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Stalin's leadership was the most significant reason for the Soviet victory over Germany in the 1941-1945 war? Assess the validity of this view (45 marks)

The naivety of the Nazi conquering force and the sheer size of Russia and the resources it had at its disposal played a far more significant role in determining the outcome of the war than the dictatorial leadership employed by Stalin. Stalin's commitment to expand and modernise Russia's industry prior to 1941, established the Soviet power base capable of defeating the Germans in the 1941-45 war. Stalin's mass industrialisation through his Five Year Plans provided Russia with the capabilities to withstand the strain on its industry during the war. In the third Five Year Plan (that was actually a 3 year plan) from 1938-1941, Stalin concentrated his efforts on the output of tanks, armaments and weaponry. The plan's success can be appreciated in the output figures during the war. This included the production of tanks and self propelled guns where the Russians grossly outperformed Germany, 105, 251 produced by the Soviets compared to 67, 429 produced by the Nazis. Investment by the Soviets in steel, chemicals and power together with its industrial additional capacity, Russian factories were organized for war. This meant that by the time of the Nazi invasion of 1941, Russia considered itself prepared for the economic pressures of war. However, the effectiveness of the Soviet economy and its preparation was proven to be futile and unproductive following the German invasion in 1941. Russia's heavy industry was predominately located in the South and the East of the country, where they were at most danger from advances to their West. This came in the form of the German Blitzkrieg attack of 1941. By November of that year Germany occupied an area encompassing two-thirds of the Soviet population and one-third of its labour force, in addition to well over half of its big

industry and industrial capacity, which included heavy industry and weapon production. Whilst efforts were made in 1942 to relocate factories away from the advances to their western front, production in key areas such as coal, steel and oil was relatively low. The factories which relocated produced comparatively low output and by the end of 1942 Soviet productive capabilities were only 68% of pre-war levels. Stalin's poor strategic management of Russia's industry was not fully exploited by Hitler who delayed in switching the German economy to War-time production until 1942. There is no doubt that this was a major failure on the part of the Nazis and their ability to facilitate the war in Russia. A further significant factor in determining the outcome of the war was Russia's reliance on American support. America's Lend Lease policy aided the Russian economy in areas that they were struggling in. In WWII America provided Russia with thousands of jeeps and trucks as well as provisions for their army including such basic necessities such as salt. Lend Lease has been estimated to contribute around one-fifth of Soviet resources from 1943. It has further been argued by a number of historians that if were not for America's involvement in the war it may have taken Russia many more years to defeat the Germans. Although Stalin's five year plans provided Russia with a dominant manufacturing sector compared to the Nazis his leadership alone cannot be seen as the most significant factor in determining the Russian victory in 1945. The role of America and their lend lease policy for one proved to be a significant factor in the Russian victory. One might argue that Stalin's control of the Russian population to support the war effort was one of the most significant factors in Russia victory over Germany on the Western Front. The pro-Stalinist mind set of the Russian people felt during and indeed

after the war was as a result of Stalin's well placed propaganda and his harsh discipline regime towards the Russian people. The Central Committee played an important role in bringing about civilian cooperation with the war effort. The 'Scorched Earth' policy created a sense of national unity amongst the Russian population of national unity as the strategy called for the population to come together, as one, to defend itself against the Nazi advancements. The success of this all or nothing policy can be seen in the defence of Leningrad. One million Leningraders alone worked constructing tank traps, ditches, barricades and other defences outside the city. In an effort to maximise the effect of the 'Scorched Earth', policy Martial Law was enforced in order to maintain control and order of the Soviet citizens. The restriction of the media and increased censorship, such as the confiscation of radios, facilitated Stalin's dictatorial ambitions of control. The Russian media was compelled into giving false information on the outcome of the war including exaggerating German losses. In this way Stalin prevented a potential social upheaval against his regime on the back of the millions of Russians who had died. The NVKD further consolidated Stalin's dominance in Russia playing a vital role in rounding up those who were opposed to the Soviet regime. These were known as the 'Fifth Column' who sent dissenters into exile or simply shoot those who resisted. The 'total control' imposed by Stalin restricted any anti-war movements in Russia. Without the restriction of the media and the regulation of the Russian people, a social uprising against the failures of the regime on the Western Front may have been inevitable. However, whilst Stalin imposed a sense of fear and control amongst the Russian population, the positive effects of such actions were limited and in many parts of the Russian Empire the pro Stalinist mood was initiated from <https://assignbuster.com/mr-max-wilson/>

the ruthless and antagonistic actions on the part of the invading Nazis. The pro-Stalin regime had limited influence in the East of the Empire, most notable in the Ukraine, where famine had devastated their land and people in previous years. As a result of their mistreatment under the Soviets, they were fanatical anti-Stalinists. When the Germans invaded them in 1941, those living in the Ukraine and other South- East regions of the Soviet Empire regarded the Nazis as liberators in a struggle for independence from Moscow. However, this was not the case. The mass killings and deportation that followed the German invading force by way of the Einsatzgruppen who murdered around half a million Jews within the first three months of the war petrified those Russian citizens. There was also a lack of German propaganda to encourage the participation of the Russian people to stand against Stalin. The lack of propaganda combined with the fear initiated by the Einsatzgruppen, fabricated an anti- Hitler mentality in the occupied areas of the Soviet Union. Had the Nazis had been more calculated in its advances through Russia, they could have capitalized on the support of millions of anti-Stalin Russians who might have fought for the Germans. This could have accounted for around 2.5 million potential soldiers. Such a large fighting force could have made a dramatic impact on the outcome on the war. Stalin's 'no surrender' policy, was accountable for the millions of lives that were wasted during the German invasion. The invasion of Leningrad alone can account for over one million civilian deaths. The majority of citizens killed were responsible for the running of the Russian armament factories. Their losses in part can account for the serious decline in manufacturing in Russia following 1941. Although Stalin was able to incorporate the support of the Russian for the war effort, in many cases, such as in the Ukraine, the pro

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Stalin support came as a result of the barbarity of the Germans. The harsh discipline, with which Stalin ruled the Soviet people, accounted for millions of deaths and as a result of these losses Russia lost a great deal of its own manufacturing power. Whilst the majority of evidence would suggest that Russia's military successes came more as a result of mistakes made on behalf of the Germans, there is also reason to argue against this. Stalin's ability to delegate power effectively during WWII had a significant effect on the outcome of the war. The creation of Stavka, which included the Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Scriabin (Molotov) and the heads of the armed services, provided Stalin with the necessary information and expert opinions to make calculated strategic decisions. In comparison, Hitler operated as an individual, relying on his own intuition to make decisions and surrounding himself with 'yes men' who would not contest his decisions. The structure of Russia's wartime cabinet is seen by many historians as being far superior to that of Germany. As the war developed into 1942 Stalin continued to seek the advice of senior officers such as Marshall Zukhov, in comparison to Hitler who further constricted his collaboration with the Armed forces. Stalin's compliance with the senior army officers to make strategic, calculated decisions proved, in comparison to Hitler, to be a significant success. Although Stalin's military leadership skills were to be admired, Russia's victory came as a result of poor satirical leadership on behalf of the Germans as well as the harsh nature of Russia's terrain. Whilst the German invasion of Russia can be argued to be too late, in June rather than early spring, Germany's failure to capture Moscow in the winter of 1941 was the overriding reason for the German defeat. Germany's decision to go south and consolidate their control gave the Russian General Zukhov time to

organise the defence of Moscow as well as calling in military reserves from Siberia. Without this gap in the German advances, Russia may well have been conquered by the end of 1941. The Russian winter can further account for, but not totally explain, the German retreat in 1941. The lines of supply were often fraught with danger. Oil, munitions and winter cloths could not able to reach the troops on the frontline fast enough to attack in October, when Moscow was most vulnerable. By December, the German soldiers were forced to attack in the most freezing of conditions. Hundreds of thousands died as a result of cold. The magnitude of German losses due to the Russian winter proved a major factor in the Soviet victory in Moscow. Hitler's decision to invade Russia in the summer and to consolidate German power in the South of Russia, were the main reasons for Russia's successful Defence of Moscow and their eventual victory over Germany. Although Stalin provided an image of strength and control over the Russians, the Soviet victory in 1945 came as a result of Germany's failure to capture Moscow in the winter of 1941. The size of Russia itself and the superior population meant that Germany was always at a disadvantage when attacking Russia. Although Russian losses were in all far greater than the Germans, 3. 5 million to Russia's 10. 5 million; Russia simply had the resources available to outlast the Germans.