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OBSERVATIONS ON THE COLLAPSE OF THE HITLER REGIME IN GERMANY AND THE WEAK POINTS OF THE STALIN REGIME IN THE SOVIET UNION.

INTRODUCTION

Such a far-reaching event as the collapse of a state regime can be weighed only after historians and politicians have gained the temporal and spiritual distance necessary to arrive at a judgment which must serve the purpose of an objective historical inquiry. Only after human passions have calmed down and emotional repercussions have given way to rational judgment will historians and politicians come to representations and conclusions which will stand against the criticism of posterity. With this reservation, the causes of the collapse of the Hitler regime will be briefly dealt with in the following analysis and some observations on the present situation of the Soviet Union will be added.

A. The Collapse of the Hitler Regime.

An attempt to discover why the totalitarian regime in Germany ran aground leads to the depressing conclusion that, not the regime's moral defects, but rather the fact that Hitler unleashed a war and eventually lost it, was the real reason for the collapse of that regime. The study of history reveals the disappointing fact that even the worst and most criminal regime is able to hold its ground for a long time if it utilizes adequate security organs and does not suffer decisive military defeat. Thus, the everlasting efforts of the Russian people to overthrow tsarist absolutism were successful only after a war that was lost. Likewise the rule of the Fascists in Italy and the Nazi regime in Germany would presumably have lasted for an indefinite time if those regimes had ^{not} unleashed wars which doomed their fate.

Herewith arises the question of what specific characteristics of the Nazi regime generated war and led to its loss. The answer to this question must proceed from the fact that the Nazi regime did not owe its existence to the German people's free will expressed under normal political conditions but rather was forced upon them with the help of demagogic promises. Those promises were given at a moment when the German people were driven to despair by the situation prevailing in the country. Therefore, the Germans readily accepted every criticism of the existing regime and were prone to regard any change whatsoever as a deliverance. The bourgeois parties in Germany were too weak and ineffectual to offer the people a constructive way out of the difficulties created by the threat which an army of 7 million unemployed represented to Germany in 1933. Hence, the Germans, at that time, might have thrown themselves into the arms of another extreme, i.e. Moscow-inspired Communism, if Hitler had not succeeded in capturing the imagination of the masses by more palpable promises than those offered by the Marx-Lenin doctrine.

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Hitler's road to power was paved by promises, all of which risked the danger of future war. Nevertheless, many of the German people were taken in by those promises because, being in a wretched position, they were not able to realize that danger, much less to weigh its consequences. Those promises were the following:

1. Hitler promised the German people that he would abolish unemployment once and for all. He never could have solved this problem by constructive means, such as increasing German export, because his general policy, and especially his attitude toward the Jews, excluded every possibility of sound economic relations based on mutual confidence with the rest of the world. Hitler, therefore, decided to fulfill this promise by establishing an enormous rearmament program, which became the basis for war.
2. Hitler's promise that he would regain for Germany both international equality of rights and her former position in the world resulted in measures which violated the Versailles Treaty and, therefore, made an armed conflict with the Western Powers inevitable.
3. Hitler contended that the German people needed additional living space (Lebensraum) in the East in order to secure their existence. He promised the German people that he would provide them with this Lebensraum. The result of this promise was his attack against the Soviet Union in June 1941.

Hitler's continuing in power depended decisively on his success in fulfilling his promises through a victorious war. Although Germany was not at all able to wage a successful war against all the rest of the world, Hitler unleashed that war. Many of my friends shared with me the conviction that Hitler had already doomed his and Germany's fate when, on September 1, 1939, he gave the order to invade Poland. The opinion was shared by one of my British friends who told me on the eve of the outbreak of World War II, "In the beginning the Germans will have a tremendous success, but eventually we will win the war."

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But Hitler held a different opinion, because he entirely/judged the material and psychological advantages which enabled the Allies to win the war. Hitler, who had never been abroad, had no comprehension whatsoever of other nations' mentalities. Faith in his own infallibility and wishful thinking completely dominated his thinking and actions. Therefore, his military and political advisers failed completely in their efforts to change his mind. The fate of those who dared repeatedly to try to influence him is well known. He labeled as defeatism every objective representation of actual military, economic and mental situation on the opposite side. He had no understanding of psychological warfare. For example, he did not avail himself of the Russian general VLASOV who could have facilitated his war against the Soviet Union. He completely failed to understand the disastrous consequences that would result from his treatment of prisoners of war and from the attitude of German administration officials

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in occupied countries. The longer the war lasted and the more defeat followed defeat, "the more intransigent and the less amenable he became to influence from outside." (I am citing someone who was interned with Hitler at the Landsberg fortress and remained close to him until the end.)

Hitler's decisions were equally disastrous whether he achieved success or suffered defeat. Victory in France, which persuaded Hitler that he would never fail, was the immediate cause of the war which he unleashed against the Soviet Union. The defeats he later suffered on all fronts did not bring him to reason. On the contrary, they only heightened his stubbornness, his brutality and his complete neglect of the suffering of the German people. Hitler was so absolutely convinced of his infallibility, and he so deeply believed in his intuition that he could never be persuaded to revise his decisions and to adapt himself to the existing political and military possibilities. Out of the steady fear that other nations might consider any concession on his part a sign of weakness, he desperately stuck to demands once made or decisions once taken even if they meant great danger and sacrifice of human life. He overcame internal resistance both by brutal force and by his unusual gift for oratory, with which he forced men under his hypnotic spell. For example, there are many known cases in which some of his highest generals came to him determined to vent their bitterness and to tell him the truth. But they never had a chance. Before the generals could open their mouths, Hitler, with his power of speech, had hypnotized them so that they left him with the honest conviction that he had a better grasp of the situation than they themselves. "He again managed to talk them into drunken stupor" was a comment frequently made by an eye and ear witness.

Although the fact is obvious that the collapse of the Hitler regime in Germany was the result of a lost war, which was generated out of Nazi-ideology, the question still remains unanswered whether a totalitarian regime can also run aground without a military defeat. As regards Germany, that question will never be settled convincingly. All conjectures as to whether and to what extent certain tendencies, which were unfavorable to the stability of the Nazi regime and which began to appear from the first, would have further developed in the course of time belong in the realm of hypotheses.

However, the foregoing statement, that even the worst and most criminal regime is able to subsist as long as it maintains adequate security organs and does not suffer a decisive military defeat, does not impair the fact that every totalitarian regime is bound to decompose because of its weak points and deficiencies. As regards Germany, the main weakness of the Nazi-regime was that it would have been in a position to fulfill the promises through which it came into power only after a successful war. Hence, if the Nazi regime had avoided war, it would have abandoned the only means of fulfilling those promises. Thus, the regime would have lost the material and mental foundation of its existence. As a result, a severe economic crisis and a loss of confidence would have arisen in Germany, and

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the Nazi regime could not have overcome these problems. Fully aware of this fact, Hitler purposely unleashed the war after he realized that the methods of political pressure, intimidation and bluff which he had used hitherto would not get him anywhere.

Be that as it may, the problem of the present moment is whether another totalitarian regime, which is embodied in Stalin and which now threatens the world's peace and security by its material and ideological aspirations, shows traits similar to those which caused the collapse of the Hitler regime, and whether, therefore, the prospect exists that the Stalin regime will finally succumb to its own deficiencies.

B. The Weak Points of the Stalin Regime.

The one-party system represents the common characteristic of the Nazi regime in Germany and the Bolshevik regime in the Soviet Union. In both cases the one-party system led to dictatorship of one single personality. Yet, the way in which such a development came about was fundamentally different in each country. The so-called Fuehrerprinzip (principle of single leader) was always an integral part of the program of the NSDAP (National Socialist Party), whereas that principle is contradictory to Communist doctrine, according to which, not a personality, but the collectivity is competent to rule Party and state. Therefore, the seizure of absolute power by Stalin after Lenin's death was an arbitrary act and a violation of the Communist Party's statute. Stalin's power rests exclusively upon his own strong personality. After he came into power he suppressed every trace of opposition and exterminated even his closest friends and co-workers whenever he felt the slightest danger from them for his personal position. The Soviet Union's present strength rests, in a great measure, on Stalin's dictatorial manner of ruling which, in case of his death, will be the source of her future weakness. For, there is nobody in the Soviet Union who enjoys an authority which would enable him to take possession of Stalin's heritage at once. Therefore, it must be assumed as certain that after Stalin's death his competencies will be distributed among the most prominent members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the U.S.S.R. but that soon afterwards a severe struggle, similar to that which once occurred between Stalin and Trotsky, will break out among his principal successors. It cannot be doubted that some of his successors will try to gain the dominating position in the Party and in the state. Furthermore, it must be expected that the rank and file of Party members will participate in that struggle in order to prevent anyone's succeeding in seizing dictatorial power. Such a struggle will not only deeply shake the whole structure of the Party but also weaken the internal and external position of the Soviet Union as a state. It is difficult to forecast now what should be done from outside in such a case in order to guide further developments in favor of the interests of the non-Communist world. Future policy will depend entirely on actual circumstances which prevail at a given moment.

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At present the world's attention must be directed to the fact that the Soviet Union is going through a transformation which can weaken her even before Stalin's death.

The above statement can be confirmed by the following arguments:

1. The vast expansion of the Soviet Union after the end of World War II, and above all the methods by which she penetrated into Southeastern Europe, created sharp disagreement between the Soviet Union and the Western Powers. During the decade before 1939 the non-Communist world was prone to believe that the Soviet Union had abandoned her original plans of world revolution and that she was honestly aspiring to a peaceful co-existence with the non-Communist states. However, recent developments in the Soviet Union have revealed the fact that this attitude of the U.S.S.R. represented a tactical maneuver and that by those tactics the Soviet Union was trying only to gain breathing time. The present domestic and foreign policy of the Soviet Union every day presents new evidence that the Soviet Government has resumed her original aims. But the difference is that in former times the Soviet Union, when she was still weak, tried to spread her influence on world affairs by ideological means only, whereas now she feels herself strong enough to use also her military strength to push the world revolution forward at a given moment.

Being aware of that, the Western Powers are taking counter-measures which induce the Soviet Union to subordinate her entire economy to the exigencies of rearmament. Thus, the hope of the Soviet population for a brighter life after the war has been frustrated. The Soviet population faces now even increased demands for its capacity to bear suffering and privations. Some of the few civil liberties which the Soviet population had been granted during the war were canceled afterwards. The Soviet people's disappointment is all the greater for, in the meantime, many Russians have been able to obtain personal knowledge of living conditions in the so-called capitalist states and have been deeply impressed by the fact that they were not so bad as they had been described by Soviet propaganda.

2. As regards the spiritual sphere, the Soviet Government in former years paid great esteem to the high standard of foreign science and induced Soviet scientists to make use of its achievements. Nowadays, the Soviet Union displays not only a distinct presumption but even a hostile attitude toward foreign science. Moreover, since the Soviet Government is afraid that Soviet scientists might fall under the influence of bourgeois ideas or techniques, those scientists are forbidden to communicate with their colleagues abroad or to publish foreign scientific works at home. The Soviet Government even went so far recently as to eliminate a number of Soviet scientists, some of them renowned in the whole world, because they were suspected of inclining toward the West. Thus, the Soviet Government has rejected the

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cooperation of many valuable Soviet scientists and lost many possibilities to enrich Soviet scientific research. It goes without saying that such tendencies will weaken the Soviet Union in the long run.

3. Up to now, Stalin's personality has had a mitigating influence on Soviet policy. His outstanding characteristic is his extraordinary flexibility, which has enabled him to adapt his actions to the exigencies of any given political moment. His undisputed authority has allowed him to take a course entirely opposite from one previously pursued whenever political considerations so demanded. His will could be traced into the smallest ramifications of Soviet domestic and foreign policy. Decisions were taken either by him personally or upon his consent or, at least, after it had been ascertained that he had no objections whatsoever against them. Nowadays, there are indications that Stalin's activity and personal influence are in decline. When he showed reserve in former definite cases, then everybody knew that he did so in order not to commit himself prematurely. But at present it seems that in various cases his reserve does not rest upon tactical considerations only but on a decrease of his determination, probably because of his advanced age and the ever growing influence of the MGB (Secret Police). This assumption is principally based on the latent state in which the Tito conflict and the Berlin issue are being maintained by the Soviet Union.

4. Whether Stalin's relative passiveness has allowed an increase in the influence of other members of the Politbureau at the cost of his own can not yet be judged with absolute certainty. Opinions which circulate in the world on this subject are contradictory and not convincing. Nevertheless, it can be taken as certain that among the members of the Politbureau there are those who consider peaceful understanding with the Western Powers both necessary and possible and others who loathe every dealing with the outer world and urge an armed showdown. Mikoyan and Kaganovich certainly belong to the first group, whereas Party politicians like Malenkov and his adherents in the Organization Bureau and in the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Party seem to represent the second one. It seems that Stalin himself has not yet made up his mind whether he should approve the one or the other line. Therefore, his most faithful henchman Molotov maintains a wait-and-see position too.

However, there is no doubt that Stalin is fully aware of the fact that a war of the non-Communist world against the Soviet Union would be an immediate danger to the U.S.S.R. The prudence and statesmanship displayed by Stalin up to now do not support the opinion that Stalin might be induced to take a step which would unleash a general war. Stalin is especially aware of the fact that in the event of war he cannot count upon the full support of the Soviet population. His experiences in this regard during the war with Germany are still fresh in his memory.

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He will not commit the same blunders as Hitler because he knows that through war he can risk all his previous achievements. Moreover, he has no cogent reasons at all to resort to war, for the Soviet Union is economically self-sufficient and is independent of the rest of the world, indeed, she possesses all the raw materials necessary for re-
armament. Stalin is too well aware of the existing balance of power between the Soviet Union and the Western Powers, and especially of the technical superiority of the USA, not to realize that the Soviet Union will not yet have won a war even if the Soviet Army were to reach the Atlantic coast in a relatively short time. Even then the vital points of Soviet territory would remain vulnerable to United States attacks, whereas the territory of the latter would be out of reach of the Soviet Union, at least for the time being. Moreover, the domestic situation in Germany is not such as to ensure the security of the rear of the Soviet Army as it pushes westward. Conditions in the satellite states are also not stabilized enough to meet the demands of a war which the Soviet Union would have to wage against all the rest of the world. Therefore, it must be assumed that Stalin will try to avoid such a war, at present.

Thus, Stalin rejects war, the only means by which the Soviet regime could be overthrown in a measurable space of time. Nevertheless, there is the prospect that, in the course of time, all the above-mentioned circumstances will weaken the Soviet Union to such a degree that she will cease being an immediate danger to the non-Communist world.

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