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# **Soviet Nationalities in German Wartime Strategy, 1941-1945**

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## PREFACE

This report, prepared for the Director of Net Assessment, Office of the Secretary of Defense, addresses the role of Soviet nationalities in German World War II strategy.

Until the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in late 1979, the last military engagement involving substantial numbers of Soviet non-Russian soldiers took place in World War II. This report examines the attitudes of German political and military officials toward the Soviet nationality issue as a potential Soviet strategic vulnerability to be exploited during that conflict. The author analyzes the failures and the successes of the Germans to use the Soviet nationality issue to advance their military goals by gaining the support of non-Russian Soviet populations against Soviet forces and by including sizable numbers of Soviet non-Russian soldiers in German military units to fight against Soviet forces.

Although hundreds of books have been written on almost every aspect of World War II, this particular dimension of the deadly conflict between the two totalitarian states remains less well explored. In the English-language literature—with the exception of Alexander Dalin's *German Rule in Russia*, which is still the best work by far on the subject despite the fact that it was written some 25 years ago—there have been few efforts to focus on the nationality issue as a crucial factor in the war. German scholars and former participants in the events, on the other hand, have recently produced a number of important works that provide valuable new insights. The present report has used these works extensively along with extant English-language scholarship and archival materials in an effort to provide a concise and coherent account of the role of the Soviet nationalities in the war.

This study should be of interest to military and strategic planners who are beginning to address the Soviet nationality issue in a strategic perspective. When used in combination with other publications in the series, it offers a more complete understanding of the strengths and vulnerabilities stemming from multinationalism in Soviet society generally and in the Soviet armed forces specifically.

## SUMMARY

This study addresses the policies of Nazi Germany toward the Soviet nationalities during World War II and seeks to examine the effect and implications of the nationality issue in the armed conflict between the two countries.

Before the German invasion of the Soviet Union, the attitudes of the top Nazi leaders toward the Soviet nationalities were characterized by a mixture of ignorance and contempt conditioned by Nazi racial dogmas. Such attitudes and the imperative of territorial aggrandizement (*Lebensraum*) were reflected in Nazi war objectives that aimed at the subjugation of the Soviet peoples and their merciless economic exploitation—objectives that precluded any meaningful attempt to harness to the German cause strong anti-Soviet and nationalist sentiments in the Soviet borderlands.

Despite the generally friendly and often enthusiastic reception accorded the German troops in most non-Russian areas, the Nazi occupiers initiated occupation policies characterized by brutality and contemptuous disregard for the dignity and national aspirations of the indigenous populations.

Particularly oppressive were German occupation policies in the Ukraine. Following the dicta of Nazi theories that proclaimed all Slavs to be "subhumans" (*Untermenschen*), Nazi officials instituted an occupation regime in the Ukraine based on political oppression, forced labor, and economic plunder that soon alienated the once friendly population. The same general policies, although in a much milder form, were implemented in the Baltic region. The Baltic states had been forcibly annexed by the Soviet Union only a little more than a year before the beginning of the war, and the Balts' hopes for the restoration of national sovereignty with German help were widespread. Nazi occupation officials, however, had little understanding or sympathy for the national aspirations of the Balts, and the initial outpouring of Baltic good will was soon replaced by resignation and resentment.

The sole exception to this typical German occupation conduct was the enlightened policies pursued by the Germans in the Caucasus. Among the reasons for this atypical approach were the general Nazi disinterestedness in the region, the fact that the Caucasus remained under German military rather than civilian administration, and the important role played by a number of civilian and military officials who were keenly aware of the importance of winning over the indigenous population. German policies that proved particularly popular included the granting of significant self-government privileges, implementation of agrarian reform that reflected popular desires, avoidance of oppressive administrative methods, and the reintroduction of religious freedom. The peoples of German-occupied territories in the Caucasus responded with wide-ranging cooperation. The Caucasus example, short-lived and small scale as it was, was the only conscious effort to apply political warfare methods to a Soviet nationality area. Its success was a clear indication of the potential of such an approach in other areas.

In view of the oppressive and often inhuman treatment of the Soviet nationalities, except in the Caucasus, it is surprising to find that the Germans were able to secure the military collaboration of huge numbers of Soviet non-Russians. This phenomenon leads us to conclude that the anti-Sovietism of many non-Russians was of such intensity as to overcome growing misgivings about and dislike for the Germans.

Two basic forms of military collaboration were observed throughout the war. The first

one involved the direct incorporation of former Soviet citizens in the Wehrmacht (German armed forces) as auxiliaries. These auxiliaries were recruited largely on the initiative of German military commanders without the sanction or even knowledge of the political authorities. Their numbers are estimated to have been anywhere between 600,000 and 1,400,000. This would indicate that, for most of the war, as much as 20 percent or more of German army manpower on the Eastern front was made up of former Soviet citizens. Soviet non-Russians accounted for more than 50 percent and quite possibly a clear majority of the auxiliaries.

The second form of collaboration among the Soviet nationalities in the occupied territories consisted of units earmarked by the Germans for internal security and antipartisan functions. Their numbers cannot be estimated with certainty, but we know that indigenous security formations greatly outnumbered German units in all occupied areas. The most politically significant form of military collaboration entailed the setting up of national military units designed primarily for front-line combat. The Baltic nationalities were represented by three divisions and a large number of smaller units, all of which distinguished themselves in combat. Nationals of the Central Asian and Caucasian regions were organized in the so-called East Legions and together accounted for more than 250,000 volunteers. These astounding numbers, and the fact that beginning in 1943 the number of non-Slavs in the Soviet armed forces decreased greatly, suggest the possibility that some of the Soviet nationalities may have been better represented in the Wehrmacht than in the Red Army. All in all, Soviet nationalities engaged in military collaboration with the Germans in truly unprecedented numbers—a fact not generally acknowledged—and provided a major contribution to the German war effort.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

During the first several months of war against the Soviet Union, Germany achieved a series of remarkable military victories. By the end of 1941, it had occupied 500,000 square miles of Soviet territory, taken three million prisoners of war, and appeared close to final victory. To explain this unusually successful military campaign, historians have traditionally pointed to such German strengths as the ability to achieve a surprise attack, German blitzkrieg tactics, the technical superiority of Wehrmacht (German armed forces) armaments, and the superior training of the German soldier. Such explanations, although undoubtedly important, primarily stress factors of a military and technical character and often neglect an equally or more crucial, albeit political, factor contributing to the calamitous reverses suffered by the Soviet Union in the initial stages of the war. The Soviets suffered from a political vulnerability deriving from the nature of their multinational state, in which peoples of vastly diverse cultural, political, and historical traditions were forcefully integrated into a highly centralized and coercive empire. When strained by war, the artificial bonds tying many of the subject nations to the empire frayed and broke. In other words, the military debacle that befell the Red Army in the summer of 1941 was as much the result of disunity, defeatism, and hostility toward the system among its peoples and soldiers as was the technical superiority and operational acumen of the enemy. In Solzhenitsyn's apt metaphor, when faced with the task of defending Stalinism, many Soviet soldiers voted with their feet. It was among the Soviet non-Russian nationalities that hostility toward the Stalinist regime and the Soviet cause took particularly virulent and extreme forms. The effect of this hostility, both political and military, was significant because the war was fought largely on non-Russian territories. In some of these areas such as the Baltics, the Western Ukraine, and the former Romanian lands, which had been incorporated into the Soviet Union barely a year and a half before the war, the invading Germans were often regarded as liberators and potential allies in a struggle against a common enemy, as the often enthusiastic reception of German troops testified. The Nazi onslaught thus not only failed to engender the Soviet peoples' unity and will to resist, but, on the contrary, unleashed powerful centrifugal forces that threatened to undermine the Soviet defense effort. The Soviet leadership, when faced with the grim prospect of open disloyalty by many citizens in and outside the army, took preventive measures.<sup>1</sup>

It is the purpose of this study to examine the determinants and character of German policies toward the Soviet non-Russian nationalities and their effects on the Soviet and German war efforts and on the nationalities themselves.<sup>2</sup> We place particular emphasis on the analysis of the nature and magnitude of military collaboration with the Germans by the non-Russian nationalities, in an attempt to examine the military exploitability of the political warfare opportunities that presented themselves. The report in general is intended

<sup>1</sup>In late 1941 the Soviet leadership issued top-secret directives acknowledging that most Soviet nationalities have proved unreliable and warned against using them in large concentrations (General Pyotr Grigorenko to author, interview, March 12, 1979). For a more detailed discussion, see S. Enders Wimbush and Alex Alexiev, *The Ethnic Factor in the Soviet Armed Forces*, The Rand Corporation, R-2787/1, March 1982. See also Susan L. Curran and Dmitry Ponomareff, *Managing the Ethnic Factor in the Russian and Soviet Armed Forces: An Historical Overview*, The Rand Corporation, R-2640/1, July 1982.

<sup>2</sup>This report does not deal with German policies toward the ethnic Russians, or with efforts to establish an anti-Soviet Russian army as the "Vlasov army." This issue has received much attention by World War II historians. Some of the better-known works on the topic are listed in the Bibliography to this report.

as a case study of the inherent vulnerabilities, both military and political, of a nonconsensual multinational state in a period of grave crisis.

Section II of the report outlines the attitudes toward the Soviet nationalities prevalent among the Nazi leadership and the role envisaged for them in a postwar German-dominated Europe, and juxtaposes them on the views of German officials who did not share Nazi dogma and advocated a more pragmatic approach. German policies in the occupied non-Russian territories and their implications are examined in Section III. Section IV describes the different types and degrees of military collaboration with the Germans. The main conclusions of the study are summarized in Section V.

[The following text is extremely faint and largely illegible due to poor scan quality. It appears to be the main body of the report, containing detailed analysis and conclusions.]



## II. GERMAN WAR OBJECTIVES AND SOVIET NATIONALITIES

The fateful German assault unleashed on the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, was soon revealed to be a meticulously well-planned and executed military campaign which, by early December, took the German troops to the outskirts of Moscow. Yet by that time the political conduct of the war had already severely prejudiced the outcome of the war effort. This paradoxical (at first sight) development was the logical outcome of the political objectives and course of action set for the war by the Nazi leadership—objectives that ipso facto made success doubtful. To the extent that the political battle was fought primarily on Soviet non-Russian territory, German failure largely derives from the nature of Germany's political objectives toward the Soviet nationalities. On this issue, German leaders were divided into two basic schools of thought, which persisted with only minor change until the final stages of the war. The first and dominant school reflected the attitudes and intentions of Hitler and the Nazi leadership.

### NAZIS AND NATIONALITIES

The war objectives espoused by the Nazis faithfully reflected the main postulates of the national-socialist *Weltanschauung*. Most relevant among those were the imperative of territorial aggrandizement (*Lebensraum*) of the German Reich and the racial theories that were the essence of Nazi ideology.

The war with the Soviet Union, although often presented for propagandistic purposes as a struggle between European civilization and barbarian Bolshevism, was in fact conceived and conducted as a war of conquest. As such, it was the culmination of the Nazis' obsession with *Lebensraum* theories, which formulate the core concept of their ideology. Bemoaning an alleged unfavorable imbalance between Germany's population and its territory, Hitler believed that "only an adequately large space on this earth assures a nation freedom of existence."<sup>1</sup> The accomplishment of this overriding political objective of acquiring "land and soil" for Germany was feasible only at the expense of Russia and her "vassal border states"—"that giant empire in the East," which Hitler believed to be "ripe for collapse."<sup>2</sup> The actual expansion of German lands expected to result from the war, however, was to come mostly at the expense of the Soviet non-Russian territories. Although there were few detailed plans as to the specific areas subject to annexation, the Nazi intentions were unmistakable. At a minimum, territories considered for incorporation in the Reich included all of the Baltic lands, Belorussia, the Western Ukraine (Galicia), and the Crimea.<sup>3</sup> At various times, schemes were hatched to annex all of the Ukraine and parts of the Caucasus, as well as large chunks of Russia proper. The newly gained territories and populations were to be dealt with unceremoniously. As Hitler succinctly put it at the beginning of the war: "basically, it is a

<sup>1</sup>Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, The Riverside Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1943, p. 643.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 655.

<sup>3</sup>See *Trial of the Major War Criminals (TMWC) before the International Military Tribunal, Nuremberg, 1949*, Document 221 (Bormann protocol of July 16, 1941, conference between Hitler and top German officials on the future of the occupied Eastern territories), pp. 86-94. (Hereafter cited as the Bormann Protocol.)

question of cutting the giant cake in such a way that we can first conquer it; second rule it; and third exploit it."<sup>4</sup> What such a program implied for the well-being of the indigenous populations was clear to the German leadership. A May 1941 study of the potential for and implications of economic exploitation of territories to be occupied concluded that "if we take from the land what we need many millions will undoubtedly starve to death."<sup>5</sup>

The final stage in Nazi plans for the conquered territories envisaged their complete Germanization by means of extensive resettlement. This, however, was not to be a traditional Germanization involving merely the imposition of the German language, culture, and customs but a radical one that was to ensure that, as Himmler put it, "only people of pure German blood inhabit the East."<sup>6</sup> To achieve this objective, the Germans intended to assimilate and Germanize certain populations but expel the overwhelming majority. According to the most detailed plan dealing with postwar *Lebensraum* policies, "Generalplan Ost," between 46 and 51 million people were earmarked for deportation as "undesirables."<sup>7</sup> In 1941, Hitler insisted on resettlement policies that would assure the Germanization of the Eastern territories in ten years with a long-term goal of establishing a Germanic population of 100 million.<sup>8</sup>

The espousal of such radical policies toward the Soviet peoples, many of whom had remarkable records of cultural achievement and national-political traditions, can best be understood in the context of the fanatical racial views held by the Nazi leadership. With very few exceptions—the Baltic peoples, for example—the Soviet nationalities were deemed by the Nazis not only to be racially inferior to the Aryans, but of such low racial value as to preclude the possibility of any meaningful coexistence with the master race. Most of them, and especially the Slavs, were not considered a *Staatsvolk*, that is, people capable of political organization and self-government. The Slavic nationalities, Ukrainians and Belorussians, were special targets of Nazi racial abuse. Along with the Russians, from whom they were only infrequently differentiated,<sup>9</sup> they were often categorized as *Untermenschen* (subhumans), whose sole purpose was to serve as the Germans' obedient and industrious servants. There were to be no efforts to improve their cultural and educational levels or their material well-being once their territories were annexed. In fact, measures were to be taken to restrict severely the Slavs' educational opportunities, food consumption, and birth rates.<sup>10</sup>

Even lower than the Slavs on the Nazi racial scale were the Soviet nationalities of Asian origin.<sup>11</sup> Generally ignorant of national, cultural, and ethnic distinctions, the Nazis lumped Soviet Orientals together with others as "Mongols" and considered them a threat, albeit a vague one, to Nazi racial purity and territorial aspirations. It was the fact that the Russian

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>5</sup>See Christian Streit, *Keine Kameraden: Die Wehrmacht und die Sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen, 1941-1945*, Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, Stuttgart, 1978, p. 63.

<sup>6</sup>Das Schwarze Korps, August 20, 1942, cited in Alexander Dallin, *German Rule in Russia, 1941-1945*, London, 1957, p. 279.

<sup>7</sup>Helmüt Heiber, "Der Generalplan Ost," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, Vol. 6, No. 3, July 1958, p. 301. A detailed treatment of the actual resettlement and population policies pursued during the war is provided in Robert Koehl, *RKFDV: German Resettlement and Population Policy, 1939-1945*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1957.

<sup>8</sup>Henry Picker, *Hitlers Tischgespräche im Führers Hauptquartier*, Munich, 1968, p. 284. (Hereafter cited as *Hitlers Tischgespräche*.)

<sup>9</sup>Hitler himself often referred to the Ukrainians as "these Russians or so-called Ukrainians."

<sup>10</sup>There was general agreement among the top Nazi officials that only a four-year elementary school should be allowed to function in the occupied territories. Disagreement existed only on the scope and content of instruction. Hitler, for example, believed that children should be taught only "the meaning of traffic signs, that Berlin is the capital of the Reich, and to read and write a little in German." See *Hitlers Tischgespräche*, p. 454.

<sup>11</sup>These include not only the Soviet Central Asians but also Tatars, Azerbaidzhanis, some North Caucasians, and others.

people had succumbed to this alleged *Mongolensturm* (Mongol menace), according to Hitler, that had led to the degeneration of the race and the victory of Bolshevism. As early as 1930, Hitler referred to the Soviet Union as a "being with a Slavic-Mongol body and a Jewish head."<sup>12</sup>

Despite these official attitudes, specific plans for the treatment of the "Mongols" were not made because the Germans did not envisage occupying or colonizing their indigenous territories in the immediate future. Nonetheless, belief in the racial inferiority of the Soviet Orientals was pervasive and undoubtedly motivated the mass executions of Asiatic-looking Soviet prisoners of war that took place in the first few months of the war.<sup>13</sup>

Among the Caucasian Christian nationalities, the Armenians were suspected of being racially inferior because of their alleged proclivity for "parasitic trade practices," said to derive from a presumed kinship with the Semitic race and miscegenation with the Jews.<sup>14</sup> The Georgians, on the other hand, were curiously enough declared to be Aryans and promised a dominant position in the Caucasus under German aegis.<sup>15</sup>

The Baltic nationalities—Latvians, Lithuanians, and Estonians—were looked upon as of Nordic Aryan stock and, for the most part, "Germanizable" (*eindeutschungsfähig*). This did not mean, however, that they were considered equal to the German *Herrenvolk* (master race) and were to be spared abuse and discrimination. A study of the Soviet Union, prepared for the Wehrmacht High Command before the German invasion, provides an interesting glimpse of prevalent attitudes toward the Balts among the Nazi leadership at the time. Although pretending to be a scientific study, it abounds in shallow stereotypes and derogatory depictions of the Baltic nationalities. For example, the Estonians are described as a "generally dull and apathetic people" who do not exhibit much national pride. The Latvians are said to possess few positive character traits and to be "suspicious, cunning and opportunistic." The Lithuanians, on the other hand, are seen as timid, insecure, and of "characteristic Eastern subservience." Further, they are shown as incapable of independent initiative and totally lacking in organizational talent.<sup>16</sup> Such attitudes were to find a practical expression in German occupation policies later on.

In general, the overriding Nazi objective of military-territorial conquest and political subjugation of the Soviet peoples and nationalities, strongly conditioned by a deterministic racial theory, precluded any meaningful appreciation of Soviet internal-political vulnerabilities, let alone a conscious effort toward their exploitation. Undoubtedly, Nazi attitudes were also reinforced by the almost universal belief at the time that the war could be decided by military means alone and in a very short time. The German war effort was thus bereft ab initio of a crucial political warfare dimension.

<sup>12</sup>One of Hitler's most bizarre theories held that until the Bolshevik revolution the overwhelming majority of the Russian population had consisted of "good-natured blond and racially pure" Russians who were later liquidated or exiled to Siberia. These were then replaced with Mongols by the Bolshevik government in order to destroy the racial purity of the Russians and advance the Asians. See *Acten zur deutschen Auswärtigen Politik*, Series D, Vol. XIII, Document #509. According to another leading Nazi, the Bolshevik revolution succeeded because of the victory of the "mongoloid elements in the Russian organism over the Nordic ones." See Alfred Rosenberg, *Der Zukunftsweg einer deutschen Aussenpolitik*, Munich, 1927, cited in Dallin, *German Rule*, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup>See Streit, *Keine Kamaraden*, p. 50.

<sup>14</sup>See Patrik von zur Mühlen, *Zwischen Hakenkreuz und Sowjetstern*, Droste Verlag, Düsseldorf, 1971, p. 51.

<sup>15</sup>The preferential treatment of the Georgians is probably also due to the fact that several of them were active as advisers to leading Nazis. See Dallin, *German Rule*, pp. 226-231.

<sup>16</sup>See "Sowjet Union: Staatsgebiet und Bevölkerung," Berlin, June 1941, cited in Ortwin Buchbender, *Das Törende Erz*, Seewald Verlag, Stuttgart, 1978, pp. 30-32.

## ROSENBERG'S VIEWS

Perhaps the only notable exception to the dominant Nazi views set forth above is to be found in the ideas and theories espoused by the noted Nazi ideologue and wartime minister of the Reich Ministry for Occupied Eastern Territories (Ostministerium), Alfred Rosenberg.<sup>17</sup> Like other Nazi leaders, Rosenberg subscribed to the basic objectives of the German policy in the East, as formulated by Hitler. And like Hitler, he believed that it was crucial to German interests to prevent the reestablishment of a national Russian state after the war. He also rejected any thought of allowing political sovereignty and self-determination to the non-Russian nationalities and consistently advocated unequivocal German political hegemony. Nonetheless, he differed from his ideological brethren in some important respects. Unlike Hitler, he clearly perceived the ethnic, cultural, and racial heterogeneity of the Soviet peoples and proposed to exploit it for German purposes. For Rosenberg, the main threat to Nazi schemes of conquest and exploitation came from the Great Russians, and he sought to neutralize this threat by breaking up the Great Russian state and using the non-Russian nationalities as a *cordon sanitaire* around the ethnic Russian lands.

In the months preceding the attack on the Soviet Union, Rosenberg, who had already been chosen by Hitler as the chief of the future Ostministerium, proceeded promptly to put his ideas into practice by designing various plans for the political administration of the Soviet territories to be conquered. The first comprehensive plan to emerge was based on the major desideratum of partitioning the Soviet state and radically weakening its Russian component. It envisaged dividing Soviet territory into seven separate units under German control: Great Russia (Muscovy), Belorussia, the Ukraine and the Crimea, the Baltic states, the Don region, the Caucasus, and Turkestan.<sup>18</sup> The essence of this plan was the formation of ethnically distinct or compatible entities, with the exception of the Don region, that were to be awarded territories at Russian expense and treated preferentially. The final prewar blueprint provided by Rosenberg and, by and large, adopted as the basis of German occupation policies called for the establishment of four administrative units called *Reichkommissariate*:

1. Ostland (including Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Belorussia)
2. The Ukraine (minus the Western Ukraine)
3. Muscovy
4. Caucasia

Alone among the leading Nazis, Rosenberg seems to have been aware of the political significance of a differentiated approach toward the nationalities, that is, the necessity of winning their allegiance and using their national aspirations to promote German interests. In the final analysis, because of the ambivalent nature of Rosenberg's attitude, his sycophancy to the Führer, and his ineptitude in Nazi bureaucratic infighting, he was unable to achieve any practical success in promoting his ideas.

<sup>17</sup>For details on Rosenberg's career and philosophy, see Dallin, *German Rule*, passim; and Rosenberg's memoirs, written in prison after the war and published as *Letzte Aufzeichnungen: Ideale und Idole der Nationalsozialistischen Revolution*, Göttingen, 1955.

<sup>18</sup>Rosenberg's plans are treated at length in Jurgen Thorwald, *Die Illusion*, Drömer Knauer Verlag, Zurich, 1974, pp. 29-37; and Dallin, *German Rule*, pp. 46-56. His earlier views on the Soviet Union are to be found in *Der Mythos des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts*, Munich, 1935; and *Bolschevismus als Aktion einer fremden Rasse*, Munich, 1935.

## THE REALISTS

The greatest significance of Rosenberg's unorthodox views within the party hierarchy may lie in his tolerance of subordinates in the Ostministerium who preached and often practiced nationality policies radically different from party dogma. These people, together with other like-minded officials, many of whom were experts on the Soviet Union serving in various capacities in military and civilian institutions, represented a viewpoint that was the antithesis of prescribed policies. What they all had in common was a conviction that the war could not be won by military means alone. As a result, they advocated positive political action designed to win over the Soviet people in a common struggle against the communist system.

The majority of these "realists" were middle-level officials who had had little access to decisionmaking circles before the war and yet began playing an important role once the war started. This somewhat incongruous development was, in part, the result of the Nazis' inability to permeate completely all echelons of government with ideologically reliable cadres. Although the Nazis controlled and dominated all important political institutions and decisionmaking forums, they had been unable to totally co-opt expert middle-level personnel in many key institutions, including the military. Thus, the Nazi leadership sometimes had to depend on people who held views contrary to the policies prescribed to implement its programs. Not surprisingly, such policies were frequently carried out with less than the requisite zeal.

Within the realist school, there were two basic orientations on the nature of required political action. The first one, espoused by a group of people with pronounced pro-Russian sentiments, held that the purpose of German political warfare should be to drive a wedge between the Soviet people and the Stalinist regime. At the same time, these people rejected the idea of breaking up the Soviet state and cautioned against "antagonizing the potentially friendly Russian population by the prospect of partitioning the Russian state."<sup>19</sup> They generally believed that separatist tendencies of the non-Russian nationalities were not particularly strong and should not be encouraged. Their basic goal was the abolition of the Bolshevik regime and the establishment of a Free Russia that would be allied with Germany. Representatives of this group were particularly prominent in the various intelligence offices and in military propaganda. Many of them had long records of involvement in Soviet affairs as diplomats or in other capacities and were staunchly anticommunist. Several would later play an important role in the anti-Hitler conspiracy.<sup>20</sup>

Besides the Free Russia advocates, the realist school included a number of officials and military men who directed their efforts toward forming and implementing a plan of political action directed specifically at the Soviet non-Russian nationalities. Their approach was characterized by a strong emphasis on the imperative of differentiated—indeed, preferential—treatment of non-Russians. According to their basic argument, the non-Russian nationalities were the most staunchly anti-Soviet and thus the most easily mobilizable segment of the Soviet population. Further, because of their national aspirations, they also represented the

<sup>19</sup>See OKW (Armed Forces High Command)/WPr, "Weisungen für die Handhabung der Propaganda im Falle Barbarosa," June 9, 1941, cited in Dallin, *German Rule*, p. 57.

<sup>20</sup>Among the most active members of this group were the former German ambassador to the Soviet Union, Werner von der Schulenburg; the chief of the organization section of the army, Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg; the operations officer of Army Group Center, Henning von Tresckow; and a number of younger officers and intelligence experts such as Heinz Danko Herre and Wilfried Strik-Strikfeldt. Throughout the war, efforts toward a positive political action were supported and encouraged by the chief of army intelligence on the Eastern front and postwar architect of the West German intelligence service, Reinhardt Gehlen. Such efforts were also aided on a number of occasions by the head of German military intelligence, Admiral Canaris.

most promising future bulwark against Russian expansionism, if given national sovereignty and treated as German allies. For the most part, people subscribing to this point of view, many of whom were former academics or diplomats, worked in the Ostministerium.<sup>21</sup> Their influence was felt most strongly in the later stages of the war, especially with respect to German policies in the Caucasus and the formation of indigenous military units.

<sup>21</sup>The key players in this group were Professor Gerhardt von Mende, an expert on Soviet Muslims and Central Asians who was chief of the section on the Caucasus and Turkestan in the Ostministerium; Otto Bräutigam, chief of the section for general policy in the Ostministerium and a German diplomat with long years of experience in the Caucasus and the Ukraine; Professor Hans Koch, an intelligence officer and an advocate of Ukrainian nationalism; and Professor Theodor Oberländer, who was active as the commander of a large Caucasian volunteer unit and who gained prominence as the author of several memoranda that were highly critical of Nazi nationality policies. Others who played an important political role as commanders of volunteer units were Generals Oskar von Niedermeyer and Ernst Köstring, although they were considered Russophiles.

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### III. GERMAN OCCUPATION POLICIES AND THE NATIONALITIES

#### ADMINISTRATIVE AND JURISDICTIONAL DIVISIONS

German blitzkrieg tactics and the uninspired performance of the Red Army in the initial stages of the war soon resulted in the loss of huge Soviet territories to the invaders and provided an opportunity for the German leadership to put into practice its plans regarding the East. Within days of the German attack, the Wehrmacht had made a deep advance into the Western Ukraine, Belorussia, and Lithuania. By the end of July all of the Baltic lands had been occupied, and by late fall the rest of the Ukraine and Belorussia had fallen. The immediate problem facing Berlin with respect to the newly occupied territories was dividing them into manageable administrative units and clarifying jurisdictional authority over them of the various Reich bureaucracies.

The territorial administrative issue was decided on the basis of an earlier proposal by Rosenberg, now officially appointed Minister of the Ostministerium. It proposed the establishment of three administrative units called Reich commissariats. The Reich commissariat Ukraine included all Ukrainian lands except the Western Ukraine, which was placed under General Gouvernement (Poland) jurisdiction. The second commissariat, called Ostland, incorporated the three Baltic territories and most of Belorussia. The western (Byalistok) region of Belorussia was directly attached to Eastern Prussia. The third commissariat was to be established in the Caucasus upon occupation. A fourth commissariat, called Muscovy, was planned for the ethnically Russian territories but was never established. Each Reich commissariat was subdivided into a number of general commissariats. As can be seen, the administrative division of captured Soviet territories, although entailing a modicum of awareness of the ethnic factor, was conducted generally in an arbitrary manner, indicative of the lack of well-thought-out strategy for administering these national areas.

A much more difficult and ultimately troublesome problem was the delineation of jurisdiction and administrative authority over the occupied lands among a number of competing entities. Although Hitler did give overall administrative authority to Rosenberg's Ostministerium, in reality its power was severely circumscribed by other agencies. Of particular significance was the role played by the notorious SS (Schutzstaffel) under Himmler. The SS, which by 1941 had already become a powerful elite guard within the state, was entrusted with security functions and liquidation of "undesirable" elements.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the war, the SS enjoyed complete autonomy from the Ostministerium, and its actions often provoked serious conflicts with this ministry. Another source of conflict in occupation policies came from a variety of economic agencies charged with the exploitation of the resources of the Eastern territories.<sup>2</sup> As in the case of the SS, the economic agencies were independent of

<sup>1</sup>SS activities with particular relevance to and impact on occupation policies were those of the notorious *Einsatzgruppen* (action teams) and those of the SS Administration for Racial-Political Affairs. The *Einsatzgruppen*, who were part of the SS Security Service (*Sicherheitsdienst*), were in fact little more than execution squads whose task was to locate and liquidate "undesirables," that is, Jews, Gypsies, communists, and others. The Racial-Political Administration, on the other hand, was in charge of determining the racial characteristics of the occupied populations and conducting racially motivated propaganda campaigns such as the notorious 1942 *Untermensch* campaign.

<sup>2</sup>Most important among these were the Four Year Plan under Göring, the Ministries of Economy and Agriculture, and the so-called *Wirtschaftsstab Ost* (Economic staff East).

Rosenberg and pursued their goals without considering the political implications of their policies. Another important institution competing for authority in the East was the Wehrmacht. It had full jurisdiction over the territory and population in the combat zone and was primarily interested in policies that would assure the security of its logistics and rear. It was, at the same time, an institution that was less affected than the others with Nazi ideological militancy—a fact that allowed it to occasionally play a positive political role.

The fragmentation of administrative authority and, at times, conflicting objectives of the various jurisdictions led to constant bickering, and inconsistent, even contradictory policies. Yet this seemingly chaotic state of affairs did not result in a lighter occupation burden for the indigenous population. The absence of centralized authority often meant the opposite.

## THE UKRAINE

The Ukraine was without question the greatest potential prize for Germany in the East. Its size, strategic location, and economic potential made it the primary target of Nazi *Ostpolitik* from the beginning of the war. The successful mobilization of Ukrainian human and economic resources could decisively affect the Germans' military fortunes; conversely, the failure to do so was bound to prejudice seriously their efforts to subdue the Soviet Union militarily. As the Wehrmacht troops began pouring into the Ukraine in June 1941, it appeared that successful mobilization would not be difficult to achieve.

The initial contact between the advancing Wehrmacht units and the Ukrainian population was made in Galicia, which, although ethnically Ukrainian, had fallen under Soviet rule only after the dismemberment of Poland in 1939. To the surprise of the Germans, the indigenous population received them as long-awaited liberators. In countless towns and villages, the troops were greeted with bread and salt (a traditional Slav custom of welcoming a cherished guest) and spontaneous demonstrations of friendship and good will. To most Western Ukrainians, the German invasion meant one thing—deliverance from the hated Soviet regime. The reception given the Germans in the Eastern parts of the Ukraine was far more subdued and did not take on the jubilant character it did in Galicia. Nonetheless, there is no question that the overwhelming majority of the Soviet Ukrainians looked to the Germans with friendliness and hopeful expectations, attitudes hardly typical toward foreign invaders. Numerous front-line reports by military commanders and intelligence officers at the time indicate that over 90 percent of the population exhibited a friendly disposition.<sup>3</sup>

The reasons for this seemingly incongruous behavior are not difficult to understand given the nature of Soviet rule in the Ukraine. Although the Soviet regime had exercised control over Galicia (a traditional hotbed of Ukrainian nationalism) for less than two years, it had managed to completely alienate the local population. Immediately upon annexing Galicia, following the Nazi-Soviet pact, the Soviet regime embarked on a ruthless campaign designed to extirpate Ukrainian nationalist feelings and identity. The repressive measures conducted by the NKVD (Soviet secret police) were directed especially toward the political elite and the intelligentsia. Most of the Ukrainian representatives in the various Polish political forums, as well as the leadership of the several political parties, were imprisoned and deported without trial.<sup>4</sup> Many prominent educators, businessmen, and clergy suffered the same fate. At the

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, the intelligence report of the Army Group South, "Stimmung und Lage beim Einmarsch der deutschen Truppen," October 28, 1941; RG/67, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz.

<sup>4</sup>A detailed account of Soviet repression in the Western Ukraine is given in Eugen Glowinsky, "The Western Ukrainians," in Nikolai Dekker and Andrei Lebed, *Genocide in the USSR*, The Scarecrow Press, New York, 1958.



outbreak of war, Soviet authorities proceeded to execute summarily as many of the political prisoners in local jails as their hasty retreat permitted. Two thousand executed prisoners were found in the city of Lvov alone.<sup>5</sup>

The roots of discontent in the Eastern parts of the Ukraine ran, perhaps, even deeper. These areas had been subjected to an especially brutal form of collectivization, including mass deportations of Ukrainian kulaks in the early thirties and vicious purges later in the decade. Again, the Ukrainian intelligentsia, accused of assorted nationalist deviations, became the prime target of NKVD fury. The magnitude of the physical liquidation of assumed regime opponents in the Ukraine is indicated by the mass graves of victims of the NKVD discovered later, some of which contained as many as 12,000 bodies.<sup>6</sup> As in Galicia during the Soviet retreat, many political prisoners were executed, as were members of the technical intelligentsia and draft-age youths. In some cities, lists of nationalists and other politically suspect individuals were compiled and given to NKVD extermination squads.<sup>7</sup>

The dismal legacy of Soviet rule in both parts of the Ukraine had helped prepare a political climate in which a majority of the population came to identify its hopes and political aspirations with the invading foreign power. For the Germans, this presented a unique opportunity, which, if exploited properly, could have resulted in a decisive strategic-political payoff.

Yet, within the first few days of the German offensive, it became clear that the Nazi leaders were unwilling to seize the opportunities offered to them. The first test of German intentions took place in the Western Ukrainian center Lvov. Here, nationalist and anti-Soviet feelings ran so strong that even before the arrival of the Germans the Ukrainian Nationalist Organization (OUN) had staged a massive revolt that was brutally put down by the NKVD. Once the Wehrmacht occupied the city, the Ukrainian nationalists under the leadership of Bandera, assuming that the Germans would be cooperative, promptly moved to fulfill their political aspirations by proclaiming the establishment of a Ukrainian state and forming a government headed by one of Bandera's lieutenants.<sup>8</sup> Although this initial attempt was designed to give Ukrainian political aspirations a pro-German cast, it was immediately perceived by Nazi leaders as a challenge to their control. Less than a week after the new government's establishment, it was abolished, and its leaders, including Bandera, were arrested and thrown into jail.

For the first two months of the war, the occupied Ukrainian territories were under military jurisdiction, and German policies were still somewhat ambiguous. It was obvious, however, that positive political action was not intended on any large scale, despite the conducive circumstances. Several actions of the German political leadership signaled the rejection of a policy of cultivating the friendship of the indigenous population. The first was the ban of all Ukrainian political activities following the Lvov affair. More important in its negative implications was the decision to award a large chunk of ethnically Ukrainian territory to the Romanians and to separate the Western Ukraine from the Reich commissariat Ukraine.<sup>9</sup>

The Reich's occupation policies in the Ukraine underwent a major change with the trans-

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>7</sup>A list containing 100,000 names is reported to have been prepared for Kiev alone. Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ukrainian nationalist politics are examined in detail in John A. Armstrong, *Ukrainian Nationalism*, Libraries Unlimited, Inc., Littleton, Colo., 1980; and Dallin, *German Rule*, especially Chap. VI, and passim.

<sup>9</sup>The area ceded to the Romanians amounted to 10,000 square miles between the Dnyestr and Bug rivers and came to be known as "Transnistria." Romanian occupation policies were incomparably more humane than those of the Germans.

fer of the occupied areas from military to civilian jurisdiction and the appointment of Erich Koch as the Commissar for the Ukraine. Koch, a fanatical Nazi, was one of the most odious characters among the Nazi leadership. Even before his appointment he was known for his hatred of Slavs and his reliance on terror and brutality as preferred administrative methods. He was also utterly contemptuous of Rosenberg's ideas of differentiation between the Soviet nationalities, considering all of them to be equally "subhuman." Indeed, it was because of Koch's reputation as a ruthless executor of Hitler's directives that he was chosen for the job despite Rosenberg's vigorous objections.<sup>10</sup> Although nominally Koch remained subordinate to Rosenberg and the Ostministerium, he enjoyed Hitler's confidence throughout the war and was able to pursue his policies in total disregard of Rosenberg's occasional meek attempts to initiate a more enlightened course. In short, Koch was perhaps the perfect man to carry out Nazi plans for the merciless political subjugation and economic plunder of the Ukraine.

The specific policies pursued by the Germans can be divided into two general categories—those of political administrative and those of economic character. The former were designed to establish unquestioned German political hegemony, while the latter sought to exploit to the fullest Ukrainian economic resources and labor. In neither case was much thought given to the political implications of such actions.

The common denominator, as well as a major determinant of official German attitudes, was a remarkable degree of racial, cultural and political intolerance toward the Ukrainian population. A document containing guidelines for German behavior in the Ukraine prepared by Koch's administration provides insight into the occupiers' mindset.<sup>11</sup> After the obligatory verbiage about the civilizing prerogative of the "master race" in the East, the document asserts that the character of the indigenous people is "afflicted with feminine traits," which necessitates "direct control in order to preserve their normal existence." In the absence of such control, they are said to "suffer the lack of purposeful and organized leadership" in their economy and to "proceed toward mutual annihilation" or to fight "civilized races." On the other hand, the native population allegedly "considers themselves fortunate to be dominated by another power . . . the more so the greater their dependency on the ruling power." A necessary prerequisite for effective German control is said to be a "hard and uncompromising treatment under constant threat and use of punishment and reprisals, even when no direct provocation for such exists." In the interest of effecting greater obedience and intimidation, the guidelines suggest that the population be allowed "neither affluence nor satiety" and sees "possibilities to curtail drastically its material and other needs."

The German political administration of the Ukraine was characterized by its steadfast refusal to allow any indigenous participation in the administrative system except at the lowest (community) level, despite widespread Ukrainian willingness to cooperate with the Germans.<sup>12</sup> All administrative positions were filled with Reich Germans, which meant that a large army of bureaucrats, some 200,000 in all, had to be mobilized for the purpose.<sup>13</sup> Most of these people were totally ignorant of local circumstances and traditions and incapable or unwilling to consider the ramifications of their policies. The refusal of the occupying authorities to permit even a semblance of self-administration and indigenous participation eventually became one of the most serious grievances against them, because this stance

<sup>10</sup>On Rosenberg's misgivings about Koch and Hitler's arguments in his favor, see Bormann Protocol, pp. 90-91.

<sup>11</sup>See "Richtlinien für die der Ukraine gegenüber zu verfolgende Politik," November 20, 1941, R6/165, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz.

<sup>12</sup>The only exception was to be made for certain trusted indigenous advisers. Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>See Theodor Oberländer, "Bündnis oder Ausbeutung," June 22, 1943, R6/70, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz.

served to convince many people that the Germans regarded them simply as colonial subjects.<sup>14</sup>

Considerable effort was also expended to suppress Ukrainian political activity, which the Germans feared might undermine their supremacy. Despite the early ban on political activities, Ukrainian nationalists organized into two major factions, quickly established political networks, and gained influence throughout the Ukraine, especially in the cities. Their successes were largely due to the tolerance of the military authorities toward the nationalists and, in many instances, their open cooperation with them. Once the military administration was replaced by the Koch administration, however, the nationalists were subjected to brutal suppression by the SS *Einsatzgruppen*. Although the nationalists were never completely subdued, their activities were severely curtailed and forced underground.<sup>15</sup>

The occupation authorities scrupulously avoided any discussions and promises regarding the political future of the country. Administration officials were authorized only to explain to the Ukrainians that the damage inflicted on the Ukraine by 20 years of Bolshevism would require long-term German presence to repair and that the final disposition of their country would depend on the behavior of the Ukrainians themselves.<sup>16</sup>

German policies regarding education and religion in the Ukraine also had far-reaching consequences on the attitudes of the local population toward its new masters. The views of the top Nazis on the subject of education in the occupied Slavic territories were uncompromising and clear-cut from the beginning. Any schooling for Ukrainians beyond the most rudimentary reading and writing skills was considered superfluous and potentially detrimental to German interests. An educated person, by definition, was seen as inevitably opposed to German rule. "To teach the Russians, Ukrainians and Kirghiz to read and write," Hitler argued, "will eventually be to our disadvantage; education will give the more intelligent among them an opportunity to study history, to acquire a historical sense, and hence to develop political ideas which cannot but be harmful to our interests."<sup>17</sup> Such attitudes were duly reflected in educational policies that limited education to four years of elementary school and, in effect, abolished the school system beyond that. In some cases even four years appeared to the Nazis as excessive and was not always permitted. Exceptions to this general rule occurred only in some areas under military jurisdiction in which local commanders allowed schools to function to the seventh grade.<sup>18</sup> Secondary and university education, with few exceptions, also came to a standstill for the duration of the occupation, resulting in the dismissal of huge numbers of disillusioned and embittered youth. German educational policies had a traumatic effect on the Ukrainian population, because in the years since the revolution the Soviets had established the principle of universal education—however Sovietized—and the Ukrainians had come to regard education as a basic right.

One of the few areas in which German policies on the whole engendered positive feelings was religion. Despite years of resolute struggle against the church, the Soviet regime had not been able to eradicate the religiosity of the Ukrainian people and religious belief had remained strong, especially in the rural areas. Because of the Soviet record of militant atheism, the Germans were given a unique opportunity to win the sympathies of a large segment of the population through an enlightened approach. Yet, as in many other cases, Nazi ideolog-

<sup>14</sup>See, for example, an appeal to Hitler written by prominent Ukrainian leaders, January 14, 1942, R6/165, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz.

<sup>15</sup>For a detailed account of Ukrainian nationalist activities, see Armstrong, *Ukrainian Nationalism*, especially Chaps. IV, V, and VI.

<sup>16</sup>See "Anweisung an der Reichskommissar des Reichskommissariats Ukraine," November 11, 1941, R6/67, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz.

<sup>17</sup>Hitler's *Table Talk*, p. 224, cited in Dallin, *German Rule*, p. 459.

<sup>18</sup>Dallin, *German Rule*, p. 461.

ical apprehensions prevented the crystallization of an effective policy. There were important people among the Nazi hierarchy who simply did not believe in the political significance of the religious issue. Their attitudes toward the church were conditioned by the violently anti-Christian character of national-socialism.<sup>19</sup> Others were opposed to freedom of religion in the occupied territories because they were afraid that the church might become the catalyst of a nationalist revival and a potential anti-German movement. This threat was viewed by Hitler as sufficient cause to repress a unified national church and to encourage religious fragmentation.<sup>20</sup> Another reason why religious tolerance in the East could not be advocated openly was the realization that such a course might stimulate criticism of Nazi anticlerical attitudes in the Reich.

Nonetheless, the idea of using the religious issue for political purposes was not systematically opposed, and tacit approval was given to efforts to generate pro-German sentiment by reopening the churches. The revival of religious life in the Ukraine had begun in a spontaneous manner under the German military administration, which not only had tolerated but in many cases openly supported the reestablishment of religion. Whenever the Germans exercised toleration and respect for the spiritual needs of the local population, considerable good will toward them was invariably forthcoming. Pro-German feelings were especially pronounced among segments of the clergy who had severely suffered under the Soviet regime. The Germans, however, remained suspicious of the nationalistic leanings of the clergy, and instead of harnessing this reservoir of good will they consistently attempted to neutralize the influence of the churches.<sup>21</sup> The result was that a potentially formidable propaganda weapon against their atheist Soviet adversaries was lost.

Nowhere did a correct policy offer greater promise, nor failure assure deeper alienation of the Ukrainian population than in the case of the agrarian question. If there was one issue that had won the lasting enmity of the predominantly rural Ukrainians toward the Soviet regime, it was the expropriation of their land and the establishment of collectivized agriculture. More than ten years after the brutal collectivization campaign, the Ukrainian peasantry, in its overwhelming majority, remained bitterly resentful of collective agriculture. For many of them, the arrival of the Germans kindled hopes for an early termination of the hated system and a return to traditional property ownership.<sup>22</sup>

Many Germans were also well aware of these attitudes and their political exploitability. Plans that focused on the agrarian problem as a key opportunity and recommended the dissolution of the kolkhozes (collective farms) and land reprivatization as the sine qua non of a successful policy were drafted even before the invasion.<sup>23</sup> These and similar plans by

<sup>19</sup>Hitler himself stated that the advent of Christianity represented the "heaviest blow to humanity," and he considered Bolshevism as "Christianity's illegitimate child." See *Hitlers Tischgespräche*, p. 348.

<sup>20</sup>In one of his typical tirades on the subject, Hitler insisted that German interests would be best served if "every village had its own sect which developed its own image of God." *Ibid.*, p. 348.

<sup>21</sup>Typical of the ambivalent attitudes of the occupying authorities toward the Ukrainian church is the case of a synod planned for December 1942. The Wehrmacht authorities gave permission for the convening of a joint synod of bishops from both major Ukrainian orthodox churches in Kharkov. One of the purposes of the synod was to issue a declaration of loyalty and appeal to Ukrainian believers to cooperate with the Germans. The meeting, however, never took place because the bishops from the Reich commissariat were denied permission to travel to Kharkov. See *Monatsbericht*, December 1-31, 1942, by the Chief of the General Staff for Army Group B, January 9, 1943.

<sup>22</sup>The extent of dislike for the collective system is indicated by the fact that in many areas the peasants spontaneously proceeded to dissolve the collective farms and divide the land amongst themselves immediately upon the retreat of the Soviet Army and before the arrival of the Germans. See, for example, G. H. Ziehm, *Abschrift aus den Berichten*, "Getreidewirtschaft in der Ukraine" (no date given), R6/67, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz.

<sup>23</sup>See Otto Bräutigam, "Aufzeichnung," October 25, 1942, in TMWC, Document 294-PS, p. 335. German intelligence had prepared a plan envisaging the dissolution of the kolkhozes as early as May 1941 (Dallin, *German Rule*, p. 324, and author's interview with Professor Theodor Oberländer, May 26, 1980).

politically astute German officials were soon to run afoul of declared Nazi objectives, which could be summed up in one word—exploitation. At least until the end of the war, without regard for indigenous needs, Ukrainian agriculture was to serve as the exclusive source of food for the Wehrmacht and was also expected to provide significant quantities of “surplus” foodstuffs for the German civilian population. The overriding objective of securing sufficient deliveries of agrarian products to satisfy German needs, coupled with callous disregard for the aspirations of the Ukrainian peasant, resulted in policies that made the needed agrarian reform impossible.<sup>24</sup> Nazi leaders from both the political and economic administrative branches feared that doing away with the kolkhoz would result in major disruptions of Ukrainian agriculture and have a negative effect on agricultural output. Under the influence of Nazi *Untermensch* philosophy, many leaders also believed that the Ukrainian peasant was not capable of running a private farm, while others, such as Koch and his minions, feared that independent peasants would be more difficult to control.

Although the Nazi hierarchy and occupation authorities were firmly opposed to land reprivatization, they were undoubtedly aware of the potential for political payoffs for even minor concessions. Several efforts were made to exploit the anticollectivist feelings of the population with initiatives designed to create the impression the Germans were willing to meet popular expectations but without really upsetting the status quo. The most important concession was the so-called agrarian order (*Agrarerlass*) of February 1942. Promulgated with great fanfare and accompanied by a massive propaganda campaign, the *Agrarerlass* was trumpeted as decisive proof of German determination to abolish the kolkhozes at some point in the future.<sup>25</sup> In fact, the order brought little change, and most of the despised kolkhoz practices were preserved.<sup>26</sup> The proposed reforms had a minimal effect, probably because they were introduced only gingerly and in some cases were openly sabotaged by the officials of the Reichkommissariat.<sup>27</sup> Still, in many areas of the *Agrarerlass*, German propaganda promising concessions elicited, at least initially, a positive reaction. In the few places where, through the initiative of local German officials or military commanders, more radical solutions to the agrarian question were attempted, results exceeded expectations. Whenever a lenient approach and understanding were shown toward the peasants, they invariably responded with higher productivity, increased output, and conscientious fulfillment of delivery quotas, despite serious shortages of manpower and equipment.<sup>28</sup>

The good will generated by the agricultural order was soon dissipated as the rural population realized that the Germans had no intention of carrying out propaganda promises and as the exigencies of war forced the Nazis to implement ever more exploitative policies and

<sup>24</sup>German policies in the agricultural area are dealt with at great length in Dallin, *German Rule*, Chaps. XVI and XVII. See also Karl Brandt et al., *Management of Agriculture and Food in the German-Occupied and Other Areas of Fortress Europe*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, Calif., 1953.

<sup>25</sup>On the propaganda surrounding the *Agrarerlass*, see Buchbender, *Das Tönende Erz*, pp. 133-138.

<sup>26</sup>The *Agrarerlass* envisaged reform in three stages. In the first stage, the kolkhozes were to be renamed “communal enterprises” (*Gemeinwirtschaften*). The only difference with the collective farm was the possibility of acquiring slightly larger household plots freed of taxation. In the second stage, the communal enterprises were to be transformed into “agricultural associations” (*Landbaugenossenschaften*) in which peasants were assigned specific strips of land, but work was still to be performed jointly. The third and final phase was transition to private farming.

<sup>27</sup>By May 1943 only slightly over 10 percent of the “communal enterprises” had been transformed into “agricultural associations.” Except in a few isolated areas, organized transfer of kolkhoz land to private farming was not implemented during the years of German occupation.

<sup>28</sup>There were cases where, despite the drastic conditions and shortages, yields exceeded prewar kolkhoz levels (Dallin, *German Rule*, p. 350). This was particularly true in areas where the kolkhoz system was abolished outright as, for example, in the settlements of the Kuban Cossacks. There were also significant increases in yields achieved through the transition from “commune” to cooperative. Average yield per hectare in 1942 in the communes was 680 kilograms but went up to 850 kilograms in 1943 in the cooperatives. Dallin, *German Rule*, p. 367.

harsher treatment. As German demands for food supplies increased, delivery norms often acquired a confiscatory character. As a rule, at least 80 percent of agricultural produce was to be turned over to the authorities. In practice, requisitions, especially of livestock, often approached 100 percent. Such policies soon disillusioned the peasants, and subsequent attempts to mobilize the *kolkhozniks* with partial reforms and promises fell on deaf ears.<sup>29</sup>

The German agricultural policies also affected the Ukrainian urban population. The initial Nazi solution to the problem of how to feed these people was as simple as it was radical: No provisions were made to provide food for city dwellers. Faced with hunger, Nazi zealots theorized, the urban people would find a way, through barter or by other means, to induce the peasants to part with food hidden from German requisitioners. Catastrophic economic conditions soon resulted in many Ukrainian towns.<sup>30</sup> Food prices often increased tenfold from Soviet levels, while wages remained the same.<sup>31</sup> Food rations as established by the occupation administration were totally inadequate, and outbreaks of famine occurred sporadically. A drastic deterioration in the Ukrainians' attitude toward German rule was inevitable.

Although the Germans' handling of the agricultural issue, especially their failure to mobilize a large reservoir of potential supporters and sympathizers, was probably their single greatest mistake, the policy that most directly alienated the Ukrainians was the practice of forced labor. The serious depletion of the German labor force had raised the question of using foreign labor (*Ostarbeiter*) in German industry very early in the war. Originally, labor recruitment in the Ukraine was planned as a voluntary program and appears even to have enjoyed some support among the population.<sup>32</sup> German recruitment methods, however, soon eschewed the principle of voluntariness, and brutal force and intimidation were widely applied to satisfy the ever-increasing demand for *Ostarbeiter*. Particularly repugnant were the methods used by the infamous SS *Einsatzgruppen* who staged veritable manhunts, arresting whole church congregations and burning villages in retaliation for peasant refusal to volunteer. Once recruited, the Ukrainian *Ostarbeiter* were treated more like POWs than "volunteer" workers, in accordance with the Nazi *Untermensch* philosophy. Most were transported to Germany in cattle cars with little food and no provision for hygiene. On arrival in the Reich, the *Ostarbeiter* were forbidden any social contact with the German population and were barred from entering public places such as theaters and restaurants. The magnitude of the forced labor program was such that the true intentions of the Germans became clear to most Ukrainians within a short time after its beginning.<sup>33</sup> This policy contributed more than any other to the growth of the Ukrainian partisan movement.

German occupation policies in the Ukraine represent the best example of German political failure in the East. The Nazi leaders whose short-term goals were limited to maximum economic exploitation of the country opted for coercion and brutal repression as the preferred methods toward these goals. In view of the imperatives of Nazi ideology, perhaps it was naive

<sup>29</sup>For example, a decree of May 1943 that made land tilled individually by peasants their private property failed to elicit any positive reaction.

<sup>30</sup>As early as January 1942, German situation reports described the economic condition of the Ukrainian population as "many times worse than in the Bolshevik period" and the situation in the cities and larger communities as "catastrophic." See "Wehrmachtpropaganda—Lagebericht für die Zeit," 1.1-1.2, 1942, cited in Buchbender, *Das Törende Erz*, p. 268.

<sup>31</sup>*Lagebericht der Oberfeldkommandantur, Donez*, December 20, 1942, R6/65, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz.

<sup>32</sup>See Armstrong, *Ukrainian Nationalism*, pp. 122-124; and Dallin, *German Rule*, Chap. XX.

<sup>33</sup>According to Armstrong, *Ukrainian Nationalism*, pp. 124-125, within the first ten months of German occupation, 10 percent of the Kiev population had been deported to Germany. By August 1943, one out of every 40 Ukrainians had become a forced laborer, and the total number of Ukrainian *Ostarbeiter* toward the end of the war amounted to a staggering million and a half.

to expect any other course. The outcome of such treatment was predictable. The initial good will of the population turned into resentment and the willingness for cooperation into open hostility, or, at best, indifference. The alienation of the indigenous population led to several negative consequences. The mistreatment of the peasantry and the stifling of private initiative seriously hampered agricultural production and resulted in mediocre yields. In no case did agricultural production in the Ukraine as a whole come close to prewar levels. Thus, Nazi hopes of feeding both the Wehrmacht and German civilians with Ukrainian produce remained illusory. As German abuses became more widespread and well known, the opportunities for practical collaboration with the occupation force by native auxiliaries and local militia waned. The partisan movement, both pro-Soviet and nationalist, intensified and, from the summer of 1943 exerted a major disruptive influence on the war effort and administration.<sup>34</sup> A less obvious but no less significant consequence of German occupation policies in the Ukraine and elsewhere was the measurable stiffening of the Red Army's combat morale as German abuses were cleverly exploited by Soviet propaganda. To many, civilians and soldiers alike, the alternative to Bolshevism, exemplified by Nazi policies, began to look less and less attractive. The implications were clear. As a former Soviet official captured by the Germans has put it succinctly: "We have badly mistreated our people; in fact so bad that it was almost impossible to treat them worse. You Germans have managed to do that. In the long term the people will choose between two tyrants the one who speaks their own language. Therefore, we will win the war."<sup>35</sup>

### THE BALTIC STATES

As in the case of the Ukraine, the territory of the Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia) fell under German sway early in the war and remained under occupation for more than three years. These states were incorporated, together with Belorussia, in the Reichkommissariat Ostland (RKO) and turned over to civilian administration as early as September 1, 1941.<sup>36</sup>

Apart from length of occupation, the Baltic area had very little in common with the Ukraine. It was, first and foremost, a region inhabited by a non-Slavic population considered "Germanizable" and thus exempted from the racial abuse of the *Untermensch* doctrine. The Baltic lands were scheduled to become a full-fledged province of the Reich, and because of their more limited resources they were subjected to less economic exploitation. Moreover, local circumstances created conditions highly conducive to an atmosphere of collaboration and support for the invaders.

The forced incorporation of the three republics into the Soviet Union following the Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 1939 took place only a year and a half before the war. This short period of Soviet rule prevented the Soviet regime from thoroughly transforming Baltic society. However, Soviet policies, albeit of short duration, had created an almost universal hostility toward the regime. Upon annexation, Soviet authorities began to eliminate the social strata

<sup>34</sup>For an excellent account of the Soviet partisan movement, see John A. Armstrong (ed.), *Soviet Partisans in World War II*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1964. Also, Armstrong's *Ukrainian Nationalism* (Chap. VI) contains a good discussion of the formation and development of Soviet and nationalist partisan movements in the Ukraine.

<sup>35</sup>Theodor Oberländer, *Bündnis oder Ausbeutung*, June 22, 1943, p. 130, R6/70, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz.

<sup>36</sup>For reasons of space, we will not discuss German occupation policies in Belorussia here. It should be noted, however, that German rule there was more similar to that in the Ukraine than that in the Baltic states. For details, see Dallin, *German Rule*, Chap. XI.

that were considered potentially inimical to the new rule. Large numbers of the intelligentsia and military and political elites were imprisoned or deported.<sup>37</sup> Other Soviet measures that provoked widespread discontent, such as the nationalization of industry and commerce, which involved large-scale expropriation of private property, were largely completed by 1941. The Soviets initiated a collectivization campaign in the countryside, but it had failed to affect the majority of Baltic peasants at the time of the Germans' arrival.<sup>38</sup> An eloquent testimony of the extent of the Balts' disaffection with the Soviet regime was the spontaneous anti-Soviet uprisings that broke out throughout the Baltic region in the first few days of the war.<sup>39</sup> Most Balts were convinced that the arrival of the Germans signaled the restoration of their national independence.

German plans for the Reichkommissariat Ostland, as already mentioned, did envisage a more lenient treatment of Baltic nationalities. But that did not, by any means, involve treating the Balts as equals, or acknowledging their political aspirations. Although considered racially superior to the Slavs, the Balts were deemed as potentially worthwhile citizens of the Reich but only after having undergone intensive Germanization.

Nazi attitudes toward the three nations differed. Estonians were universally considered the most Aryan and Germanizable. The Latvians were seen as imbued with Russian elements and thus less suitable for Germanization.<sup>40</sup> Least desirable from the racial point of view were the Lithuanians, as they were suspected of springing from a strong Russian and Jewish admixture. To get rid of the undesirable elements, the Germans planned the deportation or outright liquidation of substantial parts of the native intelligentsia of all three nations.<sup>41</sup> Germanization was to lead, in the final analysis, to the eradication of the Balts' national identity and the disappearance of their ancient nations. No consideration was to be given to the Balts' desire to restore their national sovereignty and to reestablish the three Baltic states. Indeed, any nationalistic tendencies and activities of the Baltic population were deemed inherently anti-German and were to be suppressed.

From the beginning, German occupation policies reflected these plans. The military commanders, who administered the Baltic lands for the first few months, immediately upon the arrival of the German troops initiated measures that dampened the pro-German enthusiasm of the native population. Most consequential was the order to disband indigenous self-defense units, formed during the anti-Soviet uprisings, and to confiscate their weapons. The tens of thousands of Baltic patriots who had taken up arms against the Soviet regime and hoped to be recognized as loyal German allies and co-belligerents were bitterly disappointed. On the other hand, Wehrmacht authorities allowed and even encouraged the establishment of indigenous self-government councils. The principle of local self-government was thus recog-

<sup>37</sup>During the year-long prewar occupation of the Baltic area, the victims of the Soviet regime, killed or deported, have been estimated to number 59,700 Estonians, 34,250 Latvians, and 30,500 Lithuanians, including many women and children. In a single night, on June 13/14, 1941, 48,000 of the Baltic elite were deported to Siberia. Most of those deported during that year, as well as in subsequent postwar deportations, perished, and less than 20 percent eventually returned to their homelands after the death of Stalin.

<sup>38</sup>For example, in Estonia 110,000 of the country's 171,000 farms had remained in private hands. See "Monatsbericht des Kommandierenden Generals der Sicherungstruppen und Befehlshaber im Heeresgebiet Nord," August 15, 1942.

<sup>39</sup>In Lithuania a large-scale organized uprising took place June 23, 1941—the second day of the war. Some 100,000 Lithuanian patriots rose up against the Soviets and in bitter fighting drove the Red Army out of the country at the cost of 5000 casualties before the Wehrmacht arrived. A spontaneous armed rebellion broke out also in Latvia on July 1, 1941, as German units approached the country. For details on the Lithuanian uprising, see Algirdas Martin Budreckis, *The Lithuanian National Revolt of 1941*, Boston, 1968; see also Joseph Pajanjis-Javis, *Soviet Genocide in Lithuania*, Maryland Books, New York, 1980.

<sup>40</sup>Hitler himself was in the habit of referring to the Latvians as "Bolsheviks."

<sup>41</sup>See Helmut Heiber, "Der Generalplan Ost," for the Germanization plans for the Baltic area.



nized for the Baltic area in stark contrast with the policy in the Ukraine and in other Slavic areas. Eventually, these native administrative bodies were organized at all levels, including an indigenous government that acted in an "advisory" role to German occupation authorities. The actual influence of the native representatives on decisionmaking was very limited, but they did make their opinions known, even when they were critical of German policies. In most cases, their positions reflected the national interests of their people; they were hardly the sycophantic quislings portrayed in Soviet historiography of the period.

The Germans' more liberal attitudes toward the Balts and their recognition of the need for political concessions to and cooperation with the local population resulted in a more relaxed occupation. For instance, the Balts were exempted from the order closing down schools beyond the fourth grade; the educational system was permitted to function in a more or less normal manner. Various cultural institutions such as theaters, museums, and libraries remained open, although censorship was introduced. The most repugnant methods of labor recruitment and economic plunder were seldom used.

Still, these political measures could not prevent the steady deterioration of the peoples' attitude toward the authorities. Apart from the basic Nazi inability to exploit the intense nationalism and independent political aspirations of the Balts, a number of policies were particularly objectionable to the population.

A primary reason for the Balts' growing dissatisfaction was the German failure to return property expropriated by the Soviets to its rightful owners. The nationalization of manufacture and commerce, including small business, had caused a strong anti-Soviet backlash, and it was widely expected that the Germans would reverse nationalization and reinstate private ownership. Instead, as one astute German observer put it, "to the boundless surprise of the population the German administration of Ostland preferred to play the part of receiver of goods stolen by the Bolsheviks."<sup>42</sup> The reasons for German unwillingness to reprivatize the Baltic economy were twofold. First, there was determined opposition by the Nazi commissar of RKO, Lohse, a dedicated Nazi with pronounced statist proclivities, who believed that any decentralization of economic authority would diminish German rule and his own power. A second and much more utilitarian motivation was exploitation. Many of the nationalized businesses were transformed into German-run companies (*Ostlandgesellschaften*) with profits going to the Germans rather than to their legal owners.<sup>43</sup> The Baltic area also attracted innumerable companies and entrepreneurs from the Reich who attempted to get an economic foothold in the area and devised various get-rich-quick schemes at the expense of the native population.

As the war dragged on and the Germans' military-political and economic positions deteriorated, their occupation policies in the Baltics became harsher. Economic conditions grew progressively worse and began to affect popular attitudes. This was especially true among the urban population who were forced to cope with serious food shortages and inadequate food rations, which in some cases were said to be below those of the POWs.<sup>44</sup> Increased recruitment for labor service in Germany, including many women, further intensified discontent, as induction was often less than totally voluntary.

<sup>42</sup>Otto Bräutigam, "Aufzeichnung," October 25, 1942, in TMWC, Document 294-PS.

<sup>43</sup>As the war progressed, the continuous resentment created by the reprivatization issue forced the Germans to compromise. A directive reinstating private property in RKO was passed in February 1943. Its practical effect was minimal, however, and very few properties were returned to their owners outright. For example, in July 1943 the Latvian self-government complained to the German administration that the "Bolshevik laws on the nationalization of property continue to have validity in Latvia." See *Protokoll der Sitzung der Lettischen Selbstverwaltung und der Führung des Generalkommissariats*, August 29, 1943, R6/67, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz.

<sup>44</sup>See *Allgemeine Lage und Stimmung in Estland* (no date given), R6/67, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz.

The agrarian stratum of the population was also subjected to harsher treatment. Failure to fulfill foodstuff delivery quotas frequently led to repressive measures such as used in the Ukraine. After 1943 the German authorities relied increasingly on intimidation, deportations, internment in concentration camps, and even executions to accomplish their requisition goals.<sup>45</sup> These policies, of course, only served to heighten the distrust of the peasants and caused widespread resentment among the general population.<sup>46</sup>

The Balts' progressive alienation from the Germans and their diminishing confidence that a German military victory was in the national interests of their countries were reflected in their less than enthusiastic response to various call-up efforts in 1943 and later.<sup>47</sup> The unsatisfactory results of the call-ups, especially in Lithuania, generated another wave of repressive tactics.<sup>48</sup> The Nazi administration singled out the intelligentsia as a scapegoat because of its alleged nationalist and anti-German attitudes and subjected it to severe reprisals. In many districts in which the call-up turnout had been particularly low, the leading members of the intelligentsia were arrested and sent to concentration camps.<sup>49</sup> Further measures included the closing down of the universities and massive manhunts for the truant draftees.

The general deterioration of relations between the occupation authorities and the population had progressed to the point where by late 1943 nationalist anti-German resistance groups began operating in parts of the Baltics. The large reservoir of good will for the Germans, which was present at their arrival, had finally run dry. "The present German civil administration," a pro-German Lithuanian nationalist remarked in early 1944, "is in such contradiction with the Lithuanian people, that any useful cooperation between the two is impossible."<sup>50</sup>

## THE CAUCASUS

In many ways the Caucasus was unique among the Soviet regions to fall under German rule. The territories that were actually occupied, primarily in the North Caucasus, were characterized by an unusually rich mosaic of ethnic, cultural, and religious groups that had lived in close proximity to one another for centuries while preserving their distinctiveness.<sup>51</sup> It was also an area that, while rich in history and cultural traditions, had gained a deserved reputation as politically volatile and a hotbed of anti-Soviet ferment.

<sup>45</sup>For a discussion of these policies and their effect, see the report by the Security Service/SD, *Litauische Stimmen zur allgemeinen Lage und Stimmung in der Litauischen Bevölkerung*, Bericht #53, May 8, 1944, R6/68, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz.

<sup>46</sup>In one notable case that caused immeasurable damage to the German cause, the Gauleiter of the Lithuanian district of Vilnius called 200 village elders to a meeting to reprimand them for failing to fulfill their delivery quotas. Following his speech, he ordered his SS henchmen to execute every fifth elder as a warning to the rest. See *Presse Information*, #65/43, April 2, 1943, R6/167, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz.

<sup>47</sup>For details on the Baltic participation in the German war effort, see the next section.

<sup>48</sup>For details on the call-up in Lithuania, including a remarkably frank assessment of the reasons for the negative response, see "Übersicht über den Verlauf der Musterungsaktion in Litauen," May 9, 1943, R6/162, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz.

<sup>49</sup>"Fernschreiben an der Reichministerost," May 3, 1943, R6/68, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz.

<sup>50</sup>Colonel Kazys Skirpa, *Denkschrift über die Möglichkeit die Bereitschaft des Litauischen Volkes für den Kriegseinsatz zu steigern*, February 5, 1944, R6/68, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz.

<sup>51</sup>The Caucasus is made up of two large geographic regions: the North Caucasus and Transcaucasia. Transcaucasia consists of the three republics Azerbaïdzhân, Armenia, and Georgia. The North Caucasus, the only part to be occupied by the Germans, consisted at the time of the invasion of four autonomous republics (Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Osetia, and Checheno-Ingushetia) and three autonomous oblasts (Adygei, Karachai, and Cherkess). All were part of the Russian republic (RSFSR).

The Caucasian peoples had first come into conflict with the Soviet regime in the immediate postrevolutionary period when, following the collapse of the Russian empire, they proclaimed their political independence by forming four sovereign republics (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaidzhan, and North Caucasia). Although the Bolshevik government, along with many others, officially recognized their independence in 1918, two years later, in the summer of 1920, they were invaded by the Red Army and gradually incorporated in the Soviet Union.

Trouble erupted again as a result of the brutal collectivization campaign beginning in 1929. Popular uprisings and anti-Soviet guerrilla movements were mercilessly put down, and killings and mass deportations ensued.<sup>52</sup>

Another wave of Soviet repression reached the Caucasus in 1937 as part of the Great Purge, which aimed to liquidate the national intelligentsia, including many communists. In the North Caucasus, the purges took a particularly heavy toll among the Muslim-Turkic nationalities. Islam was vigorously persecuted by the Bolshevik regime from the start, and by the late 1930s it was almost completely driven underground. Of the 4000 mosques, 2000 *meddresahs* (religious schools), and 10,000 mullahs in 1920, only 150 mosques and 150 mullahs remained by 1939.<sup>53</sup>

The response of the "mountaineers," as the Turkic peoples of the North Caucasus were known, to the brutal Soviet policies was armed resistance, primarily in the form of guerrilla warfare. In many areas such as Checheno-Ingushetia, anti-Soviet resistance took the form of a massive uprising, which necessitated Soviet deployment of tank and air force units besides the NKVD units usually used in such contingencies. By the time the Germans arrived, the Soviets had been fighting the mountaineers for two years in some areas without being able to pacify the region.

German attitudes toward the Caucasus were also significantly different from those espoused in other areas. Apart from the economic imperative of exploiting Caucasian oil, the Caucasus was considered important only as a valuable military-strategic *place d'armes* for future penetration of the Middle East. It was to become, as the "Reichkommissariat Kaukasien," one of the four administrative units of the future Nazi empire in the East, but German colonization of the region was not envisaged. Racially, the indigenous peoples were considered to be superior to the Slavs, although the "theorists" from the Racial-Political Administration occasionally inveighed against Armenians and others. German policy in this respect certainly was influenced by the desire to cultivate Turkey, which considered itself a protector of the Turkic peoples of the area and which exerted considerable influence in Berlin.<sup>54</sup> Also, due to the military circumstances and the short period of occupation, the Caucasus was never transferred to civilian jurisdiction and remained under Wehrmacht authority until the German withdrawal. More important, many of the key German representatives—both military and civilian—who were active in the Caucasus belonged to the "realist" school of officials. They were keenly aware of the disastrous implications of German behavior in the Ukraine and were determined to demonstrate the utility of more enlightened policies.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>52</sup>A detailed account of Soviet policies in the Caucasus can be found in Alexander Uralov, *Narodoubiistvo v SSSR*, Munich, 1952. For a Soviet interpretation of wartime policies, see Hadzhi Murat Ibragimbeli, *Krah Edelvaissa v blizhnii vostok*, Nauka, Moscow, 1977.

<sup>53</sup>*Genocide in the USSR*, p. 41.

<sup>54</sup>On the role of Turkey in German policy, see Dallin, *German Rule*, Chap. XIII. For a Soviet view, see *German-skaya politika v Turtsii (1941-1943)*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Moscow, 1946.

<sup>55</sup>The key military personalities involved in the Caucasus campaign were the Commander in Chief of the German troops (Group A), Field Marshal von List, and, after his replacement, Field Marshal von Kleist; the Quartermaster General of the Army, General Wagner; and the chief of the Organizations Section of the High Command, Colonel von

The differentiated German attitudes toward the people of the Caucasus found an early expression in information materials prepared to acquaint Wehrmacht personnel with the land and people before the beginning of the campaign. In stark contrast with similar materials dealing with the Slavic areas, a study put together by the propaganda section of OKW (Armed Forces High Command) emphasized the strongly developed national identity and consciousness of the Caucasian peoples, and characterized in a positive manner individual nationalities. The Georgians, for instance, were said to be "freedom-loving, brave, and proud" and of "high culture," while the Armenians were depicted as "industrious, enterprising, and peaceful."<sup>56</sup> Another pamphlet for the troops noted that the indigenous population has a "highly developed sense of honor, pride, and sensitivity" which should always be taken into consideration.<sup>57</sup> Underlying this new emphasis was the understanding that a successful policy in the Caucasus would also require a change in attitude on the part of the German soldier and a different code of behavior than that practiced elsewhere. More than in any other area, the pamphlet continued, "the German soldier here must show respect for the population's customs and religious practices and guarantee the sanctity of family life and property."<sup>58</sup>

These novel accents in the political conduct of the war found a practical expression with the beginning of the German campaign in the Caucasus in the summer of 1942. The offensive carried out by the troops of Army Group A began on June 28 and quickly penetrated the area. By late fall, the Germans had taken control of the Don and Kuban steppe areas and had reached the Volga in Kalmykia. In the south they reached the Great Caucasus Range and occupied most of the North Caucasus. They did not, however, achieve their strategic objective of seizing the oil fields of Grozny and Baku and were not able to penetrate the Transcaucasian region.

The rapid German successes were partly the result of the remarkably lackluster performance of the Red Army. The Soviet troops often retreated without putting up a fight, and confusion, panic, and mass desertions occurred with regularity. It was the dismally low morale of the Soviet troops on this front that prompted Stalin to issue the famous order #277, which openly acknowledged widespread defeatism in the army and ordered the formation of the infamous "blocking units" (*zagraditelniye otryadi*).<sup>59</sup> At least in part, the Red Army's morale problems can be attributed to the indifferent or hostile attitudes of the local population. The Soviet military authorities, on their part, distrusted the civilians to such an extent that some Red Army units were given categorical orders to avoid contact with the indigenous population in order to prevent "defeatist contagion."<sup>60</sup>

At the same time, German troops were being given orders that showed a determination to win over the local population. Before the beginning of the offensive, the Commander in Chief of Army Group A, Field Marshal von List, issued an order to the troops that is indicative of this effort. It consisted of the following seven points:

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Stauffenberg. Among the civilians, most prominent roles were played by the representatives of the Ostministerium Gerhardt von Mende and Otto Bräutigam.

<sup>56</sup>See *Der Kaukasus: Raum, Bevölkerung, Wirtschaft*, OKW, July 1942, cited in Buchbender, *Das Tönende Erz*, p. 197.

<sup>57</sup>*Merkblatt für die Kaukasus Armeen*, December 1941, cited in Buchbender, *Das Tönende Erz*, p. 198.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup>The order, issued on July 28, 1942, specified that anybody retreating without a specific order from the High Command was guilty of treason and was to be shot on the spot. Blocking units were positioned several hundred meters behind the front lines and given orders to shoot anybody retreating. For details, see Buchbender, *Das Tönende Erz*, pp. 203-206.

<sup>60</sup>Cited in Alexander Dallin, "The North Caucasus," in Armstrong (ed.), *Soviet Partisans in World War II*, p. 571.

1. The population of the Caucasus should be treated as friendly nations, except when they show themselves to be anti-German.
2. The aspirations of the Mountaineers to do away with the collective system should not be hindered in any way.
3. The reopening of houses of worship of all confessions and the cultivation of religious customs and traditions is to be allowed.
4. Property is to be respected and requisitioned goods should be paid for.
5. The trust of the population is to be won by exemplary conduct. Its collaboration is of great importance in the mountainous area which is difficult to control militarily, and can also considerably facilitate the further advance of the German troops.
6. All necessary war measures causing hardship to the population should be explained and justified.
7. The honor of the Caucasus women should be especially respected.<sup>61</sup>

Guidelines similar in emphasis but often in much greater detail were also issued for the administration and propaganda organs. Apart from the principles, listed above, they stressed the political importance of allowing the Caucasian peoples wide-ranging self-government and securing their cooperation in the administration of the region. Further, the indigenous population was to be given full autonomy in the cultural and educational domains and in the reprivatization of the economy.<sup>62</sup>

Popular attitudes toward the advancing German armies created conditions conducive to the implementation of these policies. Throughout the occupied areas of the Caucasus, the Germans were accorded a friendly reception. In some areas, such as the Cossack and Kalmyk lands in the North and in the Muslim areas, the welcome was truly enthusiastic. The Germans responded by granting self-government privileges to the local population. In some national areas, "national" or "regional" committees were organized and vested with genuine administrative authority. Elsewhere, local administration was entrusted to indigenous councils, mayors, or elders. In most cases the self-government organs appear to have been given wide responsibilities and to have been respected by the Wehrmacht authorities.<sup>63</sup>

The reintroduction of religious freedom also generated a strong positive reaction. Within a surprisingly short time, churches and mosques were able to resume their functions and assume their traditional role in society, despite shortages of clerical personnel and 20 years of Soviet atheistic repression.<sup>64</sup> German religious tolerance was particularly appreciated in the Muslim areas. Numerous witnesses report an enthusiastic public participation in the revival of religious life, including the opening of religious schools and the observation of Muslim customs and traditions. Public gratitude toward the Germans was often expressed at religious festivities.<sup>65</sup> The Germans also kept their promises in the field of education. The school system was allowed to function without any restrictions and was administered by the local authorities. Even higher learning institutions stayed open despite the war disruptions.

As in other areas under German occupation, the most decisive factor influencing indige-

<sup>61</sup>"Befehl an alle im Kaukasus eingesetzten Truppen," July 1942, R6/65, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz.

<sup>62</sup>See, for example, *Kaukasusrichtlinien*, August 1942, R6/143, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz. For the German propaganda effort in the Caucasus, see *Richtlinien für die Propaganda im Kaukasus* (no date given), R6/143, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz, and *Richtlinien für die Propaganda unter den Kaukasischen Völkern*, February 19, 1942, cited in Buchbender, *Das Tönende Erz*, pp. 191-192.

<sup>63</sup>Dallin, *German Rule*, pp. 244-247.

<sup>64</sup>One German observer reports, for instance, that in the city of Novocheerkassk six churches were functioning within a month of the German arrival. The population's gratitude was expressed in the widespread practice of asking German soldiers to be honorary godfathers in baptismal ceremonies. See *Lagebericht des Chefs der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD*, October 16, 1942, R6/143, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz.

<sup>65</sup>In one such celebration of the Muslim Kurman feast in Nalchik, Kabardino-Balkaria, the Muslim community presented the Germans with 1000 head of cattle and other expensive gifts, including a gold-embroidered saddle for Hitler, as a sign of gratitude. See Bräutigam report to Rosenberg, December 22, 1942, R6/65, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz.

nous attitudes was German policy in the economic sector and especially agriculture. The basis on which the Germans approached the problem was the general agrarian reform of February 1942. However, in the Caucasus the reform was taken much more seriously and measures were initiated to put it into practice on a large scale. For example, while in the Ukraine only 10 percent of the kolkhozes were to be transformed into agricultural cooperatives, in the Caucasus the figure ranged up to 40 percent during the first year.<sup>66</sup> In the mountainous areas where cattle breeding was the primary economic pursuit, the kolkhozes were to be abolished outright and private farms reestablished. Indeed, the popular opposition to collective farming was so strong that in many areas the peasants spontaneously divided stock, equipment, and land among themselves and dissolved the farms before German administration had been established. Such facts accomplished were honored by the Germans, which earned them the confidence of the population. Also politically significant was the notable restraint in applying Nazi methods of forced labor recruitment. Labor recruitment, to the extent that it was practiced, depended on volunteers to a degree unimaginable in the Ukraine.<sup>67</sup>

The picture of German occupation in the Caucasus was, of course, hardly an idyllic one. It was marred by many of the typical oppressive measures and transgressions against the population that were the rule in other areas. German behavior became progressively worse toward the end of the occupation with the Soviet army pressing on and the German position becoming increasingly insecure. Nonetheless, occupation policies in the Caucasus were qualitatively different from those practiced elsewhere and were carried out with a clear cognizance of their political implications. The Germans' conduct in this region was the closest they ever came to a conscious attempt to use the ethnic factor in political warfare. The results were indicative of the potential of such an approach.

One significant consequence of the more humane German treatment of the native population in the Caucasus was the failure of the Soviets to organize an anti-German partisan movement of any import. The few isolated partisan groups that operated in the Caucasus consisted primarily of former party and NKVD officials and received almost no support from the population.<sup>68</sup> Although pro-Soviet partisan actions were of little more than nuisance value, the people of the Caucasus contributed significantly to the German war effort. The willingness to collaborate with the occupation authorities was evidently so strong that internal security of the entire occupied area, including antipartisan operations, was left primarily in the hands of indigenous military units.<sup>69</sup> Large sectors of the front line appear to have been manned by Caucasian national units in German service. Sizable military units were also formed by the Germans in the Cossack areas and in Kalmykia. Many were determined to continue their anti-Soviet struggle after the reoccupation by the Red Army. Armed resistance to the Soviets in the North Caucasus continued for some time, and there were efforts to win German support for organized guerrilla warfare behind Soviet lines.<sup>70</sup>

The implementation of nonexploitative policies in the economic realm secured the maintenance of acceptable levels of production, and the desperate economic conditions that prevailed in the Ukraine were observable nowhere in the Caucasus. Perhaps the best proof of

<sup>66</sup>Dallin, "The North Caucasus," p. 579.

<sup>67</sup>See "Vermittlung von Arbeitskräften für das Reich," November 13, 1942, and "Arbeitseinsatz der Kaukasier," December 8, 1942, R6/65, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz.

<sup>68</sup>For an excellent discussion of partisan activities in the Caucasus, see Alexander Dallin, "The Caucasus Partisans," in Armstrong (ed.), *Soviet Partisans in World War II*, pp. 586-632.

<sup>69</sup>Bräutigam report to Rosenberg, December 22, 1942, R6/145, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz.

<sup>70</sup>See, for example, "Vorschlag zur Banden Bildung im Kaukasus," September 20, 1943, R6/145, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz.

**the success of the German policies in the Caucasus is the fact that at the end of the occupation tens of thousands of local inhabitants decided to throw their lot with the retreating Germans, leaving their ancestral homes for an uncertain future.**

#### IV. NATIONALITIES UNDER ARMS

German policies in the Caucasus demonstrated that military and political payoffs could result from a calculated approach toward the indigenous population. Policies employed in the Caucasus did not spill over into other regions, however. The overall record of German conduct of political warfare with respect to Soviet nationalities is a poor one.

Yet in spite of the demonstrated political ineptness of the Germans, collaboration between members of the non-Russian nationalities and the German invaders occurred on an unprecedented scale. The logical explanation for this incongruous development is that the anti-Sovietism of many former Soviet citizens was of such intensity as to overcome their misgivings and dislike for the Germans. Nowhere was this more dramatically demonstrated than in the case of those former Soviet subjects who took up arms against the Soviet Union.

The Nazi attitude toward military collaboration with the subjugated peoples of the East was unequivocal at the beginning of the Soviet campaign. Under the influence of their racial and ideological dogmas, and convinced that the Wehrmacht would quickly subdue the Soviets, Nazi leaders contemptuously rejected any thought of securing the participation of indigenous anti-Soviet elements in the war. "It should never be allowed [in occupied territories]," opined Hitler, "that non-Germans carry arms. This is very important. Even when at first it appears easier to secure the military assistance of the subjugated peoples, it is wrong. They will inevitably turn against us some day. Therefore only the German should be armed, not the Slav, not the Czech, not the Cossack, not the Ukrainian. . . ."<sup>1</sup> Apart from the typical Nazi contempt for the Soviet peoples, Hitler also feared that allowing the nationalities to fight on the German side would lead to political demands after the war. These official Nazi views were reflected in the first few months of the war in the disbanding and disarming of indigenous units that had formed spontaneously in the Baltics and the outlawing of the violently anti-Soviet Ukrainian nationalist military organization (OUP).

However, as it became clear that the war was not to be an easy one and as the Germans suffered more and more casualties, attitudes began to change. The change was only slow and grudging among top Nazi echelons but dramatic among commanders in the field. Indeed, many of the latter had never paid much attention to Nazi racial-ideological inanities and, faced with severe manpower shortages on one hand and the willingness of the indigenous population to collaborate on the other, had begun quietly to incorporate volunteers in their units. By late fall 1941, the practice of recruiting indigenous auxiliaries and volunteers had become ubiquitous and, a year after the beginning of the war, one million former Soviet citizens, both Russians and non-Russians, were actively participating in the German war effort.

There were two basic forms of indigenous participation in the war: the direct incorporation of volunteers in Wehrmacht or SS units and the formation of indigenous units of various sizes and functions operating under German supervision.

<sup>1</sup>Bormann Protocol, p. 88.



## THE AUXILIARIES

Recruitment of natives from the occupied areas for the Wehrmacht units usually began on the initiative of local commanders without any official sanction. To redress the serious shortage of reserves, native volunteers were employed in a variety of primarily noncombat functions such as truck drivers, ammunition carriers, and medics. Although many natives did serve in front-line combat functions, they were considered auxiliaries and became collectively known as *Hilfswillige* (*Hiwis*—literally, "willing helpers"). The *Hiwis* were dressed in German uniforms and received the same basic pay and food rations as German soldiers. Material support was also provided for their families and in case of death or disability.<sup>2</sup> Promotion was possible only to the rank of corporal.

It is difficult to estimate the exact or even approximate number of *Hiwis* in the Wehrmacht because most unit commanders were aware of official attitudes toward the volunteers and did not keep records and seldom mentioned them in official reports. Nonetheless, there is conclusive evidence that the German army enlisted former Soviet citizens in its ranks on an unprecedented scale. An order by the Army High Command issued in August 1942 specifies that divisions be allowed to recruit as many auxiliaries as necessary to make up any personnel shortages to full order of battle strength. Logistic and support troops were allowed an extra 10 percent.<sup>3</sup> Even these numbers, however, could be exceeded in special circumstances. According to a German officer who was actively involved in recruiting, an order by the High Command that was passed verbally, but never in written form, in the summer of 1942 allowed the recruitment of between 3000 and 4000 auxiliaries per division,<sup>4</sup> which represented approximately one-quarter of personnel strength.<sup>5</sup> Several independent reports confirm that these quotas appear to have been attained in most divisions on the Eastern front by mid-1943.<sup>6</sup> In many units the percentage of volunteers, however, appears to have considerably exceeded the guidelines. For example, the 134th Infantry division, which apparently enlisted all of its POWs on an equal footing with the German soldiers from the beginning of the war, is said to have consisted of almost 50-percent auxiliaries in late 1942,<sup>7</sup> while the 18th Army counted 47,000 volunteers among its troops<sup>8</sup> in early 1943.

The total number of military collaborators in the Wehrmacht is impossible to ascertain with certainty. Estimates vary from a low of 600,000 to a high of 1.4 million.<sup>9</sup> As the German army on the Eastern front never exceeded 3.5 million, even the lowest estimate would indicate that close to 20 percent of German troop strength consisted of former Soviet citizens.

It is even more difficult to determine the number of volunteers from the non-Russian nationalities. There are, however, good reasons to believe that at least half, and probably more, of the *Hiwis* were non-Russian. The bulk were recruited from the following three groups: released POWs, stragglers left behind by the Red Army, and the indigenous popula-

<sup>2</sup>For details on the military and legal status of the auxiliaries in the Wehrmacht, see "Order #8000: Landeseigene Hilfskräfte im Osten," Oberkommando des Heeres, August 1942.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup>Wilfried Strik-Strikfeldt, *Gegen Hitler und Stalin*, Mainz, 1970, p. 80.

<sup>5</sup>The average German division had between 12,000 and 15,000 troops.

<sup>6</sup>See, for example, Thorwald, *Die Illusion*, p. 68, and "Einsatz der Freiwilligen aus dem Osten," Oberkommando des Heeres (no date given).

<sup>7</sup>Cited in Dallin, *German Rule*, p. 537.

<sup>8</sup>Reinhard Gehlen, *The Service*, The World Publishing Co., New York, 1972.

<sup>9</sup>See Thorwald, *Die Illusion*, p. 12; Peter Kleist, *Zwischen Hitler und Stalin*, Bonn, 1950, p. 202; and Dallin, *German Rule*, p. 536. Apart from the volunteers absorbed by the army, there were considerable numbers incorporated in the *Luftwaffe* who served primarily in air defense and other support functions. A May 1944 report gives their number as 180,000. See "Vermerk betreffend Veränderungen beim General der Freiwilligenverbände," R6/70, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz.

tion. The overwhelming majority of former POWs who were recruited were Ukrainian or Belorussian, because of the German practice of releasing only those prisoners whose native lands had already been occupied. The indigenous population of the occupied territories was, of course, also overwhelmingly non-Russian because only comparatively small ethnically Russian lands were occupied for a long time. Thus, it stands to reason that because the majority of the available pool of potential volunteers was non-Russian, so was the enlisted contingent.

## INDIGENOUS UNITS

The second major form of military collaboration with the Germans was the formation of indigenous military units designed either for deployment at the front or for service in the rear. Two kinds of units were organized by the Germans to provide military security in the occupied areas. The purpose of the first type was to combat communist partisans. Known as indigenous security units (*Landeseigene Sicherungsverbände*), they were organized along military lines and possessed considerable mobility.<sup>10</sup> At first the occupation authorities were strongly opposed to any indigenous armed formations, and many of the units that had been formed spontaneously in the Baltic states and the Ukraine were ordered disbanded. Attitudes, however, began to change in reaction to the increasing partisan threat and decreasing numbers of German security personnel. As in the case of the auxiliaries, many of the units were first authorized by local commanders and occupation officials without the sanction or knowledge of central authority. By mid-1943 collaborator units were in evidence throughout the Baltic states, Belorussia, and the Ukraine, and especially in the Slavic areas where they bore the brunt of the antipartisan campaign. In general, they were of battalion size, and their troops were treated the same as auxiliaries in terms of pay and privileges.

Side by side with the larger native security forces there also existed local security units that were generally known as Guard formations (*Schutzmannschaften*) or indigenous police (*Ordnungsdienst*), depending on the area in which they were deployed. These units were, as a rule, based in a specific locality, and their members were recruited from volunteers native to the area. Their functions included a variety of military-security duties such as guarding military installations and railroads and preventing partisan infiltration. As partisan activities expanded in the later stages of the war, the guard formations were increasingly used in direct antipartisan combat.<sup>11</sup>

No reliable figures exist on the number of collaborators providing armed assistance to the Germans in the occupied areas. There is no question, however, that it must have been considerable. German sources are fairly unanimous in reporting that indigenous units represented a clear majority of all rear security troops. One source estimates the combined total of auxiliaries and rear units as high as two million.<sup>12</sup>

## NATIONAL UNITS

Much better known and politically more important were the national units organized explicitly for front-line combat. The formation of national combat units, of course, directly

<sup>10</sup>See "Order #8000" for a description of the characteristics and functions of the different rear units.

<sup>11</sup>For an analysis of the role of the collaborators in the German antipartisan effort, see George Fischer, *Soviet Opposition to Stalin*, Cambridge, Mass., 1952; and Armstrong (ed.), *Soviet Partisans in World War II*, pp. 227-249.

<sup>12</sup>Fischer, p. 45.

contradicted both Nazi philosophy and official policy at the beginning of the war. Many top Nazis, including Hitler, remained suspicious of such units and hindered their development in various ways until the end of the war. Nonetheless, in contradiction to official policy, national units were being organized as early as late 1941. By 1943 hundreds of thousands of Soviet non-Russians were fighting at the front in their respective national units. Several factors contributed to this phenomenon. The rising German casualties and manpower shortages as the war dragged on at first prompted many of the responsible field commanders and later some of the political leaders to look for replacements from among the indigenous populations. Further, it was in this specific area that the efforts of the "realist" officials, within and without the military, to promote the cause of the nationalities were most intensive and successful. The last and decisive factor was the unquestioned willingness of huge numbers of former Soviet citizens to take up arms against the Soviet regime.

### BALTIC NATIONAL UNITS

The Baltic area was the first among the occupied territories in which national units were formed and sent to the front. As already mentioned, the Nazis had fewer misgivings about the Balts, from a racial point of view, than any of the other nationalities and were more willing to accord them the status of cobelligerents. The Balts, on the other hand, were eager to establish their own indigenous armed forces, hoping that participation in the war would earn them significant political concessions in their struggle for national sovereignty later on. Still, for some time after the occupation of the Baltic region, the Germans remained suspicious of armed natives and disbanded the numerous local formations existing at the time of their arrival. An exception was made in the case of units destined for security work behind the front and a number of security battalions (*Schutzmanns-Bataillone*) that were formed from Latvian and Estonian volunteers beginning July 31, 1941.<sup>13</sup> Yet, despite an explicit order from the political leadership not to use the native formations in front-line combat, the army soon began forming its own volunteer battalions.<sup>14</sup> The first eight battalions were organized in Estonia and thrown into battle in the most difficult sectors during the Soviet winter counteroffensive of 1941-1942. Despite poor training and inadequate armament, the Estonian units showed exemplary courage. Impressed by their first experience with the national units and facing a critical situation on the Northern front, the German military commanders apparently considered a massive emergency mobilization of national armies in the Baltic states to stop the Soviet offensive.<sup>15</sup> The idea was dropped once the immediate danger passed, but additional battalions continued to be formed throughout the region. Although ostensibly entrusted with internal policing functions, these battalions were deployed more often than not in front-line combat.

Encouraged by the demonstrated combat prowess and reliability of the Baltic units, native administrators pressed for political recognition of their military contribution. Primarily, they demanded that their respective nations be allowed to form larger national forces under

<sup>13</sup>George H. Stein, *The Waffen SS: Hitler's Elite Guard at War, 1939-1945*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, N.Y., 1966, p. 174.

<sup>14</sup>An order to that effect was issued to the Army Group North on November 25, 1941. See Joachim Hoffmann, *Die Ostlegionen 1941-1943*, Verlag Rombach, Freiburg, 1976, p. 18.

<sup>15</sup>Stein, p. 174.

indigenous leadership. These Baltic armies were to be recognized by the Germans as allied forces and used in combat only for the defense of national territories.<sup>16</sup>

Such essentially political demands ran counter to German designs for the Baltic area even if they appealed to some in the military; hence, they were disregarded. Large Baltic units were established, however, under the auspices of an unlikely sponsor—the SS. Engaged primarily in policing and security functions in the occupied territories, the SS had become the primary executor of the Nazis' repressive measures and the perpetrator of untold crimes against the indigenous population. It also considered itself the guardian of the Nazi creed of racial purity. Although these SS functions continued to be carried out until the end of the war by the notorious SS *Einsatzgruppen*, the SS also had a military arm known as the Waffen SS that engaged in front-line combat. The Waffen SS underwent a reorganization in 1943 that brought about a major expansion of the SS forces. One of the results of the reorganization was the tacit disregard of the heretofore strict racial and ethnic criteria for enlistment in these elite units.<sup>17</sup> This opened the door for the organization of Baltic units in the Waffen SS.

The recruitment of volunteers for the SS units, called legions, began in late 1942 and apparently was fairly successful. In early 1943 some 15,000 Latvians and 6500 Estonians had signed up for the legions, while the Lithuanians proclaimed their intention to organize a legion of 30,000.<sup>18</sup> The initial positive response to the legions did not last long, however, and the increasingly oppressive German policies in the Baltic states resulted in fewer volunteers. Nazi authorities sought to resolve this problem by introducing compulsory military service in early 1943. As could be expected, in view of intensifying public discontent, the success of the call-ups was limited.<sup>19</sup>

Despite these setbacks, the Germans were able to considerably enlarge the existing legions, first into brigades and then into full-fledged divisions. Thus, by 1944, there were three Baltic divisions of the Waffen SS alongside many other smaller units fighting against the Red Army in the northern sector of the front.<sup>20</sup> All of them fought until the end of the war.

In general, the Baltic national units amassed a distinguished combat record despite German political insensitivities and the less than equal status of their soldiers. To the overwhelming majority of the Balts, fighting on the German side was merely coincidental with their real purpose and motivation—defending Baltic national interests.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>16</sup>See, for example, the proposal by the Latvian administration to the German authorities to set up a Latvian army of 125,000 in December 1942, R6/65, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz. On Lithuanian and Estonian attitudes, see "Denkschrift über die Möglichkeit die Bereitschaft des litauischen Volkes für den Kriegseinsatz zu steigern" (no date given), R6/68, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz, and "Möglichkeiten einer Autonomie Estlands im Kriege" (no date given), R6/67, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz.

<sup>17</sup>The first SS formation to be recruited regardless of racial and ethnic factors was made up of Yugoslav Muslims in February 1943. Stein, p. 180.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 176. The Lithuanian figure is given in "Protokoll der Sitzung der Lettischen Selbstverwaltung und der Führung des Generalkommissariats," January 29, 1943, R6/67, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz.

<sup>19</sup>See, for instance, "Übersicht über den Verlauf der Musterungsaktion in Litauen" (no date given), R6/162, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz; and a letter by the Latvian self-government to the German authorities describing the reasons for the failure of the call-up. "Abschrift," November 16, 1943, R6/165, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz.

<sup>20</sup>These divisions were the 15th Grenadierdivision der Waffen S (Latvian #1), 19th Grenadierdivision der Waffen SS (Latvian #2), and 20th Grenadierdivision der Waffen SS (Estonian #1).

<sup>21</sup>There is considerable evidence that the Baltic soldiers and officers remained strongly nationalistic even in the Waffen SS and were anything but "fascist mercenaries," as Soviet historians have traditionally portrayed them. One representative report on the political attitudes of Latvian SS units characterizes the officer corps as "strongly chauvinistic" and notes "remarkably anti-German attitudes" on the part of both officers and troops. See "Politischer Erfahrung mit lettischer Legion," October 26, 1943, R6/70, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz.

## THE EAST LEGIONS

The largest number of national units recruited from among the Soviet nationalities was made up of Turkic and Caucasian volunteers, which came to be known collectively as the East Legions. Most of them belonged to the Muslim nationalities from Central Asia and the North Caucasus, but there were also sizable contingents of Caucasian Christians, especially Georgians and Armenians.

There was little reason at the beginning of the war to suspect that hundreds of thousands of these nationals would eventually end up fighting shoulder to shoulder with the Germans. Many of them, especially those of Oriental origin, were considered by the Germans to be racially inferior even to the Slav "subhumans" and only a step above Jews and Gypsies. To the extent that the Nazis were interested in them and their territories at all, it was for economic exploitation, namely, Caucasus oil. Politically, they were considered inconsequential, and most Nazi leaders appear to have shared Hitler's total disinterest in "these primitive tribes."<sup>22</sup>

Nazi racial prejudices exacted a heavy toll among these Soviet minorities during the first few months of the war. Soviet Muslims suffered more than most. Tens of thousands of them who had deserted or had been taken prisoner were shot summarily, many on the assumption that they were Jewish because of circumcision. Of about 100,000 Turkestanians (Central Asians) documented as present in POW camps in the fall of 1941, only 6000 survived the winter.<sup>23</sup> In the POW camp in Czesstokowo, Poland, in which 30,000 Turkestanians were detained, only 2000 left alive.<sup>24</sup> The Christian peoples of Transcaucasia fared better, but even there the losses due to the inhuman conditions and treatment in the POW camps were staggering. Thus, less than 50 percent of all Georgian POWs survived the winter of 1941-1942.<sup>25</sup>

Yet even as thousands continued dying in the camps, the Nazi leadership in a remarkable about-face began instituting policies that were to result in preferential treatment for the Turkic-Muslim nationalities and for the Georgians and Armenians. Although what caused this reorientation is not certain, there were several contributing factors. First, the "realists" among the Ostministerium officials and intelligence experts had pressed from the beginning for a differentiated treatment, pointing to the much higher desertion rates of these nationalities and their general anti-Soviet predisposition. Hitler himself, while inveighing against "Mongols," is said to have believed that the Muslims were the most anti-Bolshevik among the Soviet peoples and "by and large of good soldierly qualities."<sup>26</sup> Evidently, some influence was also exerted by two Turkish generals who, while on an official visit to Hitler in October 1941, pleaded eloquently for more lenient treatment of their coreligionists.<sup>27</sup>

The first steps toward a differentiated approach were taken by the Ostministerium in conjunction with the Wehrmacht when they set up special POW commissions, whose task was to separate the prisoners by nationality and determine their potential use. The actual proposal to form national units from the Turkic and Caucasian nationalities was made by Rosen-

<sup>22</sup>Thorwald, *Die Illusion*, p. 36.

<sup>23</sup>This figure is given in a speech by Alfred Rosenberg (no date given), R6/52, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz.

<sup>24</sup>Thorwald, *Die Illusion*, p. 12.

<sup>25</sup>See the Memorandum to Reichsminister Rosenberg by the Georgian liaison staff, August 28, 1944, R6/143, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz. A detailed recent account of German treatment of Soviet POWs is in Streit, *Keine Kamaraden*.

<sup>26</sup>Hoffmann, *Die Ostlegionen*, p. 25.

<sup>27</sup>See Dallin, *German Rule*, pp. 234, 539.

berg and approved by Hitler in December 1942, at which time an order to this effect was issued by the Army High Command.<sup>28</sup>

Even before the official order, however, two special-purpose national formations were organized under the aegis of army intelligence. The first one consisted of seven companies (six Turkestani, one Azerbaidzhani) and was known as "Operation Tiger B." Its commander, Major Mayer-Mader, an expert on Central Asia who spoke several of its languages, intended to use the unit to incite unrest and anti-Soviet uprisings behind the Soviet lines in Turkestan. The unit's members were trained in guerrilla warfare tactics, sabotage, and diversion. Although it was never used for its original purpose, the unit saw action under the name "Infantry battalion #450."<sup>29</sup>

The second unit was formed in October 1941 exclusively from members of the Caucasian nationalities. It was commanded by another expert of the East, Professor Theodor Oberländer, and was intended to participate in special assignments in the campaign for the Caucasus. The battalion strength-unit, known as "Special unit Bergmann" (*Sonderverband Bergmann*), was deployed in the Caucasus in the summer of 1942 and distinguished itself in combat. It also engaged in wide-ranging propaganda activities and managed to attract some 1500 deserters from among the Caucasian troops of Red Army units in its theater of action.<sup>30</sup>

Recruitment for the regular East Legions' battalions began in January 1942 in the POW camps situated in Poland. POW commissions, including members of the respective nationalities, toured the camps and asked for volunteers for the legions. Almost all responded, and some 70 percent were deemed physically fit for enlistment.<sup>31</sup> Following basic training the volunteers were sent to one of the six national legions for additional training.<sup>32</sup> Independent of the training activity in Poland, the Army High Command ordered the organization and training of additional legions in the Ukraine, based on the same organizational principles. As a result of the legions' activities, by 1943 53 field battalions from training centers in Poland and 25 from the Ukraine had been turned over to the German army.<sup>33</sup> In addition to the field battalions, a large number of transport and logistics units and military construction teams were also organized from the same nationalities. The setting-up of new formations continued, and by the end of 1943 the East Legions achieved their greatest expansion. In May 1943 the army authorized establishing an independent Turkic division (162nd Infantry division) which became the largest single unit in the legions. Independent of the legions, sizable collaborator units were formed in the Crimean region by the Crimean Tatars. At least eight battalions are known to have existed, and the total number of troops probably was close to 20,000.<sup>34</sup> Also operating independently was a Kalmyk cavalry corps of 5000.<sup>35</sup> Beginning in 1944, the Waffen SS, having finally discarded all racial criteria, began to form volunteer units from Central Asians and from the peoples of the Caucasus. Two such units were organized: East Turkic Waffen Verband der SS and Caucasian Waffenverband der SS.<sup>36</sup>

The exact number of collaborators in the legions is subject to speculation but the avail-

<sup>28</sup>von zur Mühlen, p. 58.

<sup>29</sup>For details, see Hoffmann, *Die Ostlegionen*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., pp. 28-29; and Oberländer to the author, interview, May 26, 1980.

<sup>31</sup>F. W. Seidler, "Oskar Ritter von Niedermayer im Zweiten Weltkrieg, Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Ostlegionen," *Wehrwissenschaftliche Rundschau*, No. 3, 1970, pp. 168-174.

<sup>32</sup>The six legions were Turkestani, Azerbaidzhani, North Caucasian, Georgian, Armenian, and Volga-Tatar.

<sup>33</sup>Hoffmann, *Die Ostlegionen*, pp. 38-39, 76.

<sup>34</sup>See Edige M. Kirimal, *Der Nationale Kampf der Krimtürken*, Verlag Lechte, Emsdetten, 1952, p. 305; and Hoffmann, *Die Ostlegionen*, p. 44.

<sup>35</sup>An exhaustive account on the Kalmyk role in the war, including detailed examination of military collaboration with the Germans, is provided in Joachim Hoffmann, *Deutsche und Kalmyken, 1942 bis 1945*, Verlag Rombach, Freiburg, 1974.

<sup>36</sup>Stein, p. 188.

able evidence points to surprisingly large numbers. The lowest estimates begin at 250,000.<sup>37</sup> A fairly reliable breakdown by nationality gives the following picture: Central Asians: 110,000 to 180,000; Caucasians: 110,000; Volga Tatars: 35,000 to 40,000; and Crimean Tatars: 20,000.<sup>38</sup> These figures suggest a surprising conclusion: The possibility exists that at least some of the Soviet nationalities may have been better represented in the German army than in the Red Army.<sup>39</sup>

In fulfilling their military tasks, the legions had to surmount considerable difficulties. More often than not they were poorly trained and inadequately equipped, which seriously affected their combat capability. Moreover, the legionnaires were frequently treated as second-class soldiers and discriminated against in and outside the barracks. The Germans also failed to provide them with a political motivation and a sense of cause and viewed them merely as mercenaries, or worse still as cannon fodder. Still, the majority of these units performed adequately under extremely unfavorable conditions and, in most cases, justified the hopes placed in them.

Overall, the examination of the military involvement of the Soviet nationalities in the German war effort reveals a willingness to collaborate with the enemy on a truly unprecedented scale. The more than a million former Soviet citizens, organized in national formations, rear security units, or directly incorporated in the German army, provided up to a quarter of German manpower on the Eastern front. Their contribution undoubtedly made it possible for Germany to carry on the war as long as it did.

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<sup>37</sup>Estimates are provided in Hoffmann, *Deutsche und Kalmyken*, p. 172; Gerhardt von Mende, "Erfahrungen mit Ostfreiwilligen in der deutschen Wehrmacht während des Zweiten Weltkrieges," in *Auslandsforschung*, No. 1, *Völkerverheerung und Koalitionskriege*, Darmstadt, 1952, p. 25; Burkhart Müller-Hillebrand, *Das Heer 1933-1945, Vol. III: Der Zweifrontenkrieg, Das Heer vom Beginn des Feldzuges Gegen die Sowjetunion bis zum Kriegsende*, Frankfurt, 1969, p. 70.

<sup>38</sup>von zur Mühlen, p. 60.

<sup>39</sup>For example, German intelligence estimated the numbers of Red Army soldiers from Caucasian nationalities in March 1942 to be between 60,000 and 75,000 (Buchbender, *Das Tönende Erz*, p. 191). After 1943 the representation of the non-Slavic nationalities in the Soviet army decreased dramatically. See S. L. Curran and D. Ponomareff, *Managing the Ethnic Factor in the Russian and Soviet Armed Forces: An Historical Overview*, R-2640/1, July 1982, p. 28.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

This analysis of German policies toward the Soviet non-Russian nationalities during World War II warrants several conclusions. First, under the impact of the German attack, many of the non-Russian national groups of the USSR used the opportunity to break away from Russian control. Although reactions differed in intensity and in size from region to region, we can assume that the Baltic peoples, the Western Ukrainians, the North Caucasians, large parts of the Georgian and Armenian populations, and substantial numbers of Central Asians, Volga Tatars, and other Soviet Asians were prepared to support the invading Germans, with their as-yet-unclear policies, rather than the Soviet regime, whose policies and practices they knew well. As a result, rather than enhancing the internal cohesion and unity of the Soviet Union, the formidable external threat facing the Soviet multinational state caused significant ethnic fragmentation, which presented considerable military and political exploitation opportunities for the Germans.

Yet, from the very beginning, German policies toward the Soviet nationalities made it very difficult, if not impossible, to take advantage of this critical structural flaw in the Soviet state. German authorities—conditioned by Nazi ideology preaching territorial aggrandizement (*Lebensraum*), racial fanaticism, religious intolerance, and economic plunder—were incapable or unwilling to exploit such opportunities and failed to mount a large-scale political warfare effort designed to undermine the Soviet state by encouraging and supporting ineluctable pressures from within. In the few cases where more enlightened policies were initiated and pursued, such as in the Caucasus, they were uniformly successful in winning the allegiance and practical cooperation of indigenous populations.

Despite Nazi brutality and the generally dismal record of German occupation policies in the non-Russian territories, Soviet non-Russians collaborated and fought with the Germans in unprecedented numbers, suggesting that for many of them the Germans remained the lesser of two evils. Soviet policies toward these nationalities after the war, characterized by vicious purges and mass deportations, which in some cases assumed genocidal proportions, indicate that the regime was clearly aware of the ethnic issue as a key systemic vulnerability. To what extent the events and policies described in this report may be relevant to the Soviet multinational state of today depends on the regime's success in alleviating the grievances of nationalities and ensuring their genuine allegiance to the Soviet state.



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