

THE RED WARRIOR

U.S. PERCEPTIONS OF STALIN'S STRATEGIC ROLE IN
THE ALLIED JOURNEY TO VICTORY IN THE SECOND
WORLD WAR

Reagan Fancher, M.A., Ph.D

Texas Woman's University

*Author of *The Holy Warrior: Osama Bin Laden and His Jihadi Journey in the Soviet-Afghan War**

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To my Bramerician Queen, Graziele, with all my love

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PREFACE

“This is a very suggestive age...but it will always be found in the end that the only way to whip an army is to go out and fight it.” - Ulysses S. Grant in 1865, quoted by Peter G. Tsouras in *Civil War Quotations: In the Words of the Commanders*¹

Only days after Adolf Hitler's armies launched their summer 1941 offensive against Joseph Stalin's Soviet Union, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt initiated a process of delivering vast amounts of American Lend-Lease aid to help the beleaguered Red Army repulse the Nazi invaders and prevent Berlin from overrunning Moscow's strategic resources. Initially, the Anglo-American Arctic convoys delivered most of this Lend-Lease aid to Stalin's fighting men and women, preventing a separate peace between the Nazi and Soviet tyrannies and helping to fuel the Red Army's wartime struggle. Underestimating Stalin's determination to fight Hitler to the finish, U.S. officials also opened two other supply routes through Iran and Alaska in a desperate effort to demonstrate their goodwill and ironclad commitment to the Soviet aid program. Perceiving Stalin's Red Army as indispensable to achieving Hitler's demise, American Lend-Lease officials helped to hasten the Allied victory yet failed to induce the Soviet leader to pursue a peaceful postwar path as hoped, setting the stage for the Cold War and a precedent for later U.S. martial aid programs.

The above opening quote attributed to Union Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant in 1865 speaks volumes about the U.S. strategy to defeat the Axis Powers led by Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Imperial Japan in the Second World War between 1941 and 1945. As pointed out by historian Russell F. Weigley, Grant's strategic thinking that helped U.S. forces to ultimately crush both their Confederate and Native American opponents during the American Civil War (1861-1865) and the Plains' Indian Wars (1866-1890) appears to have strongly influenced the strategy adopted by U.S. leaders, from Roosevelt down, following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. As the U.S. leadership entered the Second World War that raged globally 80 years after Grant's, "strategy of annihilation" had helped decisively cripple the Confederacy and end the bloody futility of Americans killing each other and, subsequently, their Native opponents, they again turned to the Union commander's strategic approach in facing an Axis enemy that they regarded as potentially indestructible.²

Hoping to avoid a mechanized version of the prolonged, bloody stalemate that had characterized the First World War's Western Front, U.S. leaders zealously adhered to what they perceived as the practical path to unquestioned victory, a

victory that could not have been achieved without the ruthlessness and determination of Stalin's Red Army fighting Hitler's forces in the east. As Roosevelt and his senior officials worked to achieve this goal and poured massive resources into their Soviet Lend-Lease program from early 1942 forward, U.S. General Dwight David "Ike" Eisenhower, reflecting Grant's strategic thinking from eight decades earlier, wrote, "We've got to quit wasting resources all over the world – and still worse – wasting time. *If we're to keep Russia in* [the war against Germany], save the Middle East, India and Burma; we've got to begin slugging with air at West Europe; to be followed by a land attack as soon *as possible*."³ The zealously-executed U.S. Lend-Lease program for the struggling Soviets helped to ensure that Stalin's soldiers could indeed whip Hitler's army in the way that Grant recommended, rendering the Second World War shorter and setting a precedent for later U.S. leaders backing resistance to aggression abroad.

This work is the edited and re-edited result of my doctoral dissertation, "The Arsenal of the Red Warriors: U.S. Perceptions of Stalin's Red Army and the Impact of Lend-Lease Aid on the Eastern Front in the Second World War" that I completed while pursuing my Ph.D. in History at the University of North Texas (UNT), and, accordingly, it was initially intended primarily for an academic audience. In researching this work, I found many primary sources, such as Roosevelt's "Map Room Papers", to be immensely helpful in unmasking the U.S. leadership's motives for keeping Stalin's troops well-supplied.⁴ Other excellent primary sources that I have found to be especially helpful include the online archival collections of the U.S. Navy Department Library, the War Department's Chief of Finance records, and the U.S. Department of State's *Soviet Supply Protocols*.⁵ The *Congressional Record* and the *Wilson Center Digital Archive* also provided useful insights into U.S. wartime perceptions of Stalin's strategic importance and the reasons for which the Roosevelt administration prioritized Lend-Lease aid to the Red Army.⁶

I have also found Hero of the Soviet Union Dmitriy Loza's memoir *Commanding the Red Army's Sherman Tanks: The World War II Memoirs of Hero of the Soviet Union Dmitriy Loza* to be insightful.⁷ Other interesting perspectives are provided by Red Army private Nikolai Litvin in his memoir *800 Days on the Eastern Front: A Russian Soldier Remembers World War II* and by biology professor Vadim Medish in his January 2008 interview with Justin Pastorfield-Li.⁸ Several other insightful primary sources include British Prime Minister Winston Churchill's *Memoirs of the Second World War*, Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke's *War Diaries 1939-1945*, the second volume of Sir Henry Pownall's *Chief of Staff: The Diaries of Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Pownall*, and several archival collections housed at *The National Archives of the UK*.⁹

In 1959, Raymond Dawson introduced scholars to the roots of Lend-Lease aid to the Soviet Union in *The Decision to Aid Russia, 1941*, arguing that the first six months after the German surprise assault proved crucial to Roosevelt's efforts to generate U.S. support for Stalin's beleaguered forces.¹⁰ A decade later, in 1969, Robert Huhn Jones launched the first scholarly inquiry into Lend-Lease's effect on the Soviet war effort in contrast to Dawson's focus on the domestic debate in the United States in *The Roads to Russia: United States Lend-Lease to the Soviet Union*, crediting the Iranian route or "Persian Corridor" with delivering the most Lend-Lease transport vehicles and concluding that Lend-Lease served as a far greater contribution to the Red Army's anti-Nazi struggle than the Soviet leadership wished to admit.¹¹ In 1973, George Herring, Jr. revisited Dawson's emphasis on the diplomatic role of the Soviet Lend-Lease program in *Aid to Russia, 1941-1946: Strategy, Diplomacy, the Origins of the Cold War*, largely dismissing Jones's arguments regarding the program's effectiveness as a military tool in Stalin's war effort.¹²

Revisiting Jones's claim that Lend-Lease played a key role in the Red Army's victory over Hitler, Hubert P. van Tuyl argues in his 1989 book *Feeding the Bear: American Aid to the Soviet Union, 1941-1945* that Lend-Lease aid greatly hastened Germany's defeat.¹³ In the 1996 book *Accounting For War: Soviet Production, Employment, and the Defence Burden, 1940-1945*, Mark Harrison adds his conclusions to Soviet Lend-Lease historiography, arguing that, "Without it [U.S. Lend-Lease aid to the Soviets], everyone on the side of the Allies would have had a worse war," contrary to most Cold War Soviet officials' claims to the contrary.¹⁴ In contrast to van Tuyl, Jones, and others, Harrison's 1996 work benefited from access to key Russian archival sources that seem to have just become available during the time in which he conducted his research and which had previously been denied to Western scholars during the Cold War. Likewise consulting both Russian and Western archival sources for his 2004 book *Russia's Life-Saver: Lend-Lease Aid to the U.S.S.R. in World War II*, Albert Weeks reexamines the scholarly debate surrounding Lend-Lease's role on the Eastern Front. Establishing the total of U.S. \$12,500,000,000 as the correct monetary value of the war material contributed by the United States to supply Stalin's war effort, Weeks concludes that Lend-Lease aid played a critical role in aiding the Red Army and hastening the Allied victory over the Axis.¹⁵

In 2021, Sean McMeekin contributed a new and highly controversial perspective to Soviet Lend-Lease historiography, arguing that Lend-Lease deliveries to the Soviet Union should have been severely curtailed or perhaps ended altogether in 1943 in *Stalin's War: A New History of World War II*. McMeekin's conclusions, which are, like those of Harrison, Weeks, and others, based on his consultation of previously unavailable Russian archival sources in addition to Western sources, have since attracted both considerable commendation and controversy, receiving enthusiastic praise from some

scholars such as Geoffrey Wawro and heavy criticism from others such as Vojin Majstorovic and Geoffrey Roberts.¹⁶ While his conclusions regarding Soviet Lend-Lease have proved controversial enough, the criticism leveled at McMeekin's work also appears to result, in part, from the other half of his argument emphasizing Stalin's role, rather than Hitler's alone, in helping ignite the Second World War.¹⁷

Perhaps adding further to the ongoing firestorm of criticism is that McMeekin's already controversial arguments in this regard also appear to be somewhat similar, but in no way identical, to the earlier thesis of former Soviet GRU agent and defector Vladimir Rezun, also known as Viktor Suvorov, whose 2008 book *The Chief Culprit: Stalin's Grand Design to Start World War II* laid the responsibility for the Second World War's outbreak primarily at Stalin's feet.¹⁸ Like McMeekin's more recent work, Suvorov's thesis remains immensely controversial, attracting intense criticism from David Glantz and other top academics, as he theorizes that Stalin initially planned an attack on Nazi Germany in 1941 until Hitler's brutal invasion of the Soviet Union allegedly and inadvertently wrecked the Soviet premier's supposed scheme.¹⁹ Although he seems to part with Suvorov's most hotly contested claims, McMeekin nevertheless continues generating academic ire by adding in *Stalin's War* that, "What these Special [Soviet] Files do reveal, if not a smoking gun about Stalin's [alleged 1941] offensive intentions vis-à-vis Hitler, is a positively breathtaking ramp-up in Soviet military preparations from April to June 1941."²⁰

In keeping with my focus on U.S. perceptions of Stalin's role in the Allied war effort and the importance of effectively supplying the Red Army, this work does not delve into either McMeekin's or Suvorov's arguments regarding Stalin's alleged prewar military preparations, his documented aggression against smaller countries, or his overall part in the conflict. Nor will our subject include an in-depth assessment of Lend-Lease's possible impact on the Soviet war effort, other than occasional observations on either the findings or arguments of expert scholars of the Eastern Front such as David Glantz and Alexander Hill, as a deep discussion of these issues would greatly distract from this work's main purpose of exploring Stalin's perceived strategic importance from the wartime American perspective, and these controversies are not, therefore, discussed in the chapters that follow. All the previously mentioned works discussing U.S. Lend-Lease aid to the Soviet Union, however, whether generally held in high academic regard or roundly criticized by scholars, will be cited where relevant throughout the following chapters. Such a course is both necessary and proper in attempting to paint as complete a picture as possible of the American wartime leadership's perceptions of Stalin and the Red Army's key role in the Allied strategy in defeating Hitler, in which nearly all above-mentioned sources agree that U.S. Lend-Lease served as a crucial component.

This work expands upon the findings of the experts by not only exploring wartime Washington's prevailing contemporary views of Stalin's forces and

their role in the anti-Axis struggle but by emphasizing the Arctic convoys' key contribution to aiding the Red Army's early efforts and, in contrast to many previous works, calling attention to their importance and perseverance during the late war period as well. While McMeekin proposes that Soviet Lend-Lease aid could reasonably have been discontinued in 1943, this work, in contrast to my dissertation, refrains, to the greatest extent that I have found possible, from in-depth commenting on the Soviet war effort and Lend-Lease's possible battlefield impact therein and proposes the possibility that it was not Soviet Lend-Lease aid in and of itself that sowed the Cold War's seeds, but was, if anything at all on the American side, the naivete of Roosevelt, Hopkins, and other U.S. leaders in their misperception that they could effectively inculcate a moderate attitude in Stalin. In turn, the findings of this work strongly suggest that it was the American leadership's misplaced belief that by furnishing unconditional aid to the Red Army, which was a strategic wartime necessity, Washington could achieve not only its primary goal of preventing a separate peace but essentially "buy" Stalin into moderating and committing to a peaceful postwar world, even supplying the Soviet premier with some of the key components for atomic bomb construction.²¹

While this work, like others, discusses Stalin's infiltration of Roosevelt's White House through the effective planting of spies in the U.S. administration and the president's naivete and misplaced affection for the Soviet premier, it also tackles several questions that have, until now, remained unanswered. In emphasizing the Arctic convoys' vital contribution to the Red Army's struggle even during the late war period, Roosevelt's underestimation of Stalin's duplicitous character and anti-Western tendencies, and the fears of a second Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in Washington, I hope to help explain how and why U.S. leaders came to embrace the Soviet premier and his fighting forces as a crucial part of the Allied struggle.²²

The shadow of Brest-Litovsk continued to haunt the American leadership as the war on the Eastern Front raged across Nazi-occupied Soviet Europe and Stalin, whether subjectively for better or worse, appears to have sought to exploit these fears to ensure the continued procurement of U.S. Lend-Lease aid. While not presenting Roosevelt and Churchill with an open, outright threat to conclude a separate peace with Hitler, the Soviet premier nevertheless seems to have strongly implied that he could be forced to do so by events at the front in his telegrams with his Allied counterparts. His insistence that Allied material aid paled in comparison to the sacrifices being made by the Soviet government and people, even if subjectively true, appears to have amplified U.S. perceptions that the Red Army, if not sufficiently supplied by the West, could collapse in a repeat of 1918, removing the threat to Hitler's eastern borders and delivering massive Soviet resources to the Nazi war machine.²³

In his memoir, U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull recalls that British Foreign Secretary Sir Anthony Eden and other British officials shared American fears of Stalin feeling alienated by the West and concluding a separate peace with Hitler, just as the Soviet premier had done in August 1939 while assigning the blame for his action to the alleged failure of London and Paris to negotiate with Moscow in earnest.²⁴ Recalling, “They feared lest, in those circumstances, Stalin might negotiate a separate peace with Germany,” Hull suggests that Churchill and Eden shared the concerns of their U.S. counterparts regarding the possibility of a second Brest-Litovsk and felt, like Roosevelt and Hopkins, that the Red Army could not be allowed to falter.²⁵ Stung by Stalin’s claims that former Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain’s allegedly insincere attempts at negotiating with Moscow had supposedly led the Soviet premier to conclude his 1939 pact with Hitler, Churchill and Eden likewise labored to keep the Red Army supplied and in the war.²⁶

For his part, Stalin appears to have detected these fears and implicitly and repeatedly raised the specter of a second Brest-Litovsk in his dealings with Roosevelt and Churchill to ensure the shipping of unconditional aid to the Red Army.²⁷ In his 1975 memoir *Special Envoy to Churchill and Stalin 1941-1946*, W. Averell Harriman strongly implies that Roosevelt continued to fear the possibility of a second Brest-Litovsk and sought to prevent this by assuring Stalin of further unconditional aid even as Soviet forces crushed the Germans at Stalingrad.²⁸ Stalin is said to have coldly declined to meet with the president at Casablanca, Morocco due to, “affairs connected with the front” that demanded his presence in Moscow, a claim that he repeated after Roosevelt proposed moving the meeting to March.²⁹ “Concerned over Stalin’s absence [at Casablanca]” according to Harriman, Roosevelt offered to send U.S. Secretary of State General George C. Marshall to Moscow to help boost Soviet morale and to assure the Soviet premier in the strongest possible terms that he and Churchill intended to carry on the war to Berlin while seeking no terms but Germany’s unconditional surrender.³⁰

Having already refused to attend the Casablanca Conference at which Roosevelt and Churchill publicly declared their unconditional surrender and total war policy against Germany, Stalin rejected the president’s offer to send Marshall to Moscow.³¹ Harriman recalls that Roosevelt expressed deep concern at Stalin’s absence during the Casablanca Conference and states that the president confided to him at the time that he feared repeating President Woodrow Wilson’s perceived mistake in not ensuring Germany’s total and unquestioned defeat by taking the war into Berlin in 1918.³² With Wilson’s earlier perceived failures weighing heavily on his mind at Casablanca, Roosevelt appears to have regarded Stalin’s absence as an indication that the Soviet leader may seek a separate peace and desperately sought to demonstrate his resolve in keeping him in the war against Hitler.³³

Although limited to the American leadership's wartime perceptions of Stalin and the Red Army's importance to the Allied war effort, the chapters that proceed reveal how and why the U.S. leaders arrived at important strategic decisions in their efforts to arm their wartime Soviet allies while also overestimating the White House's ability to charm the Soviet premier into moderating his dedication to rigid Communist orthodoxy and expansionism. This work's first and second chapters explore the impact of Brest-Litovsk and early U.S.-Soviet relations on the origins of Lend-Lease, while the third, fourth, and fifth chapters closely examine U.S. perceptions of Stalin's Red Army, the importance of the Arctic convoys, the Persian Corridor, and ALSIB, and the often-overlooked exploits of the Allied Arctic mariners in the last years of the war.

In what I regard as a very important concluding section, I have also conducted a comparative analysis of Roosevelt's Soviet Lend-Lease program with U.S. President Ronald Reagan's support for the Afghan resistance during the 1980s as an example of how Lend-Lease set a historical precedent for U.S. aid programs intended to arm resistance movements fighting aggression during later periods of history up to the present time and the current war in Ukraine. Just as this work refrains from commenting too much on the Soviet war effort and Lend-Lease's possible role therein, however, the reader will find that this book's Conclusion does not delve into the popular allegations that Reagan's CIA trained Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda as this is a topic that I thoroughly explore in my earlier book and a claim that other authors and I have deftly debunked.

Finally, I would like the reader to understand that this work – unlike my above-mentioned book on bin Laden – is not intended to serve as a biographical account of any of the historical figures discussed throughout its pages (although it would not disappoint me at all if it were to be regarded as such). Nor is this work intended to be another history of either the Second World War or the Eastern Front, of which there are already numerous splendid volumes, many of which served as invaluable sources for my research into our subject. This is a book about U.S. wartime perceptions of Stalin's strategic importance as a key ally in the Second World War and how American leaders viewed him and the need to keep him in the war at the time, about the Arctic convoys' contributions to this goal even during the war's later years. While the early Arctic convoy crews persevered against the odds, the tragic 1942 fates of several convoys and the precedent of Brest-Litovsk in 1918 led many U.S. leaders to fear that Hitler's forces, which remained deep inside Soviet territory in 1943, might still prevail and force Stalin into concluding a separate peace. Their fears were enhanced by Stalin's constant complaints, however justified these may have been, and his consistent postponing of a meeting with Roosevelt, a meeting that did not occur until the Tehran Conference in late 1943. As a result

of these concerns, Roosevelt and his chief subordinates expanded the Lend-Lease supply routes through Iran and Alaska even as he and Churchill continued their Arctic aid voyages, brilliantly boosting Stalin's fighting forces and hastening Hitler's downfall while underestimating their ability to "purchase" the Soviet leader's commitment to peaceful postwar policies.³⁴

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