Joseph Stalin Essay, Research Paper

Joseph Stalin was maybe the biggest mass murderers of the twentieth century. From the purges in the Red Army to forced relocations, Stalin had the blood of millions on his hands. This essay is not going to debate the fact that this was indeed a brutal and power hungry individual, because he was indeed just that. I will on the other hand show you that through his way of governing the Soviet Union, he actually saved mother Russia from the German invasion in World War Two through he cunning and ruthlessness. Joseph Stalin was a very industrious person and used every means possible to better prepare his country for the coming war that he believed was inevitable. Wether it was diplomatic plotting, economic maneuvering, or just plain brute force, Stalin used every tool in his vast arsenal. The following are some of the more important decisions and methods that Stalin employed. Stalin was forced to consolidate his power through harsh means to better rule the Soviet Union. He ordered the five year plans to industrialize the nation and ordered one of the largest military build up plans ever. Stalin attempted many times to reach a diplomatic solution and ways to delay war with the Axis powers while at the same time trying to guarantee security from the West. Stalin wanted nothing less than to rule the Soviet Union and make her the greatest country in the world and he would stop at nothing to reach those goals. In his quest for leadership Stalin wished to consolidate his power in only himself, thus enabling him to better rule the Soviet Union. Stalin’s roots in politics go all the way back to him being expelled from the theological seminary in Tiflis, Georgia in 1899. This was where Stalin got his first real taste for politics and from that point on his political ambitions grew greater and greater. Stalin soon joined up with the Social Democratic Party and after the party split over ideological differences in 1903, Stalin joined the Bolshevik party under Vladimir Lenin. From 1903 to 1912 Stalin was arrested, and managed to escape, several times. He was exiled to Siberia from 1913 to 1917, returning only after the fall of the Tsar. With the fall of the Tzar and the country in the hands of the revolutionaries Stalin believed it to be the perfect time to come back and renew his political ambitions. Stalin was appointed Commissar of Nationalities after the Bolsheviks came to power in 1917. After Lenin’s death in 1924 the country was ruled by a triumvirate consisting of Stalin, G. E. Zinoviev and L. B. Kamenev. From this point on Stalin simply concentrated more and more power into his own hands. In 1925 Stalin made a turn to the right, got rid of his two companions and established a coalition with moderate leaders Burkharin, Rykov, and Tomsky, which lasted until 1928, when collectivization of agriculture and the forced industrialization came about. Stalin now followed a simple pattern, he simply systematically replaced all those who were not his absolute followers. By 1930 his rule was absolute. Stalin was now free to go ahead and pursue his plans to industrialize and arm the Soviet Union. The only other obstacle in his path was the army leadership. Stalin viewed the army as a threat to his power and took steps to remove that threat. He organized all of his followers to delve into the lives of the military leadership and find out if they were traitors. Many of Stalin’s followers used this as a way of getting back at old rivals and enemies. All kinds of false evidence was manufactured. Stalin took all of this at face value and a great number of the army leadership was either killed or exiled. There were also several show trials put on to demonstrate to the Soviet people that all of the killing was being done for a reason and that there really were conspirators and spies among them. Several accused openly confessed to active membership of a plot to murder the Soviet leadership. With the Army purges done, Stalin had not only control over the country but the military as well. With Stalin’s iron fisted rule things were able to happen much more quickly then they would have under a large bureaucracy. Indeed the great advances in industrialization and defense would almost definitely not have as high as they were at the outbreak of war if not for Stalin rule. Stalin instituted the Five year Plans to boost Soviet society and industry. In 1928 Stalin put into effect the first Five Year industrial and economic development plan for the Soviet Union which forced the country to develop as an industrial nation. The plan called for the industrial output to rise by over 20 percent annually. The optimum variant of the plan assumed: a) a significant expansion of connections with the world economy, both as a result of greater exports and especially as a result of greater long-term credits for equipment and technical aid. The problem with this plan was that it depended upon to many variables and the depression in the West plus low crop yield hampered the project. Yet during the first Five Year Plan, 1,500 big enterprises were built. New sectors of industry were established, which had not existed in tsarist Russia-machine tool production, automobile and tractor manufacturing, a chemical industry, motor works, airplane factories, the production of powerful turbines and generators, production of high grade steel, ferrous alloys, synthetic rubber artificial fibers. Construction was begun of thousands of kilometers of new railroads and canals, the eastern part of the country became the second metallurgical and oil center of industry. With Stalin’s push towards industrialization the Soviet Union was well on its way to create a formidable defense industry. All of the infrastructure was being laid that had previously not existed 10 years ago. The second Five Year Plan was in many ways just like the first but thought through more. This time the government took more of a direct control over everything from budgetary discipline to reorganization of the state- supervised collective-farm markets. In just a very short time, the Soviet Union had managed to pass nations that had been markedly ahead of them in terms of industrialization. The third Five Year Plan was that of complete military armament. The military budget was vastly increased and training of men was also increased greatly. Through Stalin’s direction the Soviet Union went from a backwards country to a first rate industrial and military power. This would not have been possible without the concentrated power that Stalin had amassed. Although industrialization had occurred much still remained to be done in the defense sector. With all the turmoil in Europe and the thunder heads of war gathering Stalin turned his attention towards modernizing the Red Army. Stalin ordered one of the largest military build ups and defensive programs that the world had ever seen. During the 1930s, Stalin ordered a 1,200-kilometer-long line of strong heavy fortifications extending the entire distance between the Baltic and the Black seas. Under the third Five Year Plan, massive amounts of money and resources were pumped into the defense industry. Stalin still believed that war with Germany and Japan was possible. Preparations were made by creating a modern defense industry, military aviation, an up-to-date navy, civil-defense training for the whole population, and so on. During the two year period before the War with Germany the Soviet defense expenditure, wich had been 25 percent of the total budget in 1939, rose in 1941 to 43 percent of the state budget. Prior to this time the Soviets were getting away from the individual militias ans starting to concentrate on creating a standing army. The number of Soviet soldiers grew from 1.9 million in 1939 to 5.4 million by June 22, 1941, but most of their equipment was not new. The Soviet war industry was slowly but surely beginning to produce more and more equipment, this all thanks to Stalin’s reforms. The mass production of the T-34 tank had commenced as well as the katucha rocket launcher vehicle. These two vehicles would prove to be the backbone of the Red army vehicle core. Also of note was that the Red Army had some of the best artillery of the was. While the Soviet War industry had accomplished a great deal before the war it really performed amazing feats during the war. In the early part of the war it was apparent the Germans were at least initially going to make great inroads into Soviet territory. This was due to the fact of the size of the German army and speed at wich the Blitzkrieg was performed. This was where Stalin had the foresight to move the war industries further east. Altogether, between July and November 941 no fewer than 1,523 industrial enterprises, including 1,360 large war plants had been moved to the east. The “evacuation cargoes” amounted to a one and a half million railway wagon-loads. This transportation of industry during the second half of 1941 and the beginning of 1942 and its “rehousing must rank among the most stupendous organizational and human achievement during the war. This was an extemely important decision by Stalin, for in a modern mechanized army, even small drops in production or the loss of a few plants can mean the difference between victory and defeat. In 1942-43 the Soviet was industry not only caught up to the Germans in equipment quality but started to surpass them as well as the rest of the world. The La-5-FN proved to be better then any German fighter, the T34 tank had earned the reputation as the best medium tank of the war and the new heavy JS(”Stalin”) tank was described as the best heavy tank in the world. By 1943 ever facet of Soviet industry was running at full steam and everything that the Soviets had lacked at the beginning of the war they now had thanks to Stalin’s industrialization plans. Stalin had planed for war but he had also played the diplomatic card to improve his chances as well. Stalin had attempted many dfferent diplomatic solutions with both the Allied and Axis power and tried to delay the Soviet Unions involvement in the war as long as possible. Stalin absolutely did not want to involve his country his country in the war unless he absolutely had to and even then he wanted to manoeuver it so the Red Army would only play a supporting role. Even long before the war, Stalin carefullly distinguished between the “aggressive” powers (Germany, Italy, japan) and the “non-aggressive” powers (France, Britain, USA, Canada). For the early part of the 1930’s Stalin really didn’t have a firm foreign policy. The only thing that his foreign policy did at the time was look out for the Soviet Union and nothing else. This can be best understood from an excerpt from one of his speeches to the sixteenth congress: ‘We do not want a single foot of foreign territory, but we will not surrender a single inch of our territory either.’ this policy did not change until the late 1930’s when the real threat of a Second World War became apparent. Stalin now wanted to create a firm foreign policy to better open up dialogues with neighboring countries as the rush was on to create alliances to better prepare for the imminent threat of war. The policy that was created was one that stressed defense as well as opening up and maintaining relations with other countries. The tasks of the Party in foreign policy were: 1-To pursue the policy of peace and of the consolidation of business relation with all countries. 2-To observe the greatest caution and not to allow our country to be drawn into conflicts by war provocateurs, who were in the habit of getting others to save them when they got in over there head. 3-To strengthen in every way the military might of the Red Army and Navy. 4-To strengthen the international bonds of friendship with the workers of all countries, workers whose interest it was to maintain peace and friendship among people. After the new foreign policy was created, Stalin set about to create protective alliances, which proved to be quite difficult to achieve. The first thing Stalin did was try and get treaties signed with those countries on the eastern front to try to create a buffer zone between Germany and the Soviet Union. Poland agreed to prolong her non-aggression treaty with the Soviet Union but things were progressing very slowly with the southern countries. At the beginning Stalin wished to have his alliances with the Western powers and not the Germans. Yet time after time the Soviet ideas of alliances with the West were discarded. What Stalin really wanted was a strong system of alliances that promised military support and mutual aid if one of the signatory countries was attacked. What the Western powers wanted however was a series of large alliances for a psychological effect and not real support. This was unacceptable to Stalin therefore he started to probe the Germans for a possible treaty. The Soviet Union signed several treaties with France, Czechoslovakia, Mongolia, and China but they were not really what Stalin wanted. In 1939 after numerous attempts for a grand mutual assistance treaty with the West, Stalin got the closest thing without even having to commit himself. On march 31, 1939 Chamberlain made his famous speech on Poland. Later that speech was also extended to Rumania and Greece.’Rumania and Poland practically form a continuous front from the Black Sea to the Baltic, a front separating Germany from the USSR. Germany cannot attack the Soviet Union without going through Poland or Rumania, i.e. without bringing into play the Western guarantee, and without having to commit himself, Stalin secured a Western guarantee in the East which he had sought in vain for ten year… Once again attempts were made for an Anglo- Franco-Soviet alliance but it was doomed for failure again mostly due to the fact that Poland would absolutely not let any Soviet forces through their territory even as German forces were about to invade. From this point on a deal with Hitler was almost certainly on Stalin’s mind. Stalin sought a deal with Hitler so he could keep his country out of the war and then possibly be an arbiter in the aftermath, so preparation he began to make a deal with his arch-enemy. All of Stalin’s actions were intended to protect Soviet Union. It must have occurred to Hitler that he did not want to risk a two front war, at least in the early stages of the war. We can see this because all of a sudden his anti-Russian views changed to that of friendship. On August 23 a deal between Germany and the Soviet Union was hammered out. In the pact they undertook to remain strictly neutral towards each other if one of them should be involved in war. Stalin now had the breathing room and the time that he desperately needed. Stalin did not believe this to be a permanent arrangement but he thought that the Germans would not break the pack, or at the vary least officially break off relations and declare war before attacking. Defense preparations were already underway but through Stalin’s diplomacy he had bought the Red Army valuable time in which to turn itself into a modern mechanized army. Stalin may have saved the Soviet union from the Germans but that does not mean he was without fault, quite the contrary. Stalin ignored a great deal of evidence that the Germans were going to attack in June 1941 and did nothing to bolster border defenses. A German deserter actually gave the Soviets the exact time and date of the attack, Stalin ignored this. This enabled the Germans to capture more territory than they initially should have. The army purges also contributed to the Germans winning almost all the opening engagements as the red Army had very few able Generals and officers. Others might point out to the lack of material and equipment. All of these things were done for very specific reasons, Stalin weighed the gains and losses before acting and ultimately made some vary hard but mostly sound decisions. Stalin did not give the deserter any credit because he believed that Hitler would not be foolish enough to attack the Soviet Union when Britain was still fighting and the Battle for Africa waged on as well indeed no one else thought that Hitler would attack the Soviet Union either. Stalin did not send masses of troops and equipment to the border because he thought that he could still negotiate and that Hitler would not risk a two front war. He did this because he knew that the border fortification would not be ready for another six months. The army purges were done to limit the militaries opposition against him so he could have greater control over the military. Stalin and many other truly did believe that the military was corrupt and compromised. As to the lack of equipment, Stalin had instituted a massive military industry at the beginning of the war and up-to-date equipment was starting to be delivered to the front. The movement of the war industry east contributed to the lack of material but proved to be the saving grace of the army in the end. At the end the Soviet war industries were producing some of the best equipment in the world. In the end I do believe that through Stalin’s leadership the Soviet Union was saved. Had it been under the leadership of the intended Communist bureaucracy it would have surely fallen. As we have seen in our country even simple matters can take forever to go into effect or get started under a bureaucracy. In that highly volatile and dangerous time period only an iron fisted rule could bring about change fast enough to due any good. True in the short term peoples right were trampled upon and millions died from famine, purges, and the war itself but in the end hundred’s of millions were saved.

Robert Conquest, The Great Terror, (Toronto: Macmillan and Co. Ltd, 1968), p.123. Alexander Werth, Russia at War, (London: Barrie and Rockcliff, 1964), p.19. Isaac Deutscher, Stalin, (New York: Oxford University Pres, Inc 1967