

Army Group Center Operation Barbarossa June 22 1941

The German War Machine



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In Mein Kampf and in numerous speeches Adolf Hitler claimed that the German population needed more living space. Hitler's Lebensraum policy was mainly directed at the Soviet Union. He was especially interested in the Ukraine where he planned to develop a German colony. The system would be based on the British occupation of India: "What India was for England the territories of Russia will be for us... The German colonists ought to live on handsome, spacious farms. The German services will be lodged in marvellous buildings, the governors in palaces... The Germans - this is essential - will have to constitute amongst themselves a closed society, like a fortress. The least of our stable-lads will be superior to any native."

Hitler intended to force Norwegians, Swedes and Danes to move to these territories in the East. Hitler believed that the Blitzkrieg tactics employed against the other European countries could not be used as successfully against the Soviet Union. He conceded that due to its enormous size, the Soviet Union would take longer than other countries to occupy. However he was confident it could still be achieved during the summer months of 1941.

Joseph Stalin believed that Germany would not invade the Soviet Union until Britain and France had been conquered. From Stalin's own calculations, this would not be until the summer of 1942. Some of his closest advisers began to argue that 1941 would be a much more likely date. The surrender of France in June, 1940, cast doubts on Stalin's calculations.

Stalin's response to France's defeat was to send Vyacheslav Molotov to Berlin for more discussions. Molotov was instructed to draw out these talks for as long as possible. Stalin knew that if Adolf Hitler did not attack the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941 he would have to wait until 1942. No one, not even someone as rash as Hitler, would invade the Soviet Union in the winter, he argued.

Germany was now in a strong negotiating position and found it impossible to agree to Hitler's demands. As soon as talks broke-up, Hitler ordered his military leaders to prepare for Operation Barbarossa. The plan was for the invasion of the Soviet Union to start on the 15th May, 1941. Hitler believed that this would give the German Army enough time to take control of the country before the harsh Soviet winter set in.

General Friedrich Paulus was asked to carry out a strategic survey on the Soviet Union for the proposed invasion. The main advice given by Paulus to Adolf Hitler was to make sure that after the invasion the Red

Army did not retreat into the interior. For the campaign to be successful he argued for battles of encirclement. He also suggested that the main thrust should be made north of the Pripyat Marshes in order to capture Moscow.

Information on the proposed invasion came to Stalin from various sources. Richard Sorge, an agent working for the Red Orchestra in Japan, obtain information about the proposed invasion as early as December, 1940. Winston Churchill sent a personal message to Stalin in April, 1941, explaining how German troop movements suggested that they were about to attack the Soviet Union. However, Stalin was still suspicious of the British and thought that Churchill was trying to trick him into declaring war on Germany.

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