration of all available forces for a great offensive towards Moscow.¹⁶ Earlier in July they had preferred this course because they believed that the Russians were defeated and there was therefore no need to carry out the circuitous manoeuvres of the "Barbarossa" plan.¹⁷ Now they had even stronger reasons for wishing to adopt the swifter and simpler course of a direct thrust on Moscow. They were beginning to recognise the serious miscalculations of comparative strengths, terrain difficulties, logistics and timing upon which their plans had been based.

The Reappraisal of the Soviet Forces

The serious defeats and enormous losses initially suffered by the Soviet Armed Forces in 1941 seemed to confirm the German intelligence estimates of Russian weaknesses. Much of the Soviet equipment was inferior or obsolete. The

¹⁶See KTB OKW, I, 1031-34.

¹⁷See Halder KTB, III, 38-9, 3 July, 41, 4 July 1941.

leadership of the Russian forces at all levels was frequently inept. The training of the troops was inadequate for the requirements of flexible, mobile warfare.

The achievement of tactical surprise on the frontier and the failure of the Russians there to elude the German envelopment operations came as a great relief to the Germans.¹⁸ The extent of the material successes was first indicated by the war in the air. At 13.30 hours on the first day of the attack, Halder recorded that the Luftwaffe had claimed the destruction of 800 Soviet aircraft. Its own losses totalled only ten aircraft.¹⁹ On the second day the German claims reached 2,500 aircraft shot down or destroyed on airfields. When Goering refused to believe this score it was rechecked and found to be 200 to 300 short of the actual total.²⁰

On the ground the Panzer groups north of the Pripet Marsh had also achieved spectacular successes. On 26 June the right wing of Hoepner's Panzer Group 4 had reached the

¹⁸See Ibid., pp. 3, 5, 22 June, 12, 25 June 1941.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 4.

²⁰See Albert Kesselring, Memoirs (London, 1952), p. 98.; Plocher, pp. 41-2.

Dvina River and seized the bridges at Dvinsk.²¹ Next day the two Panzer groups of Army Group "Centre" met at Minsk thus closing the ring around the Russian forces in the Bialystok salient.²² From there Guderian thrust eastward with part of his Panzer Group 2 in an endeavour to establish a bridgehead across the Dnieper.²³ Yet even amid the reports of the first victories came indications that the Russians were meeting the Blitzkrieg attacks with a determination seldom encountered in the earlier German campaigns. "Reports from the front," Halder noted on 29 June, "indicate that everywhere the Russians are fighting to the last man."²⁴ General Ott, the Inspector General of Infantry, reported with an air of professional vindication that:

Now, for once, our troops are compelled by the stubborn Russian resistance to fight according to their combat manuals. In Poland and the West they could take liberties, but here they cannot get away with it.²⁵

By mid-July, a note of deeper concern was creeping into Halder's notes. "The Russian troops," he wrote on 15 July,

²¹See Manstein, Lost Victories, p. 183.

²²See Hoth, p. 64; Guderian, p. 158.

²³See Halder KTB, III, 25, 29 June 1941.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid.

"are fighting as ever with wild ferocity and enormous human sacrifice."²⁶

The size of the Russian losses in ill-directed frontal counter-attacks²⁷ and the large numbers of prisoners taken in the envelopment battles encouraged German belief that Russian resistance must soon slacken.²⁸ On 5 July reports of unusually high rail movements from Briansk and Orel puzzled Halder and caused him to remark that "the forces still available to the enemy can hardly permit the establishment of an operational reserve."²⁹ The Foreign Armies East Branch of the General Staff estimated at this time that of the total of 164 Soviet divisions 89 had been entirely or partly destroyed, and only 9 of the 29 Soviet tank divisions were still fit for combat.³⁰ The danger that the Russians might raise new divisions was dismissed by Halder as unlikely on the grounds that officers, technical specialists, and artillery equipment would be lacking. But a month

²⁶Ibid., p. 79, 15 July 1941.

²⁷Ibid., p. 47, 6 July 1941.

²⁸See Ibid., p. 56, 9 July 1941; Weber/Korbe, p. 30.

²⁹Op. cit., p. 43, 5 July 1941.

³⁰Ibid., p. 52, 8 July 1941.

later he was forced to admit that the structure, economy, transportation system and military capability of "the Russian colossus" had been underestimated.

At the beginning of the war we reckoned with about 200 divisions. We have already counted 360. Admittedly, these divisions are not armed and equipped to our standards, and their tactical leadership is often inadequate. But they are there, and when a dozen of them are destroyed, then the Russians replace them with a dozen more.³¹

The size of the Soviet tank forces and the quality of its new tanks also came as an unpleasant surprise. The Germans had estimated Russian strength at 15 thousand tanks,³² but the total was probably nearer to 24 thousand of which 1,475 were new T-34 and KV tanks which had begun to come into service in April.³³ The armament and thickness of armour of these new types came as a shock to the Germans.³⁴ By the end of 1941 the Soviet armament industry was concentrated upon their production with a target figures of 22 thousand to 25 thousand for the year 1942.³⁵

³¹Ibid., p. 170, 11 August 1941.

³²Ibid., 36, 2 July 1941.

³³See R.E. Sherwood, Roosevelt and Hopkins. An Intimate History (New York, 1948), p. 317 ff.; Ogorkiewicz, The Soviet Army, p. 300; Erickson, p. 567.

³⁴See Halder KTB, III, 14, 25 June 1941; Erickson, p.616.

³⁵Werth, p. 223.

The Germans made a very similar underestimation both of the size of the Soviet Air Force and of the quality of its new equipment. Even on 1 July Halder admitted that the Luftwaffe had seriously underestimated the strength of the Soviet Air Force which ". . . evidently had far more than 8000 aircraft."³⁶ After a month of fighting the Luftwaffe claimed the staggering total of 7,564 destroyed. But of these a very large proportion were knocked out on the ground which meant that the Russian losses in crews were not so severe.³⁷ The demands for air support for the ground troops forced the Luftwaffe to reduce the attacks on the Soviet Air Force before it had won complete air superiority. As a result the Russians gradually rebuilt their air formations from the current production of their aircraft industry in the Moscow, Voronezh and Ural areas, which the Luftwaffe was unable to bomb effectively through lack of suitable aircraft.³⁸

³⁶Op. cit., pp. 32-3, 1 July 1941.

³⁷See Flocher, p. 42. The availability of air crews is described by Eremenko, p. 208.

³⁸See Flocher, pp. 43-4.

The Decline of German Strength

The size and fighting spirit of the Soviet forces and the quality of their new equipment, especially tanks and aircraft, confronted the Wehrmacht with unexpected difficulties. By the third week of July the combat strength of the Panzer and motorised divisions had fallen to about 60 per cent of normal in Army Group "Centre".³⁹ In some of the Panzer divisions of Army Group "South" it was down to 40 per cent.⁴⁰ Early in July, Halder calculated that by the end of the month only 431 tanks would be available from the OKH reserve and current production to replace those destroyed or broken down out of the original total of 3,350.⁴¹ But to make matters worse, Hitler gave orders that new tanks should be kept in Germany for equipping fresh Panzer divisions for use in the offensives planned for 1942 in the Middle East.⁴² Under pressure from the Army leaders, he agreed on 8 July to release seventy Mark III and fifteen Mark IV tanks, and all the captured Czech tanks available.⁴³ Later in the

³⁹Halder KTB, III, 90, 18 July 1941.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 97, 20 July 1941.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 34, 2 July 1941.

⁴²Ibid., pp. 39, 3 July, 53, 8 July 1941.

⁴³Ibid., p. 54, 8 July 1941.

month Hitler insisted that Panzer divisions suffering heavy losses in Russia should be disbanded and their personnel and equipment used to reinforce the remainder.⁴⁴ However, on 4 August Guderian persuaded him to provide 350 new engines for Mark III tanks,⁴⁵ and with this meagre allocation the Panzer group commanders had to patch up their tank units for the far-reaching operations by which Russia was to be conquered. Not only the lack of tank replacements but also the shortage of vehicles, tyres and fuel made it impossible to maintain the strength even of the inadequate mobile forces allocated to the Russian front.⁴⁶

In view of their inferior strength, the German Panzer forces achieved remarkable victories. Their success was due to the superior tactics and leadership which resulted from their training and experience, especially in the use of radio communications for the coordination of supporting fire and in the tactical use of the ground. Thus they were frequently able to out-manoeuver and defeat even the Soviet

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 109, 24 July, 115, 25 July 1941.

⁴⁵See Ibid., p. 152, 4 August 1941. Guderian mentions only 300 new engines (p. 190).

⁴⁶Halder KTB, II, 343, 3 April 1941.

units equipped with KV and T-34 tanks. Nevertheless, the new Russian tanks presented serious problems to the German infantry divisions because only the medium artillery and the heaviest anti-tank guns were capable of penetrating their armour.⁴⁷ Under these circumstances, the order forbidding the employment of anti-aircraft artillery against ground targets was frequently waived, and in the first three weeks of the campaign the II Flak Corps, for instance, destroyed 250 Russian tanks in addition to 92 aircraft.⁴⁸

The use of anti-aircraft artillery in this manner was possible only in the first weeks of the campaign when the Soviet Air Force was still suffering from the effects of the initial blows inflicted by the Luftwaffe. In the opening days, German bombers flew from four to six missions daily, dive-bombers seven to eight, and fighters between five and nine sorties.⁴⁹ During the period 22 to 25 June the V Air Corps, one of five such formations allocated to the eastern front, flew 1,600 sorties against 77 Russian airfields and

⁴⁷ Ibid., III, 42, 4 July 1941.

⁴⁸ Plocher, p. 75.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 39.

destroyed 774 Russian aircraft on the ground and shot down a further 136.⁵⁰ After shifting the weight of its attacks to the support of the ground forces, it destroyed in one day, 1 July, 40 tanks and 180 other vehicles.⁵¹ But it was impossible to keep up this level of effort. By the end of July, air-crews were showing signs of exhaustion and maintenance problems were seriously reducing the number of serviceable aircraft. As a result, when Hitler demanded "terror attacks" on the city of Moscow, the Luftwaffe was unable to deliver raids of more than 100 sorties, and they usually consisted of harassing attacks of only 30 to 40 sorties.⁵²

The exhaustion, which by late July was reducing the Blitzkrieg impact of the air and mobile forces, was also having its effect on the infantry divisions. Though their strength still averaged about 80 per cent of normal establishment,⁵³ they were seriously fatigued by a month of intermittent, often severe, fighting and continuous marching

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 52.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Rise and Fall of the German Air Force, p. 167.

⁵³Halder KTB, III, 104, 23 July 1941.

on hot dusty roads. The general weariness influenced the morale of the senior commanders,⁵⁴ who were becoming increasingly aware that the dogged resistance of the Soviet troops even when surrounded was causing a constant drain in casualties, which by 31 July had reached 213,301 officers and men.⁵⁵ Furthermore, it had imposed repeated delays which were bound to effect the time-table of the campaign.

In the original operational plan developed at the end of 1940, General Paulus had allowed twenty days for the first phase of the campaign culminating in the attainment of the line Dnieper - Smolensk - Dvina. There would then be a pause of almost three weeks for recuperation, redeployment and the establishment of new supply bases. The second phase of the campaign was to start on the fortieth day at the latest.⁵⁶ In fact, the first phase of the campaign was still not completed on the fortieth day, 31 July, and the troops had received no significant pause for rest. It was evident

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 98, 20 July 1941.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 151, 4 August 1941.

⁵⁶See Goerlitz, Paulus, pp. 115, 120.

therefore, that most of August would be required for the elimination of the Soviet forces enveloped near Smolensk and for recuperation and replenishment. This left six weeks at the most in which to complete major operations before the autumn rains began.

The logistic factor also imposed limits upon the duration of the campaign. General Halder had been warned on 28 February 1941 that there would be sufficient fuel oil only for the deployment and for two months of operations.⁵⁷ On 7 August General Wagner, Quartermaster General, confirmed that after 1 October fuel oil and gasoline would be in such short supply that a major military operation would no longer be possible.⁵⁸

The Abandonment of the "Barbarossa" Plan

In the second half of July the German Army leaders recognised that, in spite of the enormous efforts of the Wehrmacht, the Soviet forces had only been weakened and not eliminated. No longer were they able to justify their clandestine revival of their own plan on the grounds that the

⁵⁷Op. cit., 261, 28 January 1941; see also 420-21, 19 May, 422, 20 May 1941.

⁵⁸See Ibid., pp. 160-61, 8 August 1941.

collapse of the enemy made the second phase of the "Barbarossa" plan unnecessary. Now they were forced openly to advocate a direct assault on Moscow for the new and disquietening reason that there was no longer time to carry out the "Barbarossa" plan as restated in the Supplement to Directive No. 33 before the arrival of winter. If reduced to static warfare, they warned, the Wehrmacht would be confronted in the spring by new and re-equipped Soviet formations which would pin down even more German forces in the East. As a result,

. . . it would not be possible to achieve the military aim of the war against Russia, the swift overthrow of one opponent in a two-front war in order to tackle the other (Britain) with all forces.⁵⁹

The choice of Moscow as the next major objective was justified by the expectation that the Russians would commit the major portion of their remaining forces to battle in its defence. Furthermore, the capture of the centre of the Soviet "leadership apparatus" and communications system, in addition to the significant industries of the city, would split Russia in two parts and ". . . render unified resistance

⁵⁹ KTb OKW, I, 1033.

difficult."⁶⁰ Behind these cautious words lay the hope that the fall of the capital would bring about a collapse of the Soviet Union.

At the OKW Jodl was converted by the Army's arguments and on 27 July he asked Hitler to reconsider his plans.⁶¹ But Hitler was not impressed. He still considered that the capture of the industries at Kharkhov and the Donets Basin and the cutting off of Soviet oil supplies would have far more significant effects on the Russian ability to resist than the capture of Moscow.⁶² Furthermore, he adhered to the view, which he had expressed repeatedly since December 1940, that a great frontal offensive would not succeed in enveloping the Russians, but would merely push them back into the interior. The experiences of the Bialystok - Minsk and Smolensk operations served only to confirm this view. Therefore, apart from the bold thrust of the 4 Panzer Army to capture economic objectives, the Army should concentrate upon ". . . tactical battles of destruction over

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Op. cit., pp. 1036-7.

⁶²Ibid., pp. 1037, 1040.

smaller areas in which the enemy would be pinned down and completely destroyed."⁶³ When von Brauchitsch also expressed this view Halder sarcastically reported that the avoidance of all tactical risks and the methodical elimination of all gaps between the army groups could indeed be achieved and the end result would be positional warfare.⁶⁴ On 26 July, he bluntly informed Hitler that to resort to "tactical envelopments" would be to play into the hands of the enemy. Such operations, he warned, would be too prolonged to permit the attainment of the objectives on the Volga.⁶⁵

Shortly after this conference, General Paulus returned from a visit to Army Group "North" and reported that the area between Lake Peipus and Lake Ilmen was, in the opinion of General Hoepner and his corps commanders, Reinhardt and von Manstein, quite unsuitable for mobile warfare.⁶⁶ This

⁶³Ibid., p. 1035.

⁶⁴Halder KTB, III, 121, 26 July 1941.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 123, 26 July 1941.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 124, 26 July 1941. See also Manstein, Lost Victories, p. 187. The supply trucks in this terrain averaged 7 m.p.h. Up to 50 per cent were off the road with broken springs. Delays of 24 hours due to traffic congestion were not unusual. The average day's journey for a truck was only 68 miles. In October conditions became

was hardly new information. General Marcks in the study he compiled in July and August 1940 had rejected the idea of an advance on Moscow from the Baltic states because the swampy forests were ". . . most extensive between Leningrad and Moscow."⁶⁷ Nevertheless, the "Barbarossa" plan, required that the Panzer groups north of the Pripet Marsh should traverse this forest region twice, first to reach Leningrad and then to drive east of Moscow. Awareness that the OKH should have openly questioned the feasibility of these movements when they were first proposed only added to Halder's irritation at Hitler's determination to go through with them now. Three days later he was still grumbling to the unfortunate von Brauchitsch, who, as usual, was the whipping boy for both Hitler and the General Staff, that the forthcoming operations would lead only to ". . . a dispersal of force and a standstill in decisive direction towards Moscow."⁶⁸

worse. See U.S. Army Europe, Historical Division, Heidelberg, "Transportation Problems of the 18 Army during the advance to Leningrad (22 June - 3 September 1941," typescript report submitted to the OKH by the Chief of Supply, 18 Army, February, 1942.

⁶⁷Appendix I.

⁶⁸Op. cit., p. 129, 28 July 1941.

Though Halder did not yet know it, Hitler had in fact decided "in view of . . . the arrival of new, strong enemy forces on the front and flank of Army Group 'Centre' . . ." ⁶⁹ to cancel Supplement to Directive No. 33. On 30 July, news of this change, coupled with reports that Panzer Group 1 had at last broken through into the rear of the Russian forces west of the Lower Dneiper, provoked from Halder an uncharacteristic burst of enthusiasm:

This solution means that all thinking soldiers are now freed from the frightful spectre of the last few days during which it looked as if the entire eastern operation would be bogged down as a result of the Fuehrer's stubbornness. At last a little light on the horizon once more. ⁷⁰

However, the contents of Directive No. 34, ⁷¹ which arrived next day rather dampened Halder's spirits again. It called for operations to envelop Leningrad and link up with the Finns, and to destroy the Soviet forces at Kiev and in the Ukraine west of the Dnieper. Army Group "Centre" including both its Panzer Groups, was to go over to the

⁶⁹KTB OKW, I, 1040.

⁷⁰Halder KTB, III, 134, 30 July 1941.

⁷¹See Hubatsch, pp. 168-71.

defensive for recuperation. But there was no indication how it would be employed when it was ready for further operations.⁷²

For the next few days Halder was preoccupied with administrative problems including that of providing winter clothing and accomodation.⁷³ The difficulties lay less in obtaining items of clothing and buildings than in getting them to the troops on the inadequate transport system. It was clear that as long as all railway rolling stock and road transport was committed to carry ammunition, fuel, and food for the current operations the delivery of winter clothing and equipment would be impossible. This problem could only be solved if Russia was defeated before winter set in.

On 4 August Halder discussed the early resumption of vigorous operations with the Commander-in-Chief. To achieve a decisive victory, he said, the Wehrmacht must either deprive the enemy of the industries of the Ukraine and the Caucasus, or defeat the last of the enemy armed forces. If the second choice was made, Halder warned von Brauchitsch, then the Army would have to be given full operational freedom, instead of

⁷²Op. cit., pp. 138-39, 1 August, 142-44, 2 August 1941.

⁷³Ibid., p. 153, 4 August 1941.

being "talked into" courses of action with which it disagreed. Operations in 1941 would end not on the Volga, but at Moscow. Further conquest of territory would depend on the situation. However, he stated, it was ". . . unlikely that we shall be in the Caucasus before winter sets in."⁷⁴ With these words Halder dismissed the hope of achieving the aims of Directive No. 21 and so admitted that "Operation "Barbarossa" had failed.

The Responsibility for the Failure of "Barbarossa"

On 22 August, in the course of the argument over the future conduct of operations in the East, Hitler wrote a study in which he blamed the Army leaders for the failure of the "Barbarossa" plan.⁷⁵ His main criticism was that the OKH had lost control of the campaign by giving excessive freedom of action to the army group and army commanders who had been able to ". . . threaten or question the overall concept (of the operation)."⁷⁶ The Army, he stated, had wrongly assumed that, because the main weight of the German forces had been

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵KTB OKW, I, 1063-68.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 1064.

deployed in the centre of the front, the decisive objective also lay there. In fact, the real reason for this form of deployment was that from the centre the enemy front could best be rolled up to the north and south. There was no room for doubt that on reaching a certain line - he himself had placed it on the Dnieper⁷⁷ - Army Group "Centre" should have halted in order to free its two Panzer groups to assist Army Groups "North" and "South". Instead, Army Group "Centre" had sought to extend its attack eastwards towards Moscow. As a result the Panzer forces had lost contact with the infantry following them, and valuable weeks had been lost in re-establishing coordination while many Russian formations had broken out of the envelopments to form a new front.

What made Hitler's study particularly invidious to the OKH was its unfavourable comparison between the manner in which Reichsmarschall Goering had concentrated the Luftwaffe for decisive operations ". . . in keeping with the requirements of the overall campaign plan,"⁷⁸ and the manner in

⁷⁷ Ibid. Cf. Halder KTB, II, 319, 17 March 1941.

⁷⁸ Op. cit., p. 1065. See also Halder KTB, III, 193, 22 August 1941. Halder suggested to von Brauchitsch that they should resign in protest. In fact, Hitler was right. General Schmid later described the inability of the OKL to obtain from the OKH the formulation of a clear plan ". . . for

which the Army had employed its mobile formations. By allowing the field commanders to follow their own selfish or independent wishes, Hitler asserted, the Army leaders had made it necessary to abandon "proven fundamentals" of the plan because they were no longer compatible with the general situation.⁷⁹

Hitler's criticisms were not without foundation. From the start of the campaign, Halder, von Bock and Guderian had not directed operations in accordance with the intentions of the "Barbarossa" plan, but had fixed their eyes upon Moscow as the main objective. Von Brauchitsch had failed to assert himself in the role of Commander-in-Chief, either by clearly proposing a reversion to the OKH plan or by ordering a strict adherence to the "Barbarossa" plan.

In the opinion of General Hoth, the commander of the 3 Panzer Group, his forces could only have carried out a successful turning movement to the north in accordance with

the subsequent operation to be conducted after the smashing of the Russian armed forces" (Plocher, p. 5). When the OKL adhered to the "Barbarossa" plan Halder irritably complained that it had got ". . . a totally muddled conception about concentrating air strength against Leningrad" (Halder KTB, III, 32, 1 July 1941).

⁷⁹KTB OKW, I, 1065.

the "Barbarossa" plan if it had been ordered between 1 and 10 July.⁸⁰ At that time the mobile forces could have moved through favourable terrain in the rear of the enemy pinned down by Army Group "North" and thus achieved the envelopment victory in the north which Hitler had evidently envisaged. In its Deployment Directive, the OKH acknowledged its responsibility for deciding when they should turn.⁸¹ But once Guderian crossed the Dnieper and drew half of Army Group "Centre" after him, the chance of an early northward movement was lost. Later, after the battle of Smolensk, neither the terrain nor the state of the enemy presented a favourable opportunity for a decisive envelopment battle on the north flank of Army Group "Centre".

Nevertheless, Hitler must also share with his Army commanders some of the blame for the failure to order the turning operation at the decisive moment early in July. It may be said that it was not his responsibility to make an operational decision of this sort. But he was in fact meddling at this level, and had done so since the beginning of

⁸⁰See Hoth, p. 105.

⁸¹See Appendix II, paragraph 4(c).

planning. Significantly, at this time Hitler himself had departed from the "Barbarossa" plan. On 8 July he told von Brauchitsch and Halder that the "ideal solution" would be to leave Army Group "North" to fulfil its objective ". . .with its own forces."⁸² This optimism, he revealed later, resulted from the successful crossing of the Dvina achieved by von Leeb's forces which temporarily convinced him that Army Group "North" needed no help.⁸³

Hitler's criticism of the Army's failure to keep the mobile forces concentrated for operations in accordance with the spirit of the "overall campaign plan"⁸⁴ was hardly justified in view of his own indecision and inconsistency over the selection of objectives. The directives and supplements, orders and counter-orders about the direction to be taken by the mobile forces resulted in the splitting and dispersion of Panzer Groups 3 and 4 in the swamps and forests between Lake Peipus and Lake Ilmen, the diversion of part of Panzer Group 2 to the south in July, and strong disagreements with

⁸²See Halder KTB, III, #53, 8 July 1941; KTB OKW, I, 1021.

⁸³KTB OKW, I, 1041.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 1065.

the OKH and Army Group "South" over the objective of Panzer Group 1 in the first phase of the battle of Uman.⁸⁵

Hitler's complaint that the OKH had allowed its plans to be directed by the tactical concepts and needs of the individual army groups and armies was partly due to his failure to understand the freedom to act upon their own responsibility traditionally granted to field commanders in the German Army. It was also due to Hitler's preference for placing men with weaker personalities in the top appointments of the Army. Von Brauchitsch had been made Commander-in-Chief over the heads of all of the three men who now served him as army group commanders. It seems likely that the command of the OKH would have been exercised rather more firmly by von Rundstedt or von Bock. Similarly, the man whom Ludwig Beck nominated as his successor as Chief of the General Staff, Erich von Manstein, was not acceptable to Hitler. He would undoubtedly have kept a far tighter control over the planning and direction of the campaign than Halder.

⁸⁵Op. cit., 58, 9 July, 61, 10 July 1941.

The failure of Halder personally to conduct the planning for the eastern campaign has been remarked upon in an earlier chapter.⁸⁶ Later, he accepted Hitler's concepts and incorporated them into the written operational plan. But he evidently harboured mental reservations and even criticisms⁸⁷ which remained unexpressed yet which were sufficient to mar his direction of the campaign. His ideas seemed to shift in such a way that they were always diametrically opposed to Hitler's. When Hitler wanted to swing von Bock's Panzer groups north, Halder's eyes were on the road to Moscow. When Hitler became optimistic and was inclined to retain them in the centre, Halder began to worry about the flanks, even as far as Kiev. By the time Hitler was drawn towards Kiev, Halder had reverted to his preference for Moscow. Whether these shifts were a subconscious expression of antipathy for Hitler or merely the result of an earlier recognition of the needs of the situation it is impossible

⁸⁶See Chapter IV.

⁸⁷See Halder KTB, III, 7, 23 June 1941. Halder's belated criticism of change of plan in Rumania was quite unjustified since he had accepted the change in March.

to say. What is certain was that neither he nor von Brauchitsch shared a real understanding with Hitler of the overall concept of the "Barbarossa" plan. As a result, the unsettled points on which they differed became the cause of mutual recrimination over errors for which all three shared responsibility.

CHAPTER IX

THE IMPROVISED PLANS

The Choices Open

After the abandonment of the "Barbarossa" plan the German leaders were left with three alternatives: to seek a political solution by means of peace negotiations; to adopt a new military strategy based on an acceptance of period of static warfare in the winter and a second campaign in 1942; to improvise a decisive victory in 1941. The first solution could have been combined with the second so that if the negotiations failed, operations could be resumed in 1942. But the German leaders were not sufficiently convinced that the situation warranted a negotiated peace. The victorious encirclement battles completed in early August at Smolensk and Uman seemed to pave the way for further successes even though the objectives of Operation "Barbarossa" were now out of reach. The military leaders would probably have settled for the establishment of a series of buffer states between the Black Sea and the Baltic and the transfer of most of the Wehrmacht for the completion of the war in the West. But Hitler's war in Russia was not

merely an indirect solution of the grand strategic problem of defeating Britain. His political, economic and territorial aims were too extensive to be satisfied with a mere revival of the Treaty of Brest Litovsk. In 1938, confronted by unexpected difficulties, he had told his service chiefs that he would adapt circumstances to aims.¹ Now by the same token there was no question of modifying the aims of winning Lebensraum or of destroying Bolshevism.

Hitler had decided to fight a two-front war on the assumption that he could win a quick victory. With Britain, and perhaps later the United States, threatening the south and west of Europe, the Wehrmacht could not accept a protracted war in the East.² Furthermore, it lacked the equipment and training for such a war. Thus the idea of deliberately adopting a military strategy based on two campaigning seasons was barely considered until it was too late.³

¹IMT, XXXVII, 079-L, 548.

²See KTB OKW, I, 1033.

³See Liddell Hart, On the Other Side. . . , pp. 284-85. See also U.S. Army Europe, Historical Division, Heidelberg, "Construction of a Strategic Defence Line in the East proposed by General of Infantry Olbricht, Chief of the General Army Office, January-February 1942," typescript.

There remained the third choice, a resumption of Blitzkrieg operations to seek a decisive victory before winter. This would be an improvisation because the forces were still deployed for the unattainable "Barbarossa" plan. It would also be a gamble since success was not certain and failure could mean the loss of the war. Above all it required a fresh analysis of the situation and a clear expression of operational aims which were attainable with the force and time available.⁴ However, General Halder had no confidence in the ability of von Brauchitsch to demand such aims from Hitler. He was, Halder had noted earlier, dominated by his anxiety not to reveal any opinions which contradicted those of the Fuehrer.⁵ As a result, on 7 July, the Chief of the General Staff took the unusual step of discussing the selection of new operational objectives with his rival on the OKW, General Jodl.⁶

Halder's first question was "Do we want to defeat the enemy forces or go after economic objectives (Ukraine, Caucasus)?" Jodl replied that the "Fuehrer thinks we can

⁴See Halder KTB, III, 153, 4 August, 155, 5 August 1941.

⁵Ibid., p. 136, 31 July 1941.

⁶See Ibid., p. 159, 7 August 1941; Warlimont, p. 186.

do both at the same time."⁷ However, Halder was not convinced that this was entirely possible since he considered that a major defeat of the Soviet forces could only be achieved by concentrating German forces for an operation with a ". . . far-reaching, decisive objective,"⁸ namely Moscow. Thus Leningrad would have to be reached with the forces already available in Army Group "North." Similarly, Army Group "South" would have to take advantage of its recent victory at Uman to seize the Ukraine and eliminate the Korosten bastion, north-west of Kiev, with its own forces. Although this meant postponing the Caucasus operation, it was, Halder said, not a question of Moscow or the Ukraine, but of Moscow and the Ukraine; otherwise, the source of enemy strength would not be conquered before the autumn. Finally Halder urged Jodl to impress upon Hitler the need to concentrate all forces for the operation against Moscow and to "play down" the importance of the Russian forces near Kiev.⁹

Although Jodl supported the OKH proposal with a situation report recommending a concerted attack on Moscow for

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., p. 160, 7 August 1941.

the end of August,¹⁰ Hitler refused to give priority to such an operation. He attempted at first to adhere to some of the operational objectives set for Operation "Barbarossa", Leningrad, then the Donets Basin and finally Moscow.¹¹ His desire to conduct tight enveloping operations on the flanks of the army groups led him into the concept of a great envelopment battle around Kiev.

The arguments between Hitler and the Army leaders over the order of priority between Kiev and Moscow were a more open repetition of their disagreements over Leningrad and Moscow. Their exchanges of views have been described elsewhere and need not be detailed here. Hitler's view was clearly expressed in the same strategic study dated 22 August in which he criticised the Army leaders' handling of the "Barbarossa" plan.¹² Although prepared to carry out a post mortem of this plan, Hitler refused to believe that it was quite dead. He sought to adhere to the general sequence of operations it contained but limited the range of its aims since the line Archangel - Volga - Caucasus was no longer

¹⁰KTB OKW, I, p. 1044.

¹¹Ibid., p. 1043.

¹²Ibid., pp. 1063-68.

attainable. The first aim continued to be the destruction of the Soviet armed forces. The second was the prevention of rearmament by depriving the Russians of their major sources of raw material and industrial centres. In addition, the protection of the supplies of Swedish iron ore and Rumanian oil also had to be ensured by establishing German control over the Baltic and over the Crimea and South Ukraine. Compared with these aims the capture of Moscow was less important. "However," Hitler reminded his Army leaders, "this is no new concept, but one which I have made clear and plain from the beginning of the campaign."¹³

The essential aim of clearing the Baltic coast could be achieved, Hitler insisted, only with the help of forces from Army Group "Centre." Even more important was the need to send forces southward to envelop the Russian salient at Kiev. Hitler was convinced that the opportunity presented here would be far more decisive than the capture of Moscow. For at Kiev the Wehrmacht could destroy large Soviet formations and at the same time open the way for the capture of the economic objectives in the Ukraine and Donets basin

¹³Ibid., p. 1064.

and the elimination of the Soviet air threat to the Rumanian oil fields. Furthermore, Hitler pointed out, the arguments that the Kiev operation would be time-consuming and perhaps cause the Moscow offensive to open too late, or that it would impose too great a strain upon the mechanised forces, were not acceptable. Indeed, the elimination of the Russian threat to the south flank of Army Group "Centre" would make its subsequent task of attacking Moscow easier, not more difficult.¹⁴ While on this subject, Hitler took the opportunity to stress yet again that when the Moscow offensive was launched, after the Kiev operation, it should have the task, ". . . not of storming forward into endless space," but of destroying the enemy forces in tight envelopments.¹⁵

The victory at Kiev which resulted from Hitler's decision to override the OKH has been described as "the greatest cauldron battle in history."¹⁶ According to the OKW report, the operation yielded 665,000 prisoners, 884 tanks and 3,718 guns captured or destroyed.¹⁷ Meanwhile, the operations of

¹⁴Ibid., p. 1067.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶See Werner Haupt, Kiev, die groesste Kesselschlacht der Geschichte (Bad Neuheim, 1964).

¹⁷Ibid., p. 180.

of Army Group "North" near Lake Ilmen led to the capture of a further 53,000 prisoners and the capture or destruction of 320 tanks and 695 guns.¹⁸ The elimination of the Russian army group at Kiev enabled von Rundstedt to occupy the Ukraine, most of the Crimea and the Donets Basin. In the course of these operations, Army Group "South" took a further 400,000 prisoners, and captured or destroyed 753 tanks and 2,800 guns.¹⁹ Early in October Army Group "Centre" launched Operation "Typhoon", the offensive towards Moscow. At the double-envelopment battle of Viasma and Briansk von Bock's forces took 663,000 prisoners, and captured or destroyed 1,242 tanks and 5,452 guns.²⁰ But in spite of these enormous losses the Russians continued to resist the German advance. As the autumn rains turned the roads to quagmires, the German armies bogged down. They made sporadic attempts to resume their attacks when the ground froze hard, but Russian counter-attacks flung them back from Rostov in the south, Tikhvin in the north, and Moscow in the centre.

¹⁸ See Appendix

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

In spite of the claims to the contrary,²¹ it seems very doubtful whether the OKH plan for a direct advance on Moscow could have achieved a more decisive result. The Russians were expecting such an attack and had prepared their defence to meet it.²² The frontal attack proposed by the OKH towards Moscow would have had little chance of eliminating the Soviet forces on its flanks. At most it could have pushed them back. The envelopment of the enemy between Viasma and Briansk with two Panzer groups would probably not have achieved a greater success than that conducted by three Panzer groups in October. Thus even if the Germans had reached Moscow they could hardly have inflicted losses upon the enemy as great as those which resulted from the battle of Kiev and the operations which followed it. After reaching the city, their forces, extended in a great salient would not have been favourably deployed to deal with the enemy threats to its base and flanks south of Lake Ilmen and north of Kiev. Subsequent German attempts at envelopment operations from this salient would have lacked the "tightness"

²¹See especially Carl Wagener, Moskau, 1941. Der Angriff auf die russische Hauptstadt (Bad Neuheim), p. 199 ff. Wagener presents a hypothetical construction of what might have happened if the OKH had had its way.

²²See Eremenko, pp. 202-4, 216.

which Hitler rightly insisted was essential to their success. The economic conquests in the Moscow area would not have exceeded those actually gained in the South. The Russian railway network would have lost its most important junction, but contact between the eastern industrial areas and the front could still have been maintained on the lines north and south of the city. Thus the capture of Moscow could have been decisive only if it had resulted in a psychological or political collapse. But in view of the terrible losses of human life and resources, stoically borne by the Russian people in 1941 and in the following year, it does not seem likely that such a collapse would have resulted from the loss of the capital to a second Grande Armée.

Some have argued that the early capture of Moscow would have given the German army a better chance to prepare winter positions and to complete its victory in the following year.²³ This view ignores the fact that the OKH plan assumed a continuation of operations after the fall of the city, to capture Leningrad, the Ukraine the Donets Basin and if possible the route to the Caucasus. Furthermore, Hitler had

²³See Op. cit., p. 206.

ordered that Moscow and Leningrad should be razed to the ground. They would therefore have offered few advantages to the German winter defence. Even if these orders had been abandoned and the great salient with Moscow at its apex had been defended, it might only have offered the Russian winter offensive a more specific objective to envelop and destroy as occurred at Stalingrad in the following year.

It is pointless to indulge in speculations of this nature except to suggest that even if Moscow had been placed first instead of last in Hitler's list of priorities the Germans would still have fallen short of complete victory. The tasks which they had set themselves in Russia exceeded their resources. The arguments of the Army leaders and most of the field commanders served only to waste valuable time in discussion. With the means and time available they were unable to destroy sufficient Russian formations or capture enough Russian territory, industrial plants or raw material to deprive the Soviet Union of its power to offer further resistance. The many flaws in their planning of the campaign in the East had tended both to conceal and to compound the difficulties which lay before them. The misassessment of the comparative strengths, the miscalculation of the time

required to conduct the envelopment battles, the failure to base operations on the logistical needs of the mobile forces, the half-concealed lack of accord and inconsistency over the objectives and lines of operation, all these lay at the root of the failure of the Blitzkrieg in Russia.

CHAPTER X

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study has been to seek in the German planning for the campaign in the East the answers to four questions: Did Hitler follow a great pre-conceived plan? Why did he decide to invade Russia before ending the war against Britain? What role did the German military leaders play in the planning for the invasion of Russia? Why did the Blitzkrieg fail in Russia? The conclusions are, therefore, presented in the form of answers to these questions and to the further question of Hitler's responsibility for the failure of the campaign which arises from them.

Did Hitler Follow a Great Plan?

What light does the German planning for the invasion of Russia cast upon the question of whether Hitler followed a great pre-conceived plan? At first the absence of any planning for such an operation until after the defeat of France would seem to suggest that Hitler was an opportunist and that the policies expressed in Mein Kampf and in his public speeches had little relation to his actions. This,

however, is a false impression. Hitler did indeed follow a pre-conceived plan. Throughout his career, though he used the flexible methods of an opportunist, he adhered rigidly to the aim of winning a great eastern empire.

His consistency of purpose was partly veiled by his failure to create a staff responsible for grand strategic planning. Thus there is a lack of documentary evidence of the grand strategic connection between Nazi foreign policy and the military operations of the Second World War. German grand strategy must be traced less in the files of the military staffs than in the sweeping statements and vague hints of Hitler's secret speeches and casual conversations. But even though this evidence sometimes appears slight, especially in the eyes of soldiers or archivists, it is substantial enough to belie the assertion that Hitler had no grand strategy.

The Army leaders by refusing until July 1940 to accept Hitler's ideas as a valid grand strategic basis for their planning, neither served Hitler loyally nor opposed him effectively. Since the war it has been in their interest to minimise their responsibility for aggression and for the strategic errors which contributed to the German defeat by

stressing that there was no over-all "war plan." They have supported General Halder's assertion that Hitler produced ". . . a chaos of improvisation which has already become next to impossible for the historian to unravel." This, however, was an expression of hope rather than fact. For a close examination of the secret speeches, decisions and directives which Hitler gave to his military leaders confirms that they were consistently related to the Lebensraumpolitik described in his early writings and public speeches.

Events did not always turn out the way Hitler hoped. So, in order to continue the relentless pursuit of his aims, he was forced to adapt his methods to the new circumstances. In 1938 he wanted to invade Czechoslovakia but Britain and France forced him to negotiate. He made a drastic departure from his usual line of policy when the refusal of Poland to become a satellite forced him to isolate her by means of a pact with Russia in 1939. The declaration of war by the Western Powers forced him to improvise an attack on France earlier than he would have chosen. But these actions were quite consistent with the internal and external policies and grand strategy he had followed since 1933, which were intended to create in Germany and Europe a favourable situation for

a war of conquest against Russia.

Hitler's grand strategy was based upon his determination to win his eastern empire without a repetition of the long coalition struggle which had led to the German defeat in the First World War. He sought to attain his aims by a series of political coups and limited wars. This demanded a readiness to strike when internal weaknesses or divisions between potential enemies presented the opportunity. Once the process of conquering territory occupied by non-Germans had begun in Czechoslovakia in 1939, Hitler was driven by a desperate determination to achieve his aims before a great coalition of enemies united to oppose him. This explains the urgency behind his decisions to destroy Poland and to strike in the West. For the same reason he felt compelled to invade Russia even though the war in the West was not completely won and finally to gamble on a Blitzkrieg victory even when the aims of Operation "Barbarossa" eluded his grasp.

He could at any time have modified his aims. After 1938 he had surpassed Bismarck by unifying Greater Germany including the German-speaking territories of Austria. In the winter of 1939 he could have made genuine attempts to use

the territories he had won in central and eastern Europe as bargaining counters with which to negotiate a favourable peace. In the summer of 1940 great opportunities for conquest lay open to him in the South. In August or September 1941, he could have sought to impose a second Treaty of Brest-Litovsk upon the Soviet Union. But on each occasion he chose a riskier course because it led him nearer to his inflexible goal, the conquest of a great empire in the East.

Why did Hitler Invade Russia Before Defeating Britain?

Hitler decided to attack Russia before ending the war against Britain because he was determined to complete the conquest of Lebensraum in the East as soon as possible. His aim in the West in 1940 had been to inflict upon France and Britain a defeat which would prevent them from interfering with German expansion into Russia. By June he thought he had succeeded and he began to make long term economic preparations for the eastern campaign. But he soon began to realise that the British would require another demonstration of German power to make them give up. This, however, did not need to interfere with the plans for the East, especially since, in the last week of July, Hitler decided that the Russian campaign would require a full summer season and would, therefore, have to be delayed until 1941. This left

only enough time to deliver a swift, direct attack on Britain.

Some historians have expressed surprise at Hitler's preference for a quick solution to the problem of Britain because there seemed ". . . to be no compelling reason for its adoption."¹ Telford Taylor has questioned whether the air attack on Britain and Operation "Sea Lion" were "secondary operations - speculative ventures in the nature of time-killers, pending the maturation of eastern plans. . ."² The evidence certainly supports an affirmative answer.

Throughout his political career Hitler had pursued the aim of eastward expansion. It is hardly likely that at the moment of his great triumph in France he lost sight of his ultimate objective. The reason why there was insufficient time for a war of attrition against Britain was because the great task in the East, the attack on Russia, was on no account to be delayed by these interim activities in the West. The Soviet forces were undergoing modernisation, and, furthermore, Hitler suspected that by 1942, the United States might be prepared to enter the war.

He decided, therefore, to launch an air offensive, gambling that it might cause a collapse of the British will

¹Wheatley, p. 141.

²Taylor, Breaking Wave, p. 75.

to resist great enough to permit a Channel-crossing. The collapse would have to be considerable, because he envisaged Operation "Sea Lion", not so much as a sea-borne assault as the transportation of army to occupy a defeated nation. In contrast to his attitude towards the other operations of the war, Hitler avoided active participation in the preparation and conduct of the aerial assault on Britain as if he did not wish to be directly connected with it. On 31 July 1940, before the battle of Britain had begun, he ordered an increase in the Army to 180 divisions in order to have 60 with which to garrison the West and 120 for the attack on Russia. This shows that he was not optimistic about the attack on Britain and began to prepare for a two-front war even before the Luftwaffe had made its bid for air supremacy over England.

It seems probable that Hitler expected the idea of a two-front war to provoke from his military leaders more of the tiresome and pessimistic criticism of the type which he had heard during the planning of operations against Czechoslovakia and France. He therefore presented his decision to attack Russia not as the fulfilment of his dream of conquering Lebensraum, which might be considered irres-

possible with a war still unfinished in the West, but as a grand strategic means of defeating Britain by depriving her of her last hope of finding a continental ally. If this had been the true reason, the prior defeat of Britain would have removed the necessity for an attack on Russia. But since the territorial aims he outlined in the East were clearly those of the Lebensraumpolitik which was the very cornerstone of Nazism it is difficult to believe that Hitler really would have abandoned the plans for an eastern campaign in the case of a British collapse. Later, he even admitted that he feared that such a collapse would make it difficult to arouse the German people against Russia, and "therefore Russia must be attacked first." This statement contained, however, an element of rationalisation, for it was made in February 1941 when Hitler knew that there was no longer any hope of defeating Britain before the attack on Russia. While there was still time he continued to attempt the prior defeat of Britain.

By the end of September 1940 it was clear that the attacks of the Luftwaffe had failed. While confirming his intention of attacking Russia in the spring of 1941, Hitler turned to the possibility of defeating Britain by means of

a number of quick, decisive blows in the Mediterranean theatre. Like the Battle of Britain, these operations did not constitute an alternative to the invasion of Russia, but were a further set of stop-gap improvisations, which Hitler regarded with some scepticism from the start. By the end of November 1940, the uncooperative attitudes of Franco, Petain and Mussolini, and the refusal of the Soviet Union to commit herself to a parallel attack on the British east of the Persian Gulf, convinced Hitler that he could not risk a major effort in the Middle East until he had settled with Russia.

The increased hostility of Russia towards Germany was frequently cited by Hitler as a further justification for the decision to attack Russia. But the conflicts over Finland and Rumania in the second half of 1940 were mainly the outcome of Hitler's decision to attack Russia in 1941 and the changes of policy which attended it. Thus, the deterioration of Russo-German relations was far more the result than the cause of Hitler's decision to strike in the East.

What was the Role of the German Military Leaders in the Planning of the Russian Campaign?

In the course of the preparations for the invasion of Russia the German military leaders conducted their usual

tasks of operational and administrative planning. In addition, the OKW carried out detailed studies and plans for the economic exploitation of the Soviet Union and the OKH prepared instructions for the participation of the Army in the ideological warfare against Bolshevism. In contrast to their attitude during the planning for the campaign in the West, the Army leaders carried out their role willingly and with an optimism so great that it led to serious errors of judgement and grave flaws in the operational plan.

The attitude of most of the German military leaders towards the invasion of Russia differed little from Hitler's concept. Broadly speaking, they were anti-Bolshevist and anti-Slav. Like Hitler they saw in the establishment of an eastern empire and a row of vassal buffer states a solution to the military, economic and political problems of Germany.

However, the majority of the senior generals had not always shown such open agreement with Hitler's Lebensraum-politik. Until June 1940 their attitude had been dominated by the humiliation of the defeat they had experienced in 1918 and by the fear that Hitler's reckless foreign policy would lead only to a repetition of that calamity. Their reserve

towards Hitler was heightened by their growing awareness that they had suffered at his hands a political defeat, more subtle but hardly less humiliating than their military failure in 1918. The independence in the state which their social status and political influence had given them was lost. They had become an isolated group in German society, surviving only through possession of military skills necessary to the Nazi regime. Thus there was seldom true accord between Hitler and the leaders of the Army, especially when he realised that their pessimistic assessment of the situation in the late 1930's made them unwilling to accept his grand strategic ideas for the conquest of Lebensraum as a serious basis for planning.

The victory over France brought about a temporary change in the attitudes of the Army leaders. They experienced an overwhelming sense of relief. Now they viewed Hitler's policy with greater optimism and saw in their contribution to its fulfilment a means of retaining some semblance of their old prestige and status. Furthermore, they acquired an inflated confidence in the invincibility of the Wehrmacht. As a result, the OKH not only began to plan the invasion of Russia early in July, but did so with a recklessness that probably surprised even Hitler since it assumed

the practicability of defeating Russia in the autumn of 1940. Even though von Brauchitsch and Halder modified their views in the next ten days, they continued to believe that a decisive Blitzkrieg victory could be won over Russia in the course of a single campaign.

Discussion of the political and moral errors of the German generals in the Second World War and the deliberate transfer of the blame for failures on to the convenient shoulders of Adolf Hitler has tended to draw attention away from the military errors made by the Army leaders in the course of planning the invasion of Russia. These errors go far to explain the failure of the subsequent campaign.

The claim that the General Staff's freedom of action was limited by the aims and ideas imposed upon it by Hitler is not entirely true. The OKH commenced planning before Hitler made his views known. The highly inaccurate reports of its Intelligence Branch and the bold plans of its Operations Department revealed the same under-estimation of the military, economic and political strength of the Soviet Union and over-confidence in the Wehrmacht which he later expressed. Thus the Army leaders shared Hitler's belief that the Soviet state could be overthrown and most of

European Russia conquered by means of a Blitzkrieg operation similar to that conducted in Poland and the West. They agreed, too, that the destruction of the enemy forces should be the first objective of the attack.

The subsequent objectives and lines of operation were, however, the source of disagreement between Hitler and the OKH. But the Army leaders made no attempt openly to argue their case for a direct advance on Moscow. Instead, they outwardly accepted Hitler's decision that the Baltic coast and Leningrad should first be conquered and modified the wording of their Deployment Directive to meet his requirements. Nevertheless, they neither pointed out the terrain problems which would be encountered by mobile forces in the area between Leningrad and Moscow nor did they plan details of the great turning operation toward Leningrad which Hitler had demanded. Hitler seems to have suspected that they did not really agree with his decision and repeatedly warned them that a frontal advance on Moscow would merely push back instead of enveloping the Russian Forces. The subsequent attempts of the Army leaders to develop the operations in accordance with their original plan led to a dispersal of effort and serious delays while the arguments which

should have been raised before the campaign were finally settled.

Similar duplicity characterised the attitude of the OKH towards Hitler's changes in the operational plan of Army Group "South". The cancellation of the 12 Army's thrust from Rumania was fully endorsed by the OKH in March 1941. But this did not prevent General Halder from expressing in June belated and futile criticism of this decision.

The final phase of the operation was also the subject of further inconsistencies and omissions. Hitler's initial verbal orders demanded a single Blitzkrieg operation and a "subsidiary operation" to capture the Caucasus. Later he indicated that a clear-cut end to the war was not to be expected and that almost a third of the Wehrmacht would remain in Russia to guard the eastern borders of the new Germanic empire. The OKH, however, made no adequate preparations for a long struggle extending into the winter. Even the Caucasus operation was neglected in the Army's planning. As in the case of the turning movement on Leningrad, the OKH attempted neither to reject the operation as unfeasible, nor to make provisions for its implementation.

In fact the operational plan of the OKH consisted of a Blitzkrieg formula based upon the experiences gained in earlier campaigns. The Army leaders assumed that the campaign would consist of a period of heavy fighting near the frontier and then a mopping up operation and the almost unopposed occupation of the rest of the country. Their complete reliance upon such a sequence of events was made clear by their failure to provide for winter clothing and equipment and their readiness to go ahead with the campaign in spite of the warning that the available gasoline and diesel supplies would suffice only for deployment and two months of operations.

Although the Army leaders viewed the proposed operations in Russia with optimism, they were less confident when they viewed the grand strategic situation in which Operation "Barbarossa" was to take place. They were uneasy at the prospect of a two-front war and especially the strain it would place upon the Luftwaffe. They would have preferred to go ahead with Operation "Sea Lion" before attacking Russia. But in expressing such a preference, they ignored the fact that the inadequate equipment of both the Luftwaffe and the Navy made a cross-channel invasion quite unrealistic in 1940 or 1941.

In spite of their speculations in July 1940 about a campaign in the Middle East and in the Mediterranean as an alternative to "Sea Lion," neither von Brauchitsch nor Halder favoured the complex coalition strategy in the south which Hitler attempted to develop in October 1940. They made no attempt to discuss the possibilities there with the leaders of the other two services. But since they were unable to suggest any other practicable means of ending the war in the West, they were left no choice but to accept Hitler's argument that the attack on Russia would provide the solution to the problem of Britain. Thus, although the failure of the attempts to defeat Britain in 1940 was not the reason for the decision to attack Russia, it did become a major factor discouraging the German military leaders from opposing Operation "Barbarossa". It seemed to offer them a solution to the strategic impasse in the West which would enable them to utilize the great land forces and Blitzkrieg methods in which they had become so confident.

The most remarkable features of the German Army leaders' role in the planning for the East was not their willingness and optimism, but their inefficiency and errors. After his impetuous and totally irresponsible proposal for an attack on Russia in the autumn of 1940, Field Marshal von

Brauchitsch played an ineffectual role as Commander-in-Chief. His contributions to the development of the operational planning were apparently negligible. His overall concept of the campaign was grossly incomplete. He was aware of the major divergence of opinion between Hitler and the General Staff over the operational objectives but he failed to bring the question into open discussion before the campaign began. He was informed of the economic and logistic problems but left it to von Bock to discuss their implications with Hitler. He accepted Hitler's ideological policies as part of the war against Bolshevism and issued orders involving the Army in his criminal acts. In accordance with German Army tradition he left the conduct of operations to the Chief of the General Staff, but during the various conflicts with Hitler he failed to present the viewpoint of the OKH clearly or firmly. Hitler had long regarded him with contempt, and by the end of 1941 even Halder's loyalty towards him was severely strained.

The role of General Halder was, however, hardly more creditable than that of his Commander-in-Chief. He delegated the planning for the eastern campaign to several subordinates but failed to combine their ideas and those of Hitler into

a unified and realistic concept. Halder shared with von Brauchitsch the responsibility for the omissions and deliberate evasions in the operational plan and for the inflexibility which made Operation "Barbarossa" a dangerous gamble. Halder allowed himself to become too involved in detailed staff work to retain the breadth of view and imagination necessary to foresee the difficulties and dangers in the East. When events forced him to face the consequences of the errors and omissions of his planning he resorted to his original proposal for an advance towards Moscow, dogmatically insisting, without any real justification, that this final Blitzkrieg operation would prove decisive.

The attitude of the leaders of the OKW towards the Russian campaign was at first more cautious than that of the OKH. In July 1940 when consulted on the Army's proposal for an autumn attack Keitel and Jodl advised Hitler to postpone it until the following spring. Keitel has claimed that he also attempted in August to persuade Hitler not to invade Russia until the war in the West was completed. But once this advice had been rejected Keitel made no further protests and devoted his entire energies to the furtherance of Hitler's plans. Jodl's doubts about the ability of the

German economy to support a multi-front war lasted at least until December 1940. But he made no attempt to question or criticise Hitler's decision to attack Russia. Late in July 1941, confronted by the urgent need to achieve a decisive victory before winter, Jodl supported the Army leaders' argument for an attack towards Moscow, but as the opportunity for an envelopment at Kiev developed, he returned to Hitler's support.

The role of the Luftwaffe leaders in the planning for the invasion of Russia is difficult to assess. The Luftwaffe chiefs rarely took an active part in the military conferences with Hitler. Most of the discussions of policy and strategy between Hitler and Reichsmarschall Goering were conducted on a personal basis and were not recorded. In spite of his claims to the contrary, Goering seems to have regarded the conquest of Russia as both militarily feasible and economically necessary. His Luftwaffe subordinates participated only in operational planning. Some of them had misgivings about the strain of a multi-front war, but their views were rejected by the enthusiastic young Chief of Air Staff,

General Hans Jeschonnek.³

Due to the minor role of the German Navy in the eastern campaign the Naval Staff played little part in the planning for Operation "Barbarossa". Nevertheless, from its ranks came the most outspoken support and the most persistent criticism of Hitler's grand strategy. No military document independently compiled by the German service staffs in the Second World War expressed more explicit agreement with the grand strategic, economic and political aims of Hitler's Lebensraumpolitik than the Naval Staff study "Observations on Russia," dated 28 July 1940. Furthermore, like the Army plan outlined to Hitler a week earlier, this document revealed the astonishingly optimistic belief that Russia could be defeated in the autumn of 1940. On the other hand, Admiral Raeder from whom Hitler deliberately at first concealed his decision to strike eastward, maintained a critical attitude towards Hitler's grand strategy for several months. Unlike his fellow service chiefs, Raeder consis-

³In August 1943 overwhelmed by his responsibility for the failure of the Luftwaffe, Jeschonnek followed the example of the head of the Technical Directorate of the Luftwaffe, General Ernst Udet, and committed suicide.

tently advocated the alternative of a campaign in the Mediterranean and Middle East. This had the aim of first defeating Britain and so freeing the Wehrmacht for an attack on Russia from the South which would have had the advantage of commencing with the capture of the oil fields of the Caucasus. However, after Hitler's acceptance of the "Barbarossa" plan in December 1940, Raeder, too, fell silent, and the success of Hitler's grand strategy became dependent upon the ability of the Blitzkrieg to defeat the Soviet Union, by means of an attack from the West.

Why Did the Blitzkrieg Fail in Russia?

The Blitzkrieg failed in Russia because it had insufficient strength, mobility, range and staying-power to defeat the Soviet forces and capture or destroy sufficient of the vital sources of Russia's economic strength in the course of the short campaigning season available. Furthermore, the Blitzkrieg as conducted in Russia had lost most of the psychological advantages which had contributed to its previous successes.

The German military leaders conceived the invasion of Russia as a Blitzkrieg campaign similar to those of 1939 and 1940. But even in the planning stages "Barbarossa" lacked many of the characteristics of the Blitzkrieg operations in Poland and the West. The division of the Wehrmacht between the East, the West and the Mediterranean and the size of the Soviet forces deprived the Germans of superiority or at least equality of strength they had achieved in their earlier campaigns. The decision to advance on all sectors of a wide front which became wider as they progressed prevented the Germans from achieving the same degree of concentration of force as that in Poland or the West. The main feature of Blitzkrieg operations, the concerted onslaught of air and armoured forces, was reduced by the lower ratio of tanks and aircraft to the distances to be covered. After the Cretan operation Hitler's decision not to employ airborne forces again deprived the Blitzkrieg in the East of an element which had been of great operational and psychological value. Similarly in Russia there was no attempt to use a real or even mythical "Fifth Column" capable of undermining the confidence and unity of the enemy. On the contrary, the brutality of the Nazi racial policies soon destroyed any

delusions that the Germans had come as "liberators." Thus the psychological impact of the entire attack was much reduced because the Blitzkrieg was no longer a combination of startling military novelties and skilful propaganda. The Russians had observed and at least to some extent, prepared for it.

Furthermore, in spite of the enthusiasm and excessive optimism with which they regarded the Blitzkrieg, most of the German planners still lacked understanding of the technical and logistic problems of mechanised warfare. These deficiencies were of vital importance in a land almost devoid of surfaced roads and in which the railway system was useless until every yard of track had been adjusted to German gauge. As the detailed planning progressed in the early months of 1941, the conservative attitudes of some of the generals towards the employment of mobile forces began to return. The bold tactics of deep armoured thrusts which had won such successes elsewhere were overshadowed by a cautious desire to slow down the advance of the Panzer divisions and keep them in contact with the infantry on foot.

Such attitudes, combined with the difficulties of supply, the size of the theatre of operations, adverse weather and terrain, and the strength of the Soviet forces reduced the impact of the Blitzkrieg even in those areas where the Panzer and air forces were concentrated. On other vast sectors of the eastern front there were no elements of the Blitzkrieg at all. German formations were committed to fight without tank support, adequate anti-tank guns or air cover, and with only a sporadic flow of supplies. They operated under conditions similar to those which had characterised warfare in the East in the First World War.

The Germans were not blind to the fact that the degree of surprise, concentration of force and mobility achieved by their forces in Russia would be relatively lower than in the West. Yet they still attempted a Blitzkrieg campaign. They were convinced that the Soviet forces had a lower fighting value than those of the Western Allies. They believed that the Russians had lost the advantage which space had given them in combatting earlier invasions because they could not abandon the industries of Western Russia. They expected that the Communist regime would be weakened and overthrown as a result of their military successes and brutal

ideological warfare. The subsequent campaign proved that there were elements of truth in all these assumptions. The Soviet forces made abysmal errors and suffered defeats on a staggering scale. Many of these were sacrifices necessary to delay the loss of industrial areas. Others were the result of disloyalty or apathy towards Stalin's regime. But the very size of Russia outweighed these weaknesses. Beyond the striving claws of the German pincer movements there were always more miles of forest, marsh and steppe, more Soviet units, more war industries and more loyal Russians to prove that the German leaders had committed a monstrous error in believing that their Blitzkrieg was capable of defeating the Soviet Union.

Hitler's Responsibility for the Failure in the East

This study of the German planning for the eastern campaign has shown that many of the errors and failures commonly attributed to Hitler were in fact those of the OKH. This does not necessitate, however, any major reappraisal of Hitler as a military leader. He displayed greater insight than most of his generals in considering the operational problems in the East and he probably understood better than they the true risks of the campaign. But the basic grand

strategic errors of Operation "Barbarossa" were of his making. They had their origin in the flaws which had marred his Lebensraumpolitik from the start: his misjudgement of Britain, his under-estimation of the Bolshevist regime in Russia and his over-estimation of the aggressive capabilities of his own generals. The continued resistance of the British, who in Hitler's original concept were to have been the allies of Germany, had resulted in the division of the Wehrmacht to garrison the coasts of Europe while the conquest in the East took place. His contempt for the Slavs and the "Jewish yoke" of their Bolshevist leadership had made him confident that Russia was "ripe for dissolution." He clung to the same delusion in 1941. Thus he took the risk of a two-front war confident that the bulk of the Wehrmacht could be turned to fight the British after the campaign of a few weeks in Russia. He felt no necessity to develop with Japan and his other allies a well-coordinated coalition grand strategy against the Soviet Union, nor to win the support of the Russian people against their Bolshevik masters. He relied instead upon the military methods of the Blitzkrieg, combined with a campaign of political terror which staked all upon the achievement of a swift victory. But here too, he repeated

an earlier error. In 1933 he had entrusted the Army leaders with the task of developing the Blitzkrieg instrument for the conquest of Lebensraum. They had disappointed him with their failure to grasp his intent and realise his wishes with imagination and enthusiasm. In 1941 they disappointed him again. But the subsequent course of the campaign in Russia was to bring not merely disappointment to its author but desolation to eastern Europe and death to millions of innocent victims.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

EXTRACT: MAJOR GENERAL MARCKS (CHIEF OF STAFF OF
THE 18 ARMY)Draft Operational Plan East

The purpose of the campaign is to strike the Russian Armed Forces and to make Russia incapable of entering the war as an opponent of Germany in the foreseeable future. In order to protect Germany against Russian bombers Russia must be occupied to the line Lower Don - central Volga - north Dnieper. The main centres of the Russian war economy lie in the food and raw material producing areas of the Ukraine and Donets Basin and the armament industries of Moscow and Leningrad. The eastern industrial regions are not yet productive enough.

Of these areas Moscow constitutes the economic, political and spiritual centre of the USSR. Its capture would destroy the coordination of the Russian state.

The War Zone:

Moscow will be protected from the North and West by great forest and marsh areas which extend from the White Sea southward past Leningrad, via Vitebsk to the line Kobrin - Lutsk - Kiev. Their southern part, the Pripet Marsh, divides the frontier zone into two separate operational areas. The forest is most extensive between Leningrad and Moscow and in the Pripet Marsh. Through its narrowest and somewhat broken central region pass the main roads from Warsaw and East Prussia to Moscow via Sluzk, Minsk and Vitebsk.

South of the Pripet Marsh lies the open country of East Galizia and the Ukraine. The terrain here is favourable for combat but mobility is limited by the lack of roads (only one main road via Kiev in an east-west direction) and by that great obstacle, the Dnieper.

The land north of the Pripet Marsh is more favourable for movement due to its greater number of good roads; while the Ukraine is more favourable for combat. In the North battle will have to be confined mainly to the lines of the roads.

Enemy:

The Russians will not do us the favour of attacking. We must expect that the Russian Army will remain on the defensive against us and that only the Air Force and the Navy, namely the submarine arm, will attack. Russia will wage war by means of a blockade. For this purpose a Russian break-through into Rumania seems probable, in order to deprive us of oil. At the very least strong air attacks on the Rumanian oil fields must be expected.

On the other hand, The Russians cannot avoid a decision as they did in 1812. Modern armed forces of 100 divisions cannot abandon their sources of supply. It is to be expected that the Russian Army will stand to do battle in a defensive position protecting greater Russia and in the eastern Ukraine. It will find a good defensive position on the line Dvina as far as Plozk - Beresina - the Pripet Marsh - Zbrutsch - Pruth or Dniester. This line is already partly fortified. A withdrawal to the Dnieper is also possible. In front of this line the Russians will probably only fight delaying actions.

Russia has at present 151 infantry divisions, 32 cavalry divisions, 38 motor mechanised brigades. In the opinion of the 12th Section (sic) it will not be possible to increase this total appreciably by next spring. Of these forces the following are tied down:

34 infantry divs., 8 cavalry divs. 8 mot. mech. bdes.
against Japan;

6 infantry divs., 1 cavalry div., against Turkey;
15 infantry divs., 2 mot. mech. bdes. against Finland

55 infantry divs., 9 cavalry divs. 10 mot. mech. bdes.

This leaves against Germany: 96 infantry divs., 23 cavalry divs., 28 mot. mech. bdes.

Distribution of forces: At present the concentrations lie on the outer wings in the Ukraine and the Baltic States. The forces are almost evenly divided south and north of the Pripet Marsh, with a reserve around Moscow. This form of distribution can also be expected in the event of a war with Germany. Whether a concentration is built up north or south depends upon political developments. The strength in the North will probably be kept greater than in the South.

The Russian army could build up a mobile reserve of tank brigades, motorised divisions, army artillery and cavalry divisions, which with good leadership could have significant effects. But there is so far no sign of such a force. Because the Russians no longer possess the superiority of numbers they had in the World War, it is more likely that once the long, extended line of their forces has been broken through they will be unable to concentrate or coordinate counter measures. Fighting in isolated battles they will soon succumb to the superiority of the German troops and leadership.

Own Troops:

Allowing for occupation forces in Norway, Denmark and the West the following should be available against Russia next spring: 24 Panzer divisions, 110 infantry and mountain divisions, 12 motorised divisions, 1 cavalry division. Total: 147 divisions.

Conduct of the Campaign:

Due to the size of the combat zone and its divisions by the Pripet Marsh a decision will not be achieved in a single battle against the Russian Army. Initially, it will be necessary to divide and advance against the two main parts of the Russian Army separately with the object of uniting later for an operation to reach the other side of the great forest region.

Operational Intentions:

The main force of the German Army will strike that part of the Russian Army in northern Russia and will take Moscow. It will advance from the line Erst Litovsk - Insterburg towards Rogachev - Vitebsk. South of the Pripet Marsh weaker forces will prevent the advance of the enemy southern group towards Rumania by an attack towards Kiev and the middle Dnieper. They will also prepare for subsequent cooperation with the main forces east of the Dnieper.

The attack on the Russian forces in the Ukraine is made unavoidable by the need to defend the Rumanian oil fields. If the main forces of the German Army could strike from Rumania, with support from northern Hungary, Galizia and south-eastern Poland, they could develop the most decisive, major offensive across the Dnieper to Moscow. But neither the political situation across the Balkans nor the

state of the railways and roads in Hungary and Rumania permit the concentration of large German forces in those countries before the outbreak of war. Only an attack from Galizia and south Poland towards Kiev and the middle Dnieper can be carried out with any certainty. This attack cannot be the main operation because the area is too narrow and the distance to Moscow too great. However, it should be carried out with sufficient forces to achieve the destruction of the enemy in the Ukraine and the crossing of the Dnieper. It should later be extended in close cooperation with the main operation north of the Pripet Marsh either towards Kharkov or north-eastwards. Its main concentration must be in the north; its main objective Kiev. The terrain is generally favourable there, especially for tanks. Three lines of defence will have to be overcome before Kiev.

The attack from Rumania should not, however, be abandoned even though the political situation might prevent a concentration there before the start of the campaign. An army should be made ready in the Reich to move the wheeled elements of its Panzer and motorised divisions and the necessary artillery at the start of the war through Hungary to defend Rumania during the deployment of German attacking forces there. The main attack of the Army will be directed from north Poland and East Prussia towards Moscow. There will be no other decisive operation because prior deployment in Rumania is not possible. An extension to the North would only lengthen the march and finally lead into the forest area north-west of Moscow. The main purpose of the offensive is to strike and destroy the mass of the Russian northern group before, within and east of the forest area by means of a direct thrust towards Moscow. Then from Moscow and north Russia it will turn southwards and, in cooperation with the German southern group, conquer the Ukraine and finally reach the line Rostov-Gorki-Archangel. To cover the north flank of this operation a special force will be directed across the lower Dvina towards Pskov and Leningrad.

As in Poland and the West success must be sought by means of surprise and speed. The conduct of operations is so conceived that in all armies mobile formations in the first wave will break through the Russian troops in front of the river and forest defences and, supported by the Luftwaffe, continue the advance to seize corridors through the forests

and river crossings. Following close behind some of the infantry divisions will seek to divide and destroy the out-flanked enemy, while others making use of all means of transportation will follow the mobile troops in order to secure and extend their successes. Some will also go through the Pripet Marshes making use of available roads and railways (armoured trains with Russian rail gauge!) in order to attack the enemy's rear.

The fact that the width of the combat zone will increase with the continuation of the attack necessitates the bringing up of strong army reserves which will be deployed under new corps headquarters. Part of these reserves will be immediately available to the northern army group, the rest will be allocated to areas with favourable road and rail communications so that they can reinforce both army groups.

Allocation of force: (Summary)

Army Group "South" -	5 Pz.,	6 mot.,	24 inf. divs.	
Army Group "North"*-	15 Pz.,	2 mot.,	50 inf.	1 cav.div.
Army Reserve	- 4 Pz.,	4 mot.,	36 inf.	
Total	- 24 Pz.,	12 mot.	110 inf.	1 cav.div.

* The northernmost army - 3 Pz., 12 inf. divs.

Signed: Marcks

APPENDIX II

OKH Deployment Directive of 31.1.4.

"Barbarossa"

Army High Command

General Staff Ops. Branch (1)

H.Q., OKH, 31 January 1941.

No. 050/41g.K.

Deployment Directive "Barbarossa"

1. Task

In case Russia should change her present attitude towards Germany, all preparations are to be completed, as precautionary measures, to make it possible to defeat Soviet Russia in a quick campaign even before the end of the war against England. The operations should be so conducted that the mass of the Russian army in Western Russia will be destroyed by deep armoured thrusts. The withdrawal of elements left intact into the depth of Russian space will be prevented.

2. Enemy Situation

It is assumed that the Russians will accept battle west of the Dnieper and Dvina at least with strong parts of their forces. They will make use of the partly strengthened fortifications of the new and old frontiers and of the many waterways which favour the defence. The Russian Command will therefore have to make a particular effort to commit sufficient forces to hold on as long as possible to its air and naval bases in the Baltic provinces and to the flank protection of the Black Sea. The unfavourable outcome of the battles which may be expected south and north of the Pripet Marshes will force the Russians to attempt to bring the German attack to a standstill on the Dnieper-Dvina line. The offensive commitment of stronger Russian formations employing armour is to be expected not only in countering German break throughs, but also in attempts to bring threatened formations back to the Dnieper-Dvina line.

3. Intention

The first intention of the OKH within the task allocated is by means of swift and deep thrusts by strong mobile formations north and south of the Pripet Marsh to tear open the front of the mass of the Russian Army which it is anticipated will be in Western Russia. The enemy groups separated by these penetrations will then be destroyed. South of the

Pripet Marshes - Army Group "South", Field Marshal von Rundstedt - will exploit the swift break-through by strong armoured forces from the Lublin area in the direction of Kiev, in order to cut the communications across the Dnieper of the enemy in Galizia and the West Ukraine. The Dnieper crossings at and below Kiev will be taken, thus ensuring the freedom for the subsequent cooperation of Army Group "South" with the German forces operating in northern Russia or for new tasks in south Russia.

North of the Pripet Marshes Army Group "Centre" - Field Marshal von Bock - will commit strong mobile forces from the Warsaw-Sulwalki area to force a break-through towards Smolensk. This will permit the turning of strong formations to the north in order to cooperate with Army Group "North" - Field Marshal von Leeb, attacking from East Prussia in the general direction of Leningrad. Both army groups will destroy the enemy formations in the Baltic area, and, in cooperation with the Finnish army and possibly German forces from Norway, finally put an end to enemy's ability to resist in northern Russia, thus ensuring freedom of movement for further tasks - perhaps in cooperation with the German forces in southern Russia. In the event of a sudden unexpected collapse of enemy resistance in northern Russia, the abandonment of the turning movement and an immediate thrust towards Moscow could be considered.

The opening of the attack will be coordinated along the entire front. (B-Day, Y-hour).

The Conduct of Operations will be based upon the principles proved in the Polish campaign. However, it must be noted that, in spite of the clear concentration of force to be achieved at decisive points, the enemy forces on other sectors of the front must also be attacked. Only thus can powerful enemy formations be prevented from withdrawing and evading destruction west of the Dnieper - Dvina line. Furthermore, the effect of the enemy air force must be expected to be more strongly felt by the army, because the full strength of the Luftwaffe will not be available for the operation against Russia. Troops must be prepared for the use by the enemy of chemical weapons from the air.

4. Tasks of the Army Groups and Armies

a) Army Group "South" will drive its strong left wing - with mobile forces in the lead - towards Kiev, destroy the

Russian forces in Galizia and in the West Ukraine while they are still west of the Dnieper, and achieve the early capture of the Dnieper crossings at and below Kiev for the continuation of operations both sides of the river. The operation is to be conducted so that the mobile formations from the Lublin area are concentrated for the break-through towards Kiev. Within the framework of this instruction Army Group "South" headquarters will issue more detailed directives to the armies and the Panzer Group for the following tasks:

The 11 Army will protect the area of Rumania vital to the German war economy against a break-through of Russian forces. As part of the attack by Army Group "South" it will pin down the enemy forces on its sector by giving an exaggerated impression of strength, and subsequently, in cooperation with the Luftwaffe, it will prevent by means of a close pursuit the orderly withdrawal of the Russians across the Dnieper.

The first task of Panzer Group 1 will be in cooperation with the 17 and 6 Armies to break through the enemy forces near the frontier between Rawa Ruska and Kowel, to advance via Berdishev - Zhitomir, and to reach the Dnieper as soon as possible at and below Kiev. Then, under the direction of Army Group headquarters, it will continue the attack in a south-easterly direction along the Dnieper in order to prevent a withdrawal of the enemy in the West Ukraine across the Dnieper and to destroy him by an attack from the rear.

The 17 Army will break through the enemy border defences north-west of Lemberg (Lvov). By means of a vigorous advance on its strong left wing, it must attempt to push the enemy back south-eastwards. In addition, the army will take advantage of the advance of the Panzer Group quickly to reach the area Vinnitsa - Berditchev so that according to the situation it can continue the attack to the south-east or east.

The 6 Army will break through the enemy front both sides of Luck in cooperation with elements of the Panzer Group 1. While covering the north flank of the army group against interference from the Pripet Marsh area, it will follow the Panzer Group 1 to Zhitomir with all possible speed and strength. It must be ready, on the orders of Army Group "South" headquarters, to turn south-eastwards with strong forces west of the Dnieper, in order to cooperate with Panzer Group 1 in preventing the enemy in the West Ukraine from withdrawing over the Dneiper.

b) Army Group "Centre" will break up the enemy in White Russia by driving forward the strong forces on its wings. It will quickly win the area around Smolensk by uniting the mobile forces advancing north and south of Minsk and so achieve the prerequisites for cooperation between strong elements of its mobile troops and Army Group "North" in the destruction of the enemy forces fighting in the Baltic states and the Leningrad area.

Within the framework of this instruction Army Group "Centre" headquarters will issue more detailed directives to the Panzer Groups and Armies for the following tasks:

Panzer Group 2 in cooperation with 4 Army will break through the enemy forces on the frontier at and north of Kobryn. By means of a swift advance to Slutsk and Minsk it will meet Panzer Group 3 advancing from the area north of Minsk and achieve the pre-requisites for the destruction of the enemy forces between Bialystok and Minsk. In close contact with Panzer Group 3, it will quickly achieve the further tasks of winning the area around and south of Smolensk, preventing the concentration of enemy forces in the Upper Dnieper region and so preserve the Army Group's freedom in the choice of subsequent tasks.

Panzer Group 3 in cooperation with 9 Army will break through the enemy forces on the frontier. By means of a swift advance in the area north of Minsk, it will meet Panzer Group 2 advancing from the south-west towards Minsk and achieve the prerequisites for the destruction of the enemy forces between Bialystok and Minsk. In close contact with Panzer Group 2 it will quickly achieve the further task of reaching the area around and north of Vitebsk, preventing the concentration of enemy forces in the upper Dvina region and so preserve the Army Group's freedom in the choice of subsequent tasks.

4 Army will achieve the crossing of the Bug and thereby will open the way to Minsk for Panzer Group 2. It will advance with its main strength across the Shava River south of Slonim, and in cooperation with 9 Army it will take advantage of the advance of the Panzer Groups and destroy the enemy forces between Bialystok and Minsk. Its further tasks will be: to follow the advance of Panzer Group 2 and, protecting its south flank against (attacks from) the Pripet Marshes; to seize crossings over the Beresina between Bobruisk and Borysau; and to reach the Dnieper at and north of Mohilev.

9 Army in cooperation with Panzer Group 3 will break through the enemy forces west and north of Grodno. With the main weight on its north wing it will drive towards Lida-Vilna, and, taking advantage of the advance of the Panzer Groups it will establish contact with the 4 Army and destroy the enemy in the area between Bialystok and Minsk. The next task of the 9 Army will be to follow Panzer Group 3 and reach the Dvina at and south-east of Polozk.

c) Army Group "North" will destroy the enemy forces fighting in the Baltic area, and will deprive the Russian fleet of its bases by occupying the Baltic harbours including Leningrad and Kronstadt. At the appropriate time the OKH will order powerful mobile forces from Army Group "Centre" advancing on Smolensk to cooperate with Army Group "North." Within the framework of this task Army Group "North" will break through the enemy front with its main effort towards Dvinsk. It will drive its strong right wing with mobile troops thrusting across the Dvina as quickly as possible to reach the area north-west of Opotschka and so prevent the withdrawal of battle-worthy Russian forces eastward from the Baltic region. It will also achieve the conditions for a further swift drive towards Leningrad.

Panzer Group 4 in cooperation with 16 and 18 Armies will break through the enemy front between Wystiter Lake and the Tilsit-Schaulen highway, and will thrust to the Dvina at and below Dvina and establish bridgeheads across the river. Furthermore, Panzer Group 4 will be required to reach the area north-east of Opotschka in order to be able to drive on northeastward or northwards according to the situation.

16 Army in cooperation with Panzer Group 4 will break through the enemy with its main effort on both sides of the road Ebenrode-Kovno, and by rapidly advancing its strong right wing behind the Panzer corps it will reach the north bank of the Dvina at and below Dvinsk.

The next task of the army will be to follow Panzer Group 4 and to reach the Opotschka area as soon as possible.

18 Army will break through the enemy on its sector with its main concentration on and east of the Tilsit-Riga highway, and will cut off and destroy the enemy forces south-west of Riga by swiftly thrusting most of its forces over the Dvina at and below Stockmannshof. It will then

block the approach of Russian forces south of Lake Peipus by means of a swift advance to the line Ostrov-Pskov, and in accordance with the directive of Army Group "North" - possibly in cooperation with mobile troops north of Lake Peipus - mop up the enemy in Estonia. Preparations are to be made so that the surprise occupation of the Baltic Islands of Oesel, Dago and Moon can be carried out as soon as the situation permits.

5. pp. (Spare)

6. Order for the Army of Norway (directly subordinate to the OKW):

a) The most important task remains the reliable security of the entire Norwegian area not only against raids, but also against the serious attempts at landings by the British which must be expected in the course of this summer. This task requires that:

- i) all energies and means of transport will be used to ensure that the batteries earmarked to strengthen the coastal defences will be installed by mid-May.
- ii) formations at present located in Norway will not be appreciably weakened for the achievement of tasks connected with operation "Barbarossa". Indeed, the sector most endangered - Kirkenes - Narvik - will be strengthened. This reinforcement is to be achieved with forces already in Norway.

b) In addition to its defensive role the Army of Norway has the following tasks:

- i) advance into the Petsamo area at the start of the main operations, or if necessary even earlier, and, together with the Finnish forces, defend it against attacks from the land, sea and air. Particular significance is attached to the safeguarding of the nickel mines which are important to the German war industry (Operation "Renntier").
- ii) Envelop, and later, when sufficient assault forces are available, capture Mumansk as a base for offensive action by its land, sea and air forces (Operation "Silberfuchs"). It is to be expected that Sweden will maintain the security of her own north-east frontier with adequate forces.

7. OKH Reserves

At the start of the operation the reserves of the OKH will be allocated to a large group in the area Reichhof and east of Warsaw and to small groups in the Zamosc, Suwalki and Eydtkau areas.

8. Support by the Luftwaffe and Navy

The task of the Luftwaffe is to eliminate as far as possible all interference by the Russian Air Force and to support the main operations of the Army especially those of Army Group "Centre" and the left wing of Army Group "South". During the main operations the Luftwaffe will concentrate all force against the enemy air force and in immediate support of the Army. Attacks against the enemy industry will be carried out only after the operational objectives of the Army have been attained.

Air support is allocated as follows:

Air Fleet 4	- Army Group "South"
Air Fleet 2	- Army Group "Centre"
Air Fleet 1	- Army Group "North"

In the course of conducting its main role against Britain and safeguarding our coasts, the Navy will prevent enemy naval forces from breaking out of the Baltic. Until the Russian fleet has been deprived of its last Baltic base at Leningrad, major naval objectives will be avoided. After the elimination of the Russian fleet, the Navy will have the task of safeguarding sea traffic in the Baltic and the supply of the north wing of the Army.

9. The Participation of other States

The active participation of Rumania and Finland in a war against the Soviet Union is to be anticipated on the flanks of the operation. The form of the cooperation and of the subordination of the forces of both countries under German command will be decided upon at the appropriate time. Rumania's task will be to assist the German forces concentrated there in pinning down the enemy facing them, and also to provide assistance in the rear areas.

Finland's tasks will be to eliminate the Russian base at Hangö and to cover the concentration of the German forces in north Finland. By the time Army Group "North" has crossed the Dvina Finland will also attack the Russian forces on her south-east front in accordance with the requirements of the OKH, concentrating either east or west of Lake Ladoga, preferably the former. She will then support Army Group "North" in the destruction of the enemy. The active participation of Sweden is probably not to be expected. It is possible, however, that Sweden will permit the use of her railways for the concentration and supply of the German forces in North Finland.

Signed: von Brauchitsch

APPENDIX III

PANZER AND MOTORISED FORCES ENGAGED IN THE BALKANS
PRIOR TO THEIR EMPLOYMENT IN OPERATION "BARBAROSSA"

Formation:	Employed in Russia under:
HQ <u>Panzer</u> Group 1	Army Group "South"
HQ XXXXI Army Corps (Mot.)	Army Group "North", <u>Panzer</u> Group 4
SS Div. "Das Reich"	Army Group "Centre", <u>Panzer</u> Group 2
Infantry Regt. "Grossdeutschland"	Army Group "Centre", <u>Panzer</u> Group 2
HQ XIV Army Corps (Mot.)	Army Group "South" <u>Panzer</u> Group 1
5 <u>Panzer</u> Division	OKH Reserve
11 <u>Panzer</u> Division	Army Group "South", <u>Panzer</u> Group 1
HQ XXXX Army Corps (Mot.)	OKH Reserve
"Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler"	Army Group "South", <u>Panzer</u> Group 1
9 <u>Panzer</u> Division	Army Group "South", <u>Panzer</u> Group 1
2 <u>Panzer</u> Division	OKH Reserve
16 <u>Panzer</u> Division	Army Group "South", <u>Panzer</u> Group 1

APPENDIX IV

GERMAN INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATES OF SOVIET ARMY STRENGTH

1940 - 1941

(Total number of formations, total facing West)

	1940		1941				
	24 Jul	8 Aug	15 Jan	30 Jan	3 Feb	4 Apr	21 Jun
Rifle Divisions	151 90	151 96	150 100	150 121	- 121	171 -	- 154
Cavalry Divisions	32 23	32 23	32 25	32 25	- 25	36 -	- 25½
Mot.mech. Brigades	38 28	38 28	36 31	36 31	- 31	40 -	- 37
Total West	221 141	221 147	218 156	218 177	- 177	247 -	- 216½

Sources: 24 July 1940:- Erickson, p. 557.
8 August 1940:- The Marcks Plan, see Appendix I.
15 January 1941:- USNA, Microfilm, Serial T78-335.
30 January 1941:- KTB OKW, I, 290.
3 February 1941:- Halder KTB, II, 266.
4 April 1941:- Halder KTB, II, 345.
21 June 1941:- Halder KTB, II, 461.

APPENDIX V

THE BLITZKRIEG WAR ECONOMY

The following statistics illustrate the effect of the Blitzkrieg economy on German armament production in the first two years of the war. The main characteristics are:

- 1) lower war production totals than those of Great Britain and the Soviet Union which adopted a total war economy;
- 2) increases in production to meet the requirements of specific campaigns;
- 3) a steady increase in tank production to meet the successive demands of Blitzkrieg operations in the West 1940, in the East 1941, and in the Middle East planned for 1942;
- 4) an inability of the aircraft industry to meet the demands placed upon it, especially in the autumn of 1940.

The low level of war production achieved by the Blitzkrieg economy compared with what was later achieved after the conversion to a total war economy is illustrated by the following selection of monthly production totals at the time of the German victory in the West, the attack on Russia and the height of the battle of Normandy:

	June 1940	June 1941	July 1944
Rifles	106,400	102,280	249,080
Machine-guns	4,400	7,770	24,141
Mortars	1,165	1,073	2,225
Artillery	294	317	1,554
Armour	121	310	1,669
Combat aircraft	675	1,040	4,219

Source: United States Strategic Bombing Survey, Economic Report, p. 187, cited by Wilmot, p. 150.

Through adhering to the Blitzkrieg economy, Germany was quickly overtaken in war production by Britain, even though the latter adopted a total war economy only late in 1939.

Output of Particular Types of Armaments in Germany
and the United Kingdom, 1940-41.

	1940		1941	
	Germany	U.K.	Germany	U.K.
Military Aircraft	10,825	15,050	10,775	20,100
Bombers	4,000	3,720	4,350	4,670
Fighters	3,105	4,280	3,730	7,065
Naval, trans- ports, etc.	3,720	7,050	2,695	8,365
Armour				
Tanks	1,640	1,400	3,790	4,845
Other	500	6,000	1,300	10,500
Trucks	88,000	113,000	86,000	110,000
Artillery	*	4,700	11,200	16,700

* Not available

Source: Klein, p. 99.

In spite of the enormous losses of her western industries in 1941, Russia maintained a level of production in essential weapons far in excess of that of Germany. Accurate figures are not available for 1941 but the following table is indicative of the Soviet total war effort compared with that of Germany.

German and Russian Production of Military
Equipment, An Average, 1942 - 1944.

	Germany	Russia
Aircraft	26,000	40,000
Tanks/self propelled guns	12,000	30,000
Artillery	10,500	120,000
Machine guns	516,000	450,000
Rifles	2,060,000	3,000,000

Source: Statistische Schnellberichte zur Ruestungsproduktion, Februar 1945, and Stalin's Speech, 9 Feb. 1946, Pravda, 10 February 1946, cited by Klein, p. 210.

The periodic increases in production to meet the demands of the early German campaigns are illustrated by the following figures:

Production of Selected Classes of
Armaments (1st Quarter 1940 = 100)

Year	Quarter	Army Weapons	Army Ammunition	Armour (total wt.)	Aircraft (total wt.)
1939	4th	94	96	85	*
1940	1st	100	100	100	100
	2nd	129	137	154	182
	3rd	113	154	216	182
	4th	109	95	250	157
1941	1st	147	91	280	166

* Not available

Source: Klein, p. 187.

Production of Selected Classes of
Armaments, 1941 (1st Quarter 1941 = 100)

Year	Quarter	Army Weapons	Army Ammunition	Tanks	Aircraft
1941	1st	100	100	100	100
	2nd	91	80	132	128
	3rd	80	53	146	122
	4th	62	48	167	104

Source: Extracts and computation from Klein, p. 187.

The general drop in production reflects the optimistic expectation of a quick victory in the East in 1941. Tank

production, however, was increased to meet the needs of the mobile operations in the Caucasus, Middle East and North Africa planned for 1942.