

# A study on hitlers operation barbarossa



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Operation Barbarossa was the plan initiated by Hitler to invade Russia. It can be considered as the most grueling battle with millions killed injured and captured. Many historians see it as a main reason for the German loss in the Second World War. After the London blitz in 1940, Hitler initiated the attempted capture of Russia. Even though there were agreements between the two superpowers, the tension was too strong to avoid a conflict. However, what motivated Hitler to move on Russia when their advantages lied in London. The aim of this investigation is to find the reasons behind Hitler's decision to finally overtake Russia, even though they had London in the firing lines. What influenced Hitler's judgment? Why did he attack when he could have continued friendly relations with Russia? The question I formulated from this investigation is, " To what extent can Hitler's Operation Barbarossa be considered as an useless strike against Russia?" I will be using a number of primary and secondary sources, such as Mein Kamph, journals from historians and finally, Viktor Suvorov's book presentation at the United States Naval Academy.

## **B. Summary of Evidence**

Even before the London Blitz, Adolf Hitler had decided to invade the Soviet Union. From as early as June, 1940, this was despite the fact that the Soviet-German Pact had been signed in August of the preceding year. In Mein Kampf and in numerous speeches, Adolf Hitler claimed that the German population needed more living space, his " Lebensraum policy was mainly directed at the Soviet Union"[1]. One of the main reasons that Hitler's General's opposed an invasion of Russia was that it threatened to stretch the military capacity of Germany with a war on two fronts. Hitler's belief was

that, by subjugating Russia – he would be eliminating Great Britain’s last possible mainland ally before the United States entered the war. He expected this to happen between 1942 and 1943. Realizing that his forces were not ready, Hitler postponed Operation Barbarossa until May 1941. Originally 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. However, some of his closest advisers began to argue that 1941 would be a much more likely date”[2]. According to Hitler’s plan, Russia’s organized forces were to be completely crushed by October of that year – within five months. Diplomatic relations between Germany and the Soviet Union was ruined as a result of Germany’s actions in its dealings with Finland, Hungary and Romania. Fearing that the Russians might suspend the valuable supply of raw materials and could be susceptible to the trade embargo of Britain, Hitler sent a letter To Stalin on October 13th, explaining these apparent transgressions and suggesting that Stalin send his Foreign Minister Molotov to Berlin to meet with Hitler and discuss the future ‘ spoils’ of the post war world. Soviets increased interests in Finland, Turkey and Bulgaria, created an increasing rift between the two superpowers. Little that they know, Stalin’s decision to refuse co-operation would increase the chances of war and that it was a matter of ‘ when’ rather than ‘ if’. The failure of the talks with Molotov only strengthened Hitler’s resolve to hit Russia, and hit it hard. He was determined to crush Soviet Russia before the conclusion of the war with England. From the beginning of 1941, the German’s began transporting 3, 400, 000 men, 600, 000 vehicles and 600, 000 horses into a concentrated area between the Black Sea and the Baltic. However, even though these

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were clear signals of aggression, Russia avoided any direct confrontation in a feeble attempt to uphold the Soviet-German agreements. Nevertheless, there are post revisionist's who believe that this is not the case. There are two Russian anthologies, both issued in 1995 with the title, " Did Stalin Make Preparations for an Offensive War Against Hitler?" They contain articles by revisionist scholars as well as critics of revisionism. " This most recent collection of Russian revisionist writings deepens our understanding of Stalin's preparations for a military first-strike against Germany in the summer of 1941".[3]The strategic deployment plan, approved by Stalin at a conference on May 15, 1941, with General Staff chief Georgi Zhukov while Defense Commissar Semen Timoshenko, called for a Blitzkrieg like attack.

This revisionist claim " also devotes much attention to analyzing Stalin's speech of May 5, 1941, delivered to graduates of Soviet military academies. In this speech Stalin justified his change of foreign policy in connection with the now decided-upon attack against Germany. From the Communist point of view even a Soviet war of aggression is a " just war" because it serves to expand the " territory of the socialist world" and " to destroy the capitalist world." Most important in this May 5 speech was Stalin's efforts to dispel the " myth of the invincible Wehrmacht." [4]The Red Army was strong enough to smash any enemy, even the " seemingly invincible Wehrmacht." These major findings and conclusions of Russian revisionists are derived mostly from the article cited above. Stalin wanted a general European war of exhaustion in which the USSR would intervene at the politically and militarily most expedient moment. Stalin's main intention is seen in his speech to the Politburo of August 19, 1939. From the outset Stalin reckoned on a war with

Germany, and the conquest of Germany. Stalin said that war with Germany was inevitable, and characterized it as a war not only of a defensive nature but rather of an offensive nature.”[5]

## **C. Evaluation of Sources**

Source A: Book presentation by Viktor Suvorov

### **ORIGIN**

### **PURPOSE**

### **VALUE**

### **LIMITATION**

Source B: Daniel W. Michaels, Examining Stalin’s 1941 Plan to Attack

Germany: Operation Barbarossa and the Russian Historians’ Dispute (review)

### **ORIGIN**

### **PURPOSE**

### **VALUE**

### **LIMITATION**

## **D. Analysis**

Hitler’s decision to invade Russia lacked any foresight or consequence. His ambition to carry out his beliefs of wiping out communism clouded his judgement and his ability to assess risk. Germany’s original belief was that

“ The German Army could have won the Russo-German War if only its leaders had made better decisions at certain key junctions.” Illustrated below are clear examples of how the German leadership, not just those of the Army, squandered away opportunities to not only correctly plan the

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operation, but also to win it. The failure of Operation Barbarossa to achieve its objectives within a limited time frame caused the Germans to lose the war by December 1941-everything after that was just trading ground for time until the eventual defeat.

Their failures in England should have led them to shift emphasis to long-range bombers, especially considering that “ planning for war with Soviet Russia began on 29 July, 1940.”[20] The vastness of the Soviet Union alone should have convinced the Germans that long-range bombers would be necessary; but instead they stuck to their plan of a quick, short campaign, no doubt gambling that they could take whatever airfields they needed along the way and move the Luftwaffe forward after each successful battle. Rather than revise their thinking and learning from their mistakes, they blundered forward. Sea Lion was the first real German setback, and a hugely foolish mistake by Hitler. He should have finished with the west before turning east; because as we know England was left to get stronger, and the entire island was used as a forward base to build up supplies and troops between 1941 and the D-Day attack in 1944. While the Germans were bleeding to death in Russia, the Allies got stronger and stronger in the safe rear area that would become ‘ Fortress England’. But instead the Germans postponed Sea Lion indefinitely and began to turn their attentions eastward-where Hitler had yearned to go since he wrote “ Mien Kampf ” nearly 20 years earlier.

A large portion of the failure to successfully execute Operation Barbarossa must go to the planners and those involved with German intelligence. Many key failures of either or both directly led to the Germans being stalled in the snows just outside Moscow in December, 1941. As far as horse cavalry was

concerned, the mighty “ German accounts tended to ridicule cavalry units as hopeless anachronisms. During the winter of 1941-42, when all mechanized units were immobilized by cold and snow, the horse cavalry divisions (and newly created ski battalions and brigades) [of the Russians] proved effective...”[23] Here the Germans stubbornly clung to their belief in a quick war that would be long over before the snows of October could set in. It would appear that no thought was given in the time leading up to the attack for contingencies based on failures to meet objectives. For instance, how could the planners not have drawn up contingency plans to cover cold weather operations? Flexibility is a major key to successful warfare. Yet two more failures had to do with German lack of any knowledge of new Russian tanks and their under-estimation of Russian military strength.

Hitler moved the date for Barbarossa back to 22 June from 15 May because of “[t]he German invasion of Yugoslavia and Greece during April and May, 1941...also caused a series of delays in the attack on Russia itself.”[42] At the time, it likely seemed the sensible thing for Germany to do; but by December, with their armies poised to finish off Russia and take Moscow, it can be seen as a key contributor to Nazi defeat. This delay of five weeks would prove to be crucial! Had Barbarossa started in May instead of June, they would have arrived in Moscow and Leningrad sooner and would have taken both cities. This was yet another in a long line of German errors and miscalculations that contributed to their defeat against the Russians in the war; but logistics might have been the key area that really broke the Nazis back.

## **E. Conclusion**

## **F. Sources**

Mein kamph

The meaning of the second world war

Video

Journal

Internet