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THE UKRAINIAN PROBLEM AS IT SHOWED UP IN THE WAR
BETWEEN GERMANY AND THE SOVIET UNION (1941-1945)

I Introduction

Among the states belonging to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics the Ukraine deserves special attention both in peace and in war because of the importance of its strategic, political, and economic position. The purpose of the present study is to deal with the political and economic aspects of the Ukrainian problem as it showed up in the war between Germany and the Soviet Union, 1941-1945. Understanding the psychological and tactical blunders committed by the Germans in dealing with the Ukraine may help other opponents of the Soviet Union to avoid similar mistakes if a war with the Soviet Union should occur. With this in mind, the question of Ukrainian national consciousness will be examined in particular.

II Divergencies of German Policy Toward the Ukraine

After Germany's WWI experiences in the Ukraine, one could have expected that before fighting the Soviet Union in 1941 the German government would elaborate a comprehensive program containing precise directives on the policy which should be followed by German authorities in occupied Soviet territories, particularly in the Ukraine. But this did not occur to Hitler. He unleashed war without having made political preparations. Therefore, a uniform German policy toward the Ukraine did not exist; the views of individual German authorities dealing with the Ukraine were heterogenous and often diametrically opposed. Deep controversies prevailed not only between various governmental institutions but even among officials of the same institution. Contradictions flourished and developed so much the more as they were personally favored by Hitler whose policy aimed at creating

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disensions and dividing responsibilities. This policy resulted in a jumble of contradictory and arbitrary measures applied to the Ukraine which were deeply resented by the Ukrainian people who had expected that the Germans, after liberating them from the Bolshevik yoke, would allow them to order their domestic affairs. The chaos which arose as a result can be understood only by recognizing the divergent opinions held on the Ukrainian issue by German politicians on the one hand, as Hitler, Rosenberg, and Koch, and by the German Foreign Office and the German Army on the other.

A. Adolf Hitler

Entering war against the Soviet Union, Hitler was convinced that he would defeat the Red Army and drive it past the Volga, if not past the Urals, in a very short time. Then, he believed, Stalin would be no longer in a position to offer further resistance.

Hitler thought that the Soviet Union could be defeated by military means alone. The necessity of political warfare never occurred to him. With particular vehemence he repeatedly rebuffed the proposals of his military and political advisers to utilize the friendly feelings with which the Ukrainian population met German troops at the beginning of the campaign. He was possessed with the fear that after the war the Ukrainian people would present him a bill for the help they rendered Germany. Moreover, he was afraid that if a critical situation arose for German occupation troops in Soviet territory, the indigenous population would immediately change its mind and turn against the Germans.

Hitler considered the Ukraine an appropriate object for colonial exploitation. He was determined to utilize the Ukraine as a supplier of raw materials which Germany needed so badly in her warfare against the Western Powers and would have

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needed after the war for making herself economically independent of the rest of the world. Therefore, Hitler never intended to grant autonomy to the Ukraine or to make it an independent state.

As regards Galicia or Western Ukraine, which until World War I belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire and afterwards to Poland, Hitler refused to recognize it as an integral part of the Ukraine and thus annexed it to the so-called "Government General of Poland." The Ukrainians deeply resented this step which was a strong blow to their national feelings.

B. Alfred Rosenberg

Although Rosenberg held the post of Minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories, his influence on the events in those countries was rather insignificant. The directives for the economic exploitation of the Ukraine were issued either by the Administration for the Four-Year Plan subordinated to Goering or by an economic staff created with the special purpose of dealing with the economic questions in the occupied territories. The administration there was handled by Commissars who, appointed by Hitler personally, simultaneously occupied high posts in the Nazi hierarchy and, consequently, did not feel any obligation to follow Rosenberg's directives, but ruled entirely upon their own judgment.

Rosenberg, of Germano-Estonian origin, was born in Estonia when that country was still a part of the old Russian Empire. A characteristic trait of his mentality was a strong resentment against Greater Russia and the Great Russians themselves. His political aim was to destroy Russian hegemony by dismembering the Eastern colossus into its national parts which in his opinion should become a bulwark against a possible resurgence of Russian imperialism. However, his program did not envisage the grant of independence to the minorities. His intention was to transform them into a kind of German colonies which should enjoy a certain

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degree of cultural autonomy only. In this respect he was willing to grant larger concessions to the Caucasian and Turkestanian peoples than to the Ukrainians. Only when the military situation of Germany deteriorated more and more did Rosenberg realize that in order to keep the confidence and allegiance of the minorities in the Soviet Union one would have to promise them a grant of independence in the event of German victory. For that purpose, representations of the Caucasian and Turkestanian peoples were established in Berlin in 1942. A Ukrainian Committee followed in the winter of 1944-45. The latter was headed by "General" Shandruk, an average Ukrainian emigrant, who was far less popular with his compatriots than other Ukrainian leaders as, for instance, Melnik or Bandera, whom the Germans did not allow to join the Ukrainian Committee. This Committee was a liaison staff between the Union of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and Ukrainian Insurrection Army (UPA) and the German authorities. During the war, the OUN and the UPA, working partly legally and partly illegally, succeeded in unifying all national Ukrainian parties in one single organization. After the re-occupation of the Ukraine by Soviet troops the movement became entirely illegal. Its headquarters was located in Galicia, the cradle of Ukrainian nationalism. Significant for the activeness of the OUN and the UPA was the fact that as late as 1944 they convened, somewhere in Galicia, an illegal congress attended by representatives of almost all minorities in the Soviet Union.

C. Erich Koch

Erich Koch, Reichskommissar for the Ukraine, was one of the most main personalities among those who enjoyed Hitler's special confidence. He was an explicit adversary of any concessions to the Ukraine and to the Ukrainians

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whom he considered as slaves destined to labor for the benefit of their German masters and to earn only as much as they needed to maintain their working power. He sabotaged every attempt to ameliorate the living standard of the Ukrainian people or to grant them certain cultural rights. He tried to annihilate the present Ukrainian intelligentsia and to prevent the formation of a new one. Therefore, only elementary four-grade schools were permitted in the Ukraine. This measure embittered the Ukrainians to the utmost, this so much the more as even the Soviet government could not be blamed for having neglected public education.

D. German Foreign Office

By Hitler's order issued in 1942, the Foreign Office was excluded from all questions concerning both the Occupied Eastern Territories and the future structure of the Soviet Union. The opinions of German experts on Russian affairs was therefore of theoretical value only. They considered war against the Soviet Union a calamity which should have been avoided in any case. After the outbreak of war they asserted the opinion that the Soviet Union could not be defeated by military means alone but only with the help of the non-Communist part of her population.

Since the majority of the people of the Soviet Union hated the Stalin regime, the German side enjoyed a unique opportunity to transform its war against the Soviets into a civil war, the only possible means of overthrowing the Soviet government. The Germans missed this opportunity, since they did not realize the necessity to fulfill the prerequisite, i.e., winning over the sympathy and the confidence of the Ukrainian people by appropriate measures such as just treatment of the population, abolition of the hated collectivization, and the promise of

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future independence. Permanently running the risk of severe punishment for their opposition, the experts on Russian affairs tried to persuade Nazi leadership of the necessity of altering its ominous policy toward the people of the Soviet Union in general and the Ukrainians in particular. They advocated a gradual establishment of self-administration in the Ukraine and the grant of a large autonomy to the Ukrainians. But all their efforts were absolutely in vain; political short-sightedness, stupidity, stubbornness, and cruelty continued in all dealings with the occupied Soviet territories.

E. German Army

The views of the German Army substantially conformed to those of the Foreign Office. Very soon after the outbreak of hostilities, officers and men engaged in warfare against the Soviet Union became aware that because of the vastness of that country and its natural resources, the Soviet Union could not be defeated by military means alone but only with the help of the Soviet population which, at first, showed an explicit willingness to collaborate with the Germans. Only when the Ukrainian people realized the sinister aims pursued by the Nazis did partisan groups begin to form groups which inflicted considerable harm upon German troops stationed or operating in the Ukraine. Therefore, Army leaders persistently tried to change the policy that produced such harmful results. But the stubbornness of Hitler and his henchmen proved stronger than calculated expediency.

It seems astounding that, in spite of the blunders committed by the German authorities in the Ukraine, a vast number of Ukrainians remained willing to fight side by side with the Germans against the Red Army till the very end of the war.

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This fact proves that the hatred of Bolshevism was stronger than the resentment aroused by the German attitude. Voluntary formations of Ukrainians were formed on a large scale. After Hitler forbade them, German military leaders, under their own responsibility, utilized Ukrainians in the framework of German formations or in small Ukrainian units.

F. The Vlasov movement

In the spring of 1942 the Russian General Vlasov fell into German captivity. Although he proved to be a reliable anti-Communist and offered the German government his and his adherents' support in combating the Red Army, neither the German Foreign Office nor the leadership of the Army could at first persuade Hitler to accept Vlasov's proposals for the establishment of a Russian National Committee and the formation of military units of Russian volunteers. Only when defeat followed defeat and the general situation deteriorated to a threatening degree did Himmler, the leader of the SS and Supreme Chief of the Police, succeed in persuading Hitler to agree to establish Vlasov as the political and military leader of Russians willing to fight Bolshevism.

The Ukrainians met the nomination of Vlasov with overt distrust, for his pure Russian origin made him suspect in Ukrainian eyes of pursuing Great Russian aims.

Vlasov himself repeatedly emphasized that the Ukrainians should be granted right of self-determination following the collapse of the Stalin regime. According to Vlasov, this goal, however, could be reached only by a common effort of all the peoples of the Soviet Union. Therefore, he considered subordination of the

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Ukrainians to his leadership indispensable. In their turn, the Ukrainians declared that although they were willing to collaborate with Vlasov on equal terms, they refused to subordinate themselves to him. On this question various German authorities held different opinions. Opinions were contradictory even among members of a single institution: there were some who realized the truth of Vlasov's logic when he said, "One cannot strike with fingers apart, but has to form a fist before," and others who supported the separatist tendencies of the Ukrainians and thus still more weakened the Vlasov movement. The eventual utter failure of the movement was due to the fact that Germany at that time was void of any moral and material means to sustain it.

III What the Ukrainians Expected from Germany and how They Conceived their Future Status

In answering this question the fact must be held in mind that the Ukraine itself is not a unified whole but consists of three parts which are distinguished by their geographical position and historical development. These parts are the following:

- a. Western Ukraine or Galicia, which since 1772 had been a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, was after World War I incorporated into Poland and in 1939 annexed to the Soviet Union.
- b. Volhynia, which till 1917 had been a part of the Russian Empire, was after World War I incorporated into Poland, to which it belonged till 1939 when it was annexed to the Soviet Union.
- c. Eastern or Soviet Ukraine, which since 1654 had been a part of Russia, enjoyed a short period of independence (1917-1922), whereupon it was incorporated into

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the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

A. Galicia

Until 1914, when the First World War broke out, the Ukrainians of Galicia had enjoyed all the rights which the Austro-Hungarian government granted the manifold nationalities that inhabited that Empire. Along with other European peoples, the Galician Ukrainians were seized by the wave of nationalism which spread over all Europe in the nineteenth century and reached its climax during the first decade of the twentieth century. While their cultural development was sympathetically advanced by the Austro-Hungarian administration, the Galician Ukrainians nonetheless had to stand firm against the Poles who tried to subjugate them. Thus, Ukrainians were strengthened in their nationalistic feelings by their fight against Polish political aspirations. Incited by democratic ideas which had penetrated into Galicia from Western Europe, the Galician Ukrainians in 1918-1920 championed the fight against Bolshevist Russia and Poland. After they had been forcibly incorporated into Poland, eastern Ukrainians doggedly fought against Polish ambitions of polonizing them. From this fight their nationalistic feelings received a further impetus.

When war broke out between Germany and Poland in 1939, the Galician Ukrainians were convinced that the struggle would generate an independent Ukrainian state. Therefore, when German troops pushed through to Lvov in September 1939, they were received with enthusiasm by the Ukrainian population. The cession of the Galician part of the Ukraine to the Soviet Union deeply disappointed the Galician Ukrainians. Nevertheless, when in June 1941 German troops entered Galicia for the second time enthusiasm flared up again, so much the more because in the

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...the Ukrainians came to know what Soviet rule would mean for them. But German policy again dealt a stunning blow at Ukrainian expectations. By Hitler's order, Galicia was incorporated in the so-called Government General of Poland where the Ukrainians were treated even more ruthlessly than the Poles themselves. The brutal methods applied by Erich Koch to the inhabitants of Eastern Ukraine was a further blow to Galician Ukrainians. Popular leaders of the Ukrainian national movement, like Colonel Polnik, were being arrested there. As a result of these measures a resistance movement flared up and gradually developed in strength and organization. However, this underground movement did not contact the Soviet side. The slogan of the Ukrainian partisans read: "To fight every oppression, regardless of its source." Noteworthy is the fact that the activities of the Ukrainian resistance movement were principally directed against the German administration, the police, and the SS. Assaults against German troops were infrequent since the Ukrainians felt that the Army sympathized with their aims and since they hoped that the Army would eventually be able to change German policy toward them.

These hopes were strengthened when Maechter was appointed Governor of Lvov, where his father had happened to be Governor under the Austro-Hungarian Empire before World War I. Although a Nazi himself, the younger Maechter sympathized with the Ukrainian cause and showed conspicuous ability in dealing with foreign nationalities. Thanks to his attitude toward the Ukrainian people, the tension was considerably mitigated. Thus, when the SS began to draw up a division of Galician volunteers to fight the Soviet Army, the OUN and the UPA ordered their members to join it. These organizations hoped that in this way their adherents would obtain practice in using modern weapons. For the same reason, the above organizations induced the Ukrainians to enter the German Army as volunteers.

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When Soviet troops re-entered Western Ukraine in 1944, the OUN and the UPA made a strong appeal to their adherents to fight the Great Russian, i.e., the Bolshevik forces. The "SS Division Galicia" courageously fought side by side with the Germans against the common foe. After Soviet troops had occupied all of Galicia the majority of the Ukrainian volunteers remained behind Soviet lines and joined the forces of the UPA which entirely dominated the flat country. The Soviet Army thus kept control of only the principal railroads, highways, and towns.

Representatives of the OUN and the UPA declared that in case of a renewed German advance they would refrain from any resistance against the Germans and would fight only the Russian oppressor, provided that the German government guarantee the establishment of an independent Ukrainian state after the defeat of the Russian Bolsheviks.

Thus, the mentality of the Galician Ukrainians may be summarized as follows:

1. they are convinced champions of an independent Greater Ukraine;
2. they reject domination whatever, whether Polish, German, or Russian;
3. they are fanatic adversaries of the idea that Western Ukraine should become an autonomous part of a Soviet Ukraine dominated by Moscow, i.e., the Great Russian Bolsheviks.

B. Volhynia

In Volhynia, which till 1917 belonged to the old Russian Empire, Ukrainian nationalism was much less developed than in Galicia. Although the Ukrainians of Volhynia were deeply attached to their native country and its traditional customs, their national feelings were weak in comparison with those of their

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Western neighbors. Then, according to the peace treaty of 1920, Volhynia was annexed to Poland, the Ukrainians made contact with their Galician brothers who at once initiated strong and rather successful nationalistic propaganda in Volhynia.

The incorporation of Volhynia into the Soviet Union in 1939 aroused mixed feelings among the Ukrainians of Volhynia. On the one hand, they were glad to escape the terror exercised against them by the Poles, but, on the other hand, they were frightened of the prospect of becoming victims of the Soviet collectivization system--out of the frying pan into the fire. Their attitude was determined rather by economic than by nationalistic considerations.

The German occupation in 1941 seemed to the Volhynian Ukrainians an escape from the dreaded collectivization, principally. The ideas held by lower classes with regard to the future political structure of their country were vague, whereas in the middle classes the longing for an independent Ukrainian state was rather vivid because they considered the Soviet Union not only an economic but a national oppressor as well.

Because of the methods applied by Erich Koch, the Germans lost the prestige they initially had enjoyed with the Ukrainian people of Volhynia. Nevertheless, the OUN and the UPA did not become as popular with the Ukrainian population in Volhynia as in Galicia. A certain proportion of the Ukrainians, disappointed by the German attitude toward them, even joined Moscow-sponsored partisan groups. The re-establishment of Soviet rule in Volhynia in 1944 did not meet an active resistance on the part of the population.

The mentality of the Volhynian Ukrainians may be therefore summarized as follows:

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1. Ukrainian nationalism does not represent a decisive political factor in Volhynia;
2. Volhynian Ukrainians are scarcely aware of the dangers involved for them in Great Russian imperialism;
3. They dread the Soviet Union more as the bearer of the collectivization than as the exponent of Great Russianism.

C. Soviet Ukraine

When German troops entered Soviet Ukraine in 1941-1942 they were deeply impressed by the hearty welcome they received from the Ukrainian population, which acclaimed the Germans as liberators from the Bolshevik yoke. That the majority of the Ukrainians hated the Stalin regime so much was a surprise even for the Germans. The reason for this hatred was primarily the collectivization system which was extremely repugnant to the Ukrainians.

The German Army realized at once that the abolition of collectivization was the conditio sine qua non to win over the Ukrainian people definitely and to ensure their support against the Bolsheviks. The German Foreign Office held the same view and used every opportunity to emphasize that the problem of land ownership had at all times played a decisive role in Russian history. Thus, Lenin would not have succeeded in seizing power in 1917 if he had not promised to break up large estates and distribute the land to the peasants. The White Russian generals were defeated by the Bolsheviks because they defended the interests of big landowners.

The demands of the German Army and Foreign Office to abolish the collectivization system and to re-establish private ownership of land in the Ukraine met

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vehement resistance on the part of Erich Koch and some influential Nazi economists. The latter declared openly that the Bolshevik system of collectivization was an ideal means of increasing agricultural output and of seizing the products from the peasants.

After a persistent struggle the Army and Foreign Office eventually succeeded in persuading the proper authorities to promulgate the so-called "New Agricultural Order." The task of elaborating on this policy was conferred upon Dr. Otto Schiller, former Agricultural Attaché to the German Embassy in Moscow, who happened to be an outstanding expert on Russian agriculture. He succeeded in finding a rather sound synthesis between the longing of Ukrainian peasants for private ownership of land and the economic advantages of big estates.

As regards national consciousness, the masses of the people in the Soviet Ukraine were not particularly imbued with Ukrainian nationalistic feelings. There was no animosity among them against Great Russians, who suffered equally under the regime and equally hated it. It proved that the severe suffering and privations to which the Ukrainians in the Soviet Ukraine had been exposed since 1917 considerably lessened their interest in such political problems as Ukrainian nationalism. They felt rather indifferent toward the character of the regime to which they must submit and primarily sought for an amelioration of their living conditions. Their way of thinking was determined rather by economic than by political considerations. They were ready to acclaim any system which would ensure them a decent living.

The Ukrainian intelligentsia was split in its national feelings. One part of the intelligentsia, as well as the elevated strata of the working class, had

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put up with the Stalin regime in so far as it offered them adequate living and educational conditions. The Russification process operated on them gradually and successfully.

There was, however, another part of the intelligentsia which realized the dangers involved in such a development. It felt a strong repugnance to Great Russian aims but was unable to vent its feelings because the Moscow terror tolerated national consciousness only as long as it did not harm the interests of the Soviet Union as a whole.

In addition, the Soviet government, in the course of time, successfully interspersed the Ukrainian intelligentsia and the Ukrainian working class with Great Russians who were transferred to the Ukraine in connection with the accomplishment of the Five-Year Plans.

Thus, the mentality of the Ukrainians in the Soviet Ukraine may be summarized as follows:

1. their national consciousness is rather weak;
2. existing potential possibilities of raising this national consciousness are small because of the Soviet government's vigilance in exterminating separatist tendencies;
3. if the Soviet Union were to become involved in an armed conflict with the outer world, the Soviet Ukrainians would probably at first show a cautious reserve but later support the Soviet Union's adversary if it succeeded in proving its ability to guarantee the Ukrainians the abolition of collectivization and a raising of their standard of living.