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Foreign Relations



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MEETINGS: The annual meeting of the Society is held in the summer. The Society also meets with the American Historical Association in December, and with the Organization of American Historians in March or April.

PRIZES: The Society administers several awards. Four of them honor the late Stuart L. Bernath, and are financed through the generosity of his parents, Dr. and Mrs. Gerald J. Bernath of Laguna Hills, California. Awards also honor Laura and Norman Graebner, the late W. Stull Holt, and Warren Kuehl. Details of each of these awards are to be found under the appropriate headings in each Newsletter.

PUBLICATIONS: The Society sponsors a quarterly Newsletter; Diplomatic History, a journal; and the occasional Membership Roster and List of Current Research Projects.

Summary Report

2nd Soviet-American Symposium on US-USSR Relations and the History of World War II

Franklin D.Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, NY
20-23 October 1987

by

Warren F. Kimball (Rutgers University)
U.S. Project Coordinator

This symposium is part of a broader joint project on Soviet-American Relations and the History of the Second World War, co-sponsored by the Soviet Academy of Sciences and the American Council of Learned Societies, and administered in the United States by the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX).

This, the second in the series of symposia on the History of World War II, had as its theme the events of mid-1942 through Autumn 1943. Specific topics ranged from military events on the Russian front to images of the Soviet Union in American media (the list of specific topics and participants is appended). As with the first symposium, held in Moscow in October 1986, the underlying themes were two -- the Second Front issue in its broadest sense, and the seemingly contradictory fact of effective Soviet-American cooperation. Both delegations remained fascinated with the ways in which the two nations could simultaneously quarrel and cooperate. In addition, we continued to gain a much deeper understanding of what historical issues most animate our Soviet counterparts. As in the first symposium, we were struck by their nationalistic pride about Soviet military accomplishments (although they admitted that recent U.S. histories seemed to pay much more attention to the opening of a front in western Europe and to the Pacific theater.

I should point out that we had a balance of new participants and people who participated in the previous symposium, an arrangement that served us well since it meant new viewpoints were introduced without

our having to start from scratch in our discussions. The Soviet delegation included "younger" scholars as well as a woman who made a point of expressing her pleasure that both groups had included a female historian.

Once again, we were a bit disappointed at the relative failure of the Soviet papers to analyze and question Soviet policy. Soviet historians continued to display a "rally 'round the flag" approach during public forums. Private conversations occasionally brought out criticisms of Soviet policies, but that is hardly a substitute for open scholarly debate. One good sign was that Soviet historians, when confronted with a hard question about Soviet policy formation, this time often countered with the admission that they could not answer since they had no access to the archives. However, no such statements appeared in their formal papers. Nevertheless, we did encounter repeated indications that Soviet historians were thinking about those kinds of issues.

The most striking evidence of such thinking came when the Soviets requested a change in the schedule in order to present a discussion of perestroika as it affected the study of history. Although we now realize that such displays of glas'nost have, in the last year, become de rigueur at Soviet-American academic conferences, that does not lessen their impact nor diminish our hopes that these words will be translated into reality. (The quotes and notes that follow are taken largely from the summary of the conference submitted by our excellent rapporteur, Ed Bennett.) One senior Soviet historian said, "We are trying to examine the white [blank?] spots in Soviet history." He went on to claim that the archives are more open and that they are trying to make more documentary material available. Both Soviet and American history textbooks misinterpret and distort each other's history. This must be corrected. (Two Soviet historians sardonically commented that they are getting two hours less sleep each night because now they are actually reading Pravda and Isvestia, whereas previously they simply threw them in the wastebasket.)

Another Soviet historian told of once being forced to excise a statement he wrote arguing that Khrushchev had tried to improve Soviet-American relations. He criticized that as the sort of thing that should not happen. A senior Soviet historian said that they are very defensive about the events of 1939. At the same time, some Soviet historians spoke in terms that can only be described as "reluctant" and even "Thermidorian" -- Ed Bennet's excellent phrase. A number of younger (a relative term) Soviet historians addressed the very real problem of reshaping attitudes and coming to grips with change. A difficult task, they said, for bureaucrats. It was the unanimous opinion of the Americans present that the Soviet historians honestly believed that major changes were in the making. For a group of prestigious Soviet historians to admit or even infer that much of what they had written was incomplete and even wrong, that their work was based on inadequate access to their archives and subject to political censorship, is remarkable. Our response to this presentation was positive, but cautious. We expressed support, but generally took a wait-and-see attitude. When we suggested that access for Americans to Soviet archives would be the best evidence of change, they responded that first those archives would have to be opened to Soviet historians.

Someone once asked if we learned anything new at these symposia. Given limited Soviet access to their own archives, it is safe to say that few of the Americans learned anything new in terms of facts. But the experience of debating a common body of knowledge with a group of historians whose perspectives and emphasis is often dramatically different from ours continues to be a challenging, intellectually broadening experience.

A Soviet decision to publish in the Soviet Union many of the American papers from the first symposium may also be a glimmer of glas'nost. In addition, a number of those papers, both Soviet and U.S., will be published in the United States sometime in 1989.

The third symposium, which will deal with the conferences at Moscow, Cairo, and Teheran (to the eve of the Normandy invasion), is scheduled for the Soviet Union sometime in October 1988. As before, we will concentrate on broad issues of Soviet-American relations and Soviet-American perceptions of each other. Discussions of military history, which the Soviets seem to prefer, will continue to be subordinated to larger issues of strategy. The list of tentative topics for that meeting includes strategic logistics, planning for postwar reconstruction, issues of public opinion, postwar Germany, and historiography.

Participants and Topics

Soviet Participants:

Academician G. N. Sevostianov (Soviet Coordinator -- Inst. of World History), "The Moscow and Teheran Conferences of 1943: Problems of War and Peace."

N. S. Ivanov (Inst. of World History), "The Battles of Stalingrad and Kursk as Interpreted in Soviet and American Historiography."

R. F. Ivanov (Inst. of World History), "Eisenhower and Soviet-American Military-Political Collaboration."

G. A. Kumanev (Inst. of History of the USSR), "The Military Economy of the USSR in the Critical Period: Nov. 1942-43."

L. V. Pozdeyeva (Inst. of World History), "Anglo-American Relations, 1942-43."

V. V. Pozniakov (Inst. of World History), "American Public Opinion and the Soviet Struggle Against the Common Enemy."

D. M. Proyektor (Inst. of World Economy & International Relations), "Hitler's Diplomacy, the Strategy and Problems of the Second Front."

O. A. Rzheshhevskii (Inst. of World History), "The Second Front Issue in 1943."

V. P. Zimonin (Inst. of Military History), "Military Operations in the Pacific Theater: Summer 1942-1943."

B. I. Zverev (Inst. of History of the USSR), "International Significance of the Battles of Stalingrad and Kursk."

American Participants:

Papers:

Edward M. Bennett (Washington St.), "Challengers to Policy Proponents of an Inevitable Soviet-American Confrontation."

Gregory D. Black (Missouri -- KC) and Clayton R. Koppes (Oberlin), "The Soviet Palimpsest: The Portrayal of Russia in American Media in WWII."

Alexander S. Cochran (CMH), "The Other Front in the Mediterranean, 1943: The Role of Operational Intelligence in Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare."

Arthur L. Funk¹ (Florida -- Emer.), "De Gaulle Between Washington, London, and Moscow -- 1943; or MARIANNE ADRIFT: How She was Rescued by the British Lion, Pecked at by the American Eagle, and Hugged by the Russian Bear."

Elizabeth K. MacLean (Otterbein), "Joseph E. Davies and the Elusive Roosevelt-Stalin Tete-a-Tete, 1943."

Steven Miner (Ohio), "Religion and Politics: Cultural Propaganda, 1941-1943."

Hugh Phillips (Alabama -- Huntsville), "Mission to America: Maxim Litvinov in the United States, 1941-1943."

Mark Stoler, "The Second Front in Allied Strategy and Diplomacy: Aug. 1942-Oct. 1943."

Interventions:

Lloyd C. Gardner (Rutgers), "The Moscow Foreign Ministers Conference, 1943."

George C. Herring (Kentucky), "Lend-Lease to the Soviet Union, 1942-43."

Warren F. Kimball¹ (American Coordinator -- Rutgers), "The Ghost in the Attic: The Soviet Union at the Casablanca Conference."

Other Formal Participants:

William Emerson (FDRL)

Norman Saul¹ (Kansas)

Theodore Wilson¹ (Kansas)

¹ indicates members of the U.S. Sub-Committee for the Project on the History of World War II.

This symposium is part of a broader joint project on Soviet-American Relations and the History of the Second World War, co-sponsored by the Soviet Academy of Sciences and the American Council of Learned Societies, and administered in the United States by the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX).

-- Warren Kimball

THE SOVIET UNION AND THE LESSONS OF WORLD WAR II

by

Milton Leitenberg (Cornell University)

Each year in May the USSR celebrates the anniversary of the end of WWII. Soviet military spokesmen routinely use the occasion to make pronouncements on "The Lessons of the Great Patriotic War," stressing the Soviet Union's need of a powerful defense to repel invaders, and justifying the claims such a defense makes on the material resources of the nation. On the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the end of WWII in the summer of 1985, the USSR published a substantial number of more historical reviews of "The Lessons of WWII" which stressed this theme.

The most important consideration in the post war years has been the direct linkage of those alleged lessons, the terrible losses suffered by the USSR in human life and resources in the war, to the need for Soviet military preparedness and rearmament, and even to the military occupation of Eastern Europe by the USSR after WWII. One of the most capable and balanced analysts of Soviet defense and foreign policy, Raymond Garthoff, wrote in 1983 that in order to understand the Soviet approach to strategic requirements, the strategic balance, and Soviet-perceived requirements and force levels in Europe, "...it is essential to take into account the Soviet experience in World War II. The Nazi attack and drive to the gates of Moscow and Leningrad was a traumatic experience that has affected the thinking of the current generation of Soviet military and political leaders."¹

Soviet political leaders and spokesmen have repeated this message to every Western political visitor to the USSR, high- or low-ranking, during the entire post war period, and it is repeated universally in the West.

The losses and suffering of the USSR in WWII are unquestionable and were terrible. But as to their causes, there are three primary "lessons" that are known to no one better than the military and political leadership of the USSR. They are, however, quite

different ones and, peculiarly, they are scarcely ever discussed in the West. Oddly enough, two of these reasons were discussed in some detail in the USSR during the Khrushchev years, but seem to have been forgotten in the West in the twenty years that followed, during which the USSR engaged in an extremely broad program of weapons acquisition. This lack of historical memory was particularly notable in the arms control literature, where it should otherwise have served as a key to assessing Soviet statements regarding their own policy determinants.

The first of the three basic causes for the Soviet losses is that Stalin had roughly 85 percent of the senior officer corps of the USSR killed in the purges between 1937 to 1939. The USSR thereby lost the overwhelming majority of its most experienced and capable military commanders. Estimates place the number of officers killed at between 30,000 and 40,000, including virtually the entire high command.² As a result, staff and regimental appointments in 1941 were usually held by junior and inexperienced officers. In 1940, not one of a random sample of 225 regimental commanders, or half the army regiments, had been through the normal staff course.³ Large numbers of senior intelligence, military R&D and military industrial managers were also killed in the 1937-1939 purges.⁴ In Khrushchev's "secret speech" to the 20th Party Congress of the CPSU, he noted that

Very grievous consequences, especially in reference to the beginning of the war, ensued from Stalin's annihilation of many military commanders and political workers in 1937-1941.... During these years, repressions were instituted against certain parts of the military cadres, beginning literally at the company and battalion commander level and extending to the higher military centers; during this time the cadre of leaders who had gained military experience in Spain and in the Far East was almost completely liquidated.

The policy of large-scale repressions against the military cadres led also to undermined military discipline, because for several years officers of all ranks and even soldiers in the Party and Young Communist League cells were taught to "unmask" their superiors as hidden enemies...⁵

Khrushchev repeated this theme as well in his speech to the 22nd Party Congress in October 1961. Notably -- and additional evidence of the consciousness of this subject in the minds of the postwar Soviet military leadership -- the military personnel killed by Stalin were the first to be rehabilitated, and they were the group most uniformly rehabilitated.

The war memoirs of over 300 senior military officers were permitted to be published in the Khrushchev years.⁶ One of these was the memoirs of General of the Soviet Army A.V. Gorbатов, post war commander of the Soviet forces in Germany, first published in the Soviet journal Novy Mir. Still alive in 1941 in a Soviet prison camp in Siberia, he was fortunate to be recalled to active service. Looking back at his arrival at the front in 1941 he wrote:

But my earlier fears still make my hair stand on end: how were we going to be able to fight when we had lost so many experienced commanders even before the war had started? Undoubtedly that was one of the main causes of our failure, although no one talked about it. Some even pretended that 'purging the army of traitors' in 1937 and 1938 had increased its strength.⁷

The Soviet lack of command was evident: Soviet armies were surrounded and surrendered by the millions to weaker German forces, resulting in the continuous retreat of Soviet forces into the winter of 1941.

The second major cause of the Soviet losses is introduced by Garthoff in the sentences immediately following those quoted above.

The Axis forces that attacked the Soviet army were smaller and had fewer weapons, and after heavy losses only the very large Soviet reserves of men and weapons, as well as depth of territory, prevented defeat. In June 1941, 166 Axis divisions attacked 188 Soviet divisions (increased to 260 by August): after four months of battle the Soviet Union had sustained more than 3 million casualties, including over 2 million men taken prisoner. The Wehrmacht committed 2,434 tanks against 24,000 Red Army tanks--and after three months had lost 550 tanks while the USSR had lost 17,500. The Luftwaffe committed 1,300 aircraft initially (later 3,000) against about 10,000 Soviet aircraft, of which 8,000 were lost in the first three months of war.⁸

In other words, Soviet "unpreparedness" was not due to the absence of sufficient military equipment. All of the Soviet forces--tanks, aircraft, manpower--far outnumbered the attacking German forces. The USSR did not suffer its military defeats in the summer months of 1941 for the lack of military preparedness in terms of military equipment or manpower. It suffered those defeats because the leader of the country refused to accept numerous strategic warnings of impending invasion--from his own intelligence services, from the governments later to be his wartime allies, and from neutral nations. In addition, under pressure from Stalin, the Soviet high command rejected messages from Soviet field commanders at the borders that they could hear and see German preparations for attack. Under the terms of the Nazi-Soviet agreements in force at the time the USSR could carry out aerial reconnaissance flights over German territory, and Germany had the same privilege of over-flying the Soviet front lines.⁹ Even requests by Soviet front-line commanders for permission to dig defensive fortifications were rejected, often with the message to relax, "...'the boss' knows all about it."¹⁰ When Soviet commanders finally reported they were being attacked they were still ordered not to return artillery fire hours after the German invasion had

begun. In some cases operational orders for defense of Soviet forces and territory did not go out from Moscow to Soviet field commanders until several days after the German invasion. A major portion of the Soviet aircraft were destroyed in the very first days and weeks of the war, but not in combat. They were lost on the ground to German air attack, sitting on airfield runways.

Khrushchev was quite explicit about this second cause as well in the "secret" 1956 Party Congress speech.

During the war and after the war Stalin put forward the thesis that the tragedy which our nation experienced in the first part of the war was the result of the "unexpected" attack of the Germans against the Soviet Union. But, comrades, this is completely untrue.... Many facts from the prewar period clearly showed that Hitler was going all out to begin a war against the Soviet state and that he had concentrated large armed units, together with armored units, near the Soviet borders.

Documents which have now been published show that by April 3, 1941, Churchill, through his Ambassador to the USSR, Cripps, personally warned Stalin that the Germans had begun regrouping their armed units with the intent of attacking the Soviet Union.... Churchill stressed this repeatedly in his dispatches of April 18 and in the following days. However, Stalin took no heed of these warnings. What is more, Stalin ordered that no credence be given to information of this sort, in order not to promote the initiation of military operations.

We must state that information of this sort concerning the threat of German armed invasion of Soviet territory came in also from our own military and diplomatic sources; however, because the leadership was conditioned against

such information, such data were dispatched with fear and assessed with reservation....¹¹

Superficial accounts of the early stages of the German invasion of the USSR frequently attribute Soviet military incompetence in the immediate post-invasion period directly to Stalin's "collapse" for over a full week following the German invasion, that is, to the failure of the central command in Moscow.¹² However, as noted by Alec Nove, a second important effect of Stalin's earlier slaughter of the Soviet military leadership was

...on the minds of those who had not been arrested: in both the military and the industrial field, it paralyzed initiative and disrupted mutual confidence and working arrangements.... Nor was it possible to organize fuel dumps, minefields, even guerilla bases, in the event a retreat was necessary; this would be "defeatism and panic mongering," perhaps a capital offense.¹³

Soviet field officers, experienced or inexperienced, knew that they could easily pay with their lives for displeasing Stalin and so were undoubtedly reluctant to dispute patently crippling orders. Nevertheless, in some cases, individual Soviet commanders took responsibility for ordering fire against the invading German forces, as reported in the memoirs of Admiral Kuznetsov, one of those published in the USSR in the years of the Khrushchev "thaw."¹⁴

It is therefore impossible to believe that the post war Soviet military leadership does not know what "the lesson of June 1941" therefore really is. There is no reason to think that the Soviet political leadership doesn't know what it is either. Clearly the lesson is not the one that was referred to publicly for over twenty years and that we in the West often used to rationalize the levels of USSR weapons procurement and military expenditure. The Soviet Union did not lack sufficient defense material in 1941. There is also the problem of explaining the excellent performance of

Soviet forces in the Far East in major battles in 1938 and 1939 with the crack battle-hardened Japanese Kwantung Army. The Japanese probes into Siberia resulted in the largest tank battles that had ever taken place to that date. Soviet forces did very well and repulsed the Japanese.

There is also a third cause, perhaps the most fundamental of all, though it is less relevant to the precise developments on the field of battle immediately following the invasion. In February 1987 General Secretary Gorbachev called for a "reopening of Soviet history books, and the restoration of names and historical periods." In the spring months that followed, a public debate did develop in the USSR concerning the role of Joseph Stalin in the few weeks immediately preceding the Nazi invasion in June 1941, as well as in the first weeks that followed. However, the discussion in the USSR accusing Stalin of "failure to prepare the country for Hitler's attack" artificially and obviously stopped short at a key point. No one drew the simple and direct relationship to Soviet national policy at the time: The 1939 Nazi-Soviet Pact. There are two very basic reasons why this third cause is not publicly recognized in the USSR, and why it probably never will be. The first is that it would force the USSR to assume at least part of the responsibility for the way in which World War II broke out, including the eventuality Stalin hoped to deflect: a German attack on his own country. This is the point that was made by former Swedish Prime Minister Tage Erlander in the first volume of his memoirs published in 1973. The second reason is that if the 1939-41 period and its policies were critically questioned, it would endanger the justification for the Soviet territorial acquisitions that were made in 1939 during the time in which the USSR was in alliance with Nazi Germany, but which it nevertheless succeeded in retaining in 1945 at the end of the war. With the exception of Finland, the USSR regained most of the Russian territory on its western border that it lost immediately after WWI and the collapse of Czarism. Between 1917 and 1933 these areas had either been independent states--such as the Baltic republics--or

had been parts of Poland, Rumania, and so forth. In 1939 the USSR occupied and then reincorporated these areas under the terms of the Nazi-Soviet pact. The tacit post war acceptance of these territorial acquisitions is one of the great conundrums of WWII.

Khrushchev's portrayal of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, as he repeatedly refers to it in his memoirs, is also quite different. Time and again he stresses the territorial gains that it brought to the USSR. "Our country had attained its maximum territorial gains."¹⁵ As predicted above, the remarks in General Secretary Gorbachev's long-awaited historical address on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Soviet revolution continued the traditional Soviet presentation of the 1939 Nazi-Soviet nonaggression treaty, with no mention of the secret protocols that divided European territory between Germany and the USSR. Soviet specialists quoted by the New York Times in analysis of the speech noted that

...since the pact laid the groundwork [for] the Soviet Union's expansion into the Baltic states, Mr. Gorbachev could not condemn it outright. To have done so, they said, could undermine the justification for the later annexation of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia.¹⁶

The terrible losses the USSR suffered in WWII are unquestioned and no disrespect is shown them through this analysis. The myths perpetuated by the common rendition of "the lessons of WWII" are why those losses occurred and what lessons Soviet decision makers learned from them and have applied in the post war years and apply at present. The "lessons" are virtually universally linked to the requirement for building up the military capabilities of the USSR. The analysis of the three major causes presented here--and which it is argued is well understood by Soviet military and political leaders--suggests that the enormous investment in Soviet defense and rearmament may not at all have been needed to prevent a similar outcome in the post war years, or at some

time in the future. It tentatively points to other possible reasons in the domain of Soviet foreign and military policy for that emphasis, and removes a good deal of the alleged "defensiveness" of that buildup.

As late as 1985, one could find frequent Western references to the "insecurity of the Soviet people and the Soviet leadership." One can justifiably be skeptical about such assessments. Surveying the thirty years of expenditures for weapons systems that the Soviet Political Bureau has approved no one should be more conscious than the Soviet leadership of the excellent comparative status of both their strategic and conventional military capabilities, and that the USSR lacks nothing in defense capabilities. No nation in the world could be as secure from external military threat as the USSR if its sole intention were to keep its military forces solely within its own borders.

Notes and References

¹Raymond L. Garthoff, Perspectives on the Strategic Balance, Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1983, p. 27.

²Robert Conquest, "The Great Purge," Encounter, 1969, pp. 80-91.

³Konstantin Simonov, Znamya (May 1964), cited in Conquest, op. cit., p. 81.

⁴For Human Rights, Letter of P.I. Yakir to the Editor of the journal Kommunist, and Letter by L. Petrovsky to the Central Committee of the CPSU, Frankfurt: Possev, 1969, pp. 39-43 and 90-95.

⁵Reproduced in H.R. Swearer, The Politics of Succession in the USSR: Materials on Khrushchev's Rise to Leadership, Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1964, p. 168. See also, "The Dethronement of Stalin -- Full Text of the Khrushchev Speech," Manchester Guardian, June 1956.

⁶Seweryn Bialer, ed., Stalin and His Generals: Soviet Military Memoirs of World War II, Pegasus, 1969. The Soviet Defense Ministry also published a six-volume history of WWII during the Khrushchev period which described the aspects discussed here. An additional aspect, Soviet assistance to the training of the German Wehrmacht and Luftwaffe in the late 1920s, is not discussed in this paper.

⁷Gen. A.V. Gorbатов, Years Off My Life: The Memoirs of a General of the Soviet Army, London: Constable, 1964, p. 185.

⁸R.L. Garthoff, op. cit., pp. 27-28.

⁹Russel H.S. Stolfi, "Barbarossa: German Grand Deception and the Achievement of Strategic and Tactical Surprise Against the Soviet Union, 1940-1941," Chapter 9 in D.C. Daniel and K.L. Herbig, Strategic Military Deception, New York: Pergamon Press, 1982, pp. 195-223.

¹⁰John Erickson, "The Soviet Response to Surprise Attack: Three Directives, June 22, 1941," Soviet Studies, 23:4 (April 1972), pp. 519-553.

¹¹Swearer, op. cit., pp. 166-167.

¹²Khrushchev commented on this aspect as well:

After this, Stalin for a long time actually did not direct the military operations and ceased to do anything whatever. He returned to active leadership only when some members of the Political Bureau visited him and told him that it was necessary to take certain steps immediately in order to improve the situation at the front.

¹³Alec Nove, "The Thick Red Line," New York Review of Books 13:5 (September 25, 1969), pp. 32-34.

¹⁴Admiral of the Fleet N.G. Kuznetsov, Before the War [Pered Voinoi], Moscow, Oktyabr, Nos. 8. 9. 11. 1965,

and "Stalin's Absence in '41 is Recalled; Soviet Admiral's Memoirs Describe Nazi Invasion," New York Times, November 4, 1965. See also Valentin Berezhkov, Between War and Peace [Na Rubezhe Mirai Voiny], Moscow, Novy Mir, No. 7, 1965, and Ruben Ainsztein, "Stalin and June 22, 1941: Some New Soviet Views," International Affairs 42:4 (November 1966), pp. 662-672.

After Khrushchev's ouster, the Soviet historian Aleksander Nekrich managed to publish his volume, June 22, 1942, describing these events in some detail. The book was condemned, removed from libraries and destroyed, and Nekrich was expelled from the Communist Party. Protests were sufficient to cause the dissolution of the entire Institute of History for a brief period.

¹⁵Khrushchev Remembers: The Last Testament, Introduction by Edward Crankshaw and Jerrold Schecter, Translated and Edited by Strobe Talbot, Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1974, p. 158. See also, Khrushchev Remembers, Vol. I, 1970, Chapter 5, "Prelude to the War," pp. 126-149.

¹⁶Richard Bernstein, "Scholars Say Gorbachev Fell Short on Objectivity," New York Times, November 4, 1987.

Writing in 1956 and describing an international historians' conference held in Rome in December 1955 which led to a confrontation between Western and Soviet historians, Dr. Walter Hofer of the Free University of West Berlin commented that

One of the best known and most significant falsifications of history perpetrated by the Soviets is, of course, the denial of the existence of the secret treaty which was appended to the German-Russian non-aggression pact of August 23rd, 1939, and by virtue of which the whole group of countries stretching from Finland to Roumania was parcelled out between the German and Soviet spheres of

interest.... Soviet historical writing has been forced to present the events of the period following 1939 as though there had never been such a secret agreement dividing up the booty between the two dictators. In the official Soviet version the advance of the Russian armies into Eastern Poland in September in 1939 is pictured as being a move to prevent the further penetration of the Germans into these areas.

Walter Hofer, "Coexistence With Soviet Historians, Science and Freedom, November 1954 to August 1956," A Selection of Articles form the First Six Issues of the Bulletin of the Committee on Science and Freedom, n.d., n.p., pp. 136-141.

Soviet publications printed in 1987 dealing with the three Baltic states all described events occurring during the period 1939-1941 with no changes in the falsification of virtually all particulars in exactly the manner that has persisted in the entire postwar period. See:

- (1) Monica Zile, Latvia, Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, 1987, pp. 29-30.
- (2) Ressi Kaeva, Estonia, Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, 1987, pp. 15-16.
- (3) Petras Griskevicius, Lithuania, Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, 1987, pp. 16-18.

**A Georgian in Mexico: President Jimmy Carter's
Visit to Ixtlilco el Grande, February 15, 1979**

by

E.V. Niemeyer, Jr.*
Austin, TX

The visit of President Jimmy Carter to Mexico, February 14-16, 1979, followed the general pattern of state visits but with one difference. The sixth U.S. president to visit the Aztec nation while in office, Carter, his wife Rosalynn, and their party, which included Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, National

Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, Congressman Jim Wright and Senator Lloyd Bentsen, both of Texas, began a whirlwind schedule of activities as soon as Air Force One landed at the Mexico City Airport at 11:15 a.m. on the 14th.

In forty-eight hours the President and all other members of his party visited the National Palace, an Aztec archeological excavation site, the Mexican Foreign Ministry, and the U.S. Embassy. In addition, the President laid a wreath at the Monument to Mexican Independence, attended a performance of the Mexico Symphony Orchestra under the baton of guest conductor Leonard Bernstein, viewed a collection of Diego Rivera murals at the Palace of Fine Arts, addressed the Mexican Congress, and met with his host, Mexican President Jose Lopez Portillo, for seven hours of discussion of issues important in the U.S.-Mexican relationship.

For Carter, preoccupied with the problems of Iran and Afghanistan, it was a welcome opportunity to leave behind the pressures and cares of Washington to visit the neighbor to the South.¹ As the only U.S. President in the 20th century able to converse in Spanish, he made two public addresses in Spanish, which gave much pleasure to the Mexicans, despite his gringo pronunciation and accent. Unfortunately, his visit was marred in two instances. Upon arrival at the airport he was given a "cool" reception by Lopez Portillo who did not offer the traditional abrazo (embrace) nor did he give Rosalynn a kiss on the cheek although Carter kissed Mrs. Lopez on hers.² Then at the luncheon on the 14th at the Foreign Ministry, Lopez Portillo chided his guest for having vetoed the purchase of Mexican natural gas by the United States in 1977 and for taking Mexico and its new-found oil wealth for granted.³ Although this was seen as a scolding by the U.S. press, Mexican newsmen considered their president just to be speaking frankly.⁴ In reality Lopez Portillo was expressing the Mexicans' obsession for respect, an ingrained belief that the United States does not show consideration for that element of the national character that is prized above

all others: dignity. It was another example of the fact that Mexicans and Americans frequently see world matters from different points of view.⁵

The second instance occurred when Carter, trying to inject humor into a talk, referred to the case of "Montezuma's revenge" -- diarrhea -- that had seized him on an earlier trip to Mexico. It was an innocent statement, unfortunately made in public; it received wide coverage.⁶

If the President was relieved to get out of Washington, he was probably just as glad to get out of Mexico City on February 15, even if it were only for a few hours. And this was the difference between his visit and those of his predecessors: he visited a rural community to observe campesino (peasant) life. He had expressed the desire to see a village whose inhabitants were trying to raise their standard of living through their own efforts. The one chosen was Ixtlilco el Grande in the south-central state of Morelos whose capital, Cuernavaca, is a popular visiting place for American tourists. It was a historic visit, for Jimmy Carter, a farmer, was the first U.S. President, before or since, to visit rural Mexico, to get the scent of the land and its products and to mix with those who tilled the soil.

The contrast with Mexico City, its splendor and sophistication, is marked. Situated in the municipio of Tepalcingo, Ixtlilco el Grande is located 42 miles southeast of Cuernavaca.⁷ The town is about 3800 feet above sea level with a population of some 2800. As an indication of general health conditions at the time of the Carter visit, 52.9 percent of the 418 homes had running water, 2.6 percent had sewage disposal, and 81.9 percent had dirt floors. Less than a third had electricity. Other services included one small clinic, one primary school, and one telephone. The literacy rate was estimated at 56 percent with the state average being about 75 percent. The inhabitants are descendants of those who had fought in the Mexican Revolution under the leadership of Emiliano Zapata whose battle cry to regain lands that had been taken

from the peasants during the 19th and early 20th centuries was "Land and Liberty."⁸ The rainy season lasts from June through October and the rest of the year is dry and arid, water being drawn from wells and creeks to cultivate beans, cotton, peanuts, corn, a high quality rice, tomatoes, onions, squash, cantaloupes, and watermelons. Milk from goats is used to make cajeta (a thick, sweet, caramel-flavored spread). Goats are also eaten for their meat.⁹

Presidential visits, even to remote areas of the world, require considerable planning and preparation. Ixtlilco el Grande was no exception. A U.S. Air Force communication team and elements of the Secret Service, White House staff, United States International Communication Agency, and American Embassy (some 37 U.S. personnel in all) worked with Mexican officials to make the visit a successful one. To improve the town's one-telephone connection with the outside world, the Air Force team arrived two weeks before the President and set up an antenna over the one-story town hall whereupon Ixtlilco entered the satellite communication age. The team quickly made friends with the townspeople, distributing frisbees and showing the children how to throw them. Team wags promptly dubbed Gonzalo Sanchez, the town telephone operator who was said to be 93 years old, "Alexander Graham Bell." Later President Carter would meet Sanchez and discuss with him the merits of the White House vs. Ixtlilco telephone systems. "Jiffy Johns" and a camper were brought down from Texas for the comfort of the personnel involved. Site Officer for the civilian personnel was Rene Greenwald, the Institute of International Education representative at the U.S. Embassy, whose tact and ability in implementing visit plans contributed significantly to the successful outcome.

Harmony prevailed and there was little friction, although tension increased as the President's arrival approached. An incident involving Dan Lee of the White House staff and Andres Diaz of Televisa, the leading Mexican television network, occurred on the morning of the 15th. The dispute concerned the

location of the trucks carrying the power generators for the TV cameras. Lee was afraid that the noise made by the generators would interfere with the public address system installed for Carter's talk. Consequently, he wanted the trucks at a safe distance from the microphone. When they argued over the location, Lee told Diaz, "I represent the President of the United States," as if this would end the matter. Diaz replied that he didn't work for the President of the United States and that they were in Mexico, not the United States. In the end a "quiet" place was found in a callejon (alley) suitable to both Diaz and Lee. Diaz was also concerned lest his cameramen lose sight of Carter as he moved from school to plaza. Eventually this problem was also settled peacefully. At one point the discussion went like this:

Diaz: "I can't lose sight of Carter on TV."

Lee: "If you do for fifteen seconds, I'll buy you a beer."

Diaz: "It won't help; I'll have already lost my head."¹⁰

The aggressive Lee also complained that the town was being painted up too much and that he wanted it to look natural. But there was little that could be done about this. The townspeople wanted to spruce up their homes and did so, many whitewashing the exterior walls, especially those of houses along the cobblestone main street, the only paved one in town. New road signs leading to the plaza were installed and paper flags and brightly colored streamers were hung for the festive occasion.

After thirty minutes of flying time from Mexico City, U.S. helicopter Marine One bearing the President and Rosalynn, Ambassador Patrick Lucey, Dr. Lukash and four others arrived at the landing point, some 3.6 miles from Ixtlilco. Nighthawk Two carried seven Secret Services personnel while Jody Powell, Hamilton Jordan, Jerry Rafshoon, Secretary Vance and Zbigniew Brzezinski and four others were aboard Nighthawk

Three.¹¹ Five Mexican helicopters with Mexican officials accompanied the American craft. At the landing site Mexican Foreign Minister Santiago Roel and his wife, the Mexican Secretary of Budget and Planning, Ricardo Garcia Sainz, and the Secretary of Agriculture and Water Resources, Francisco Merino Rabago joined the Carters. At this time, among the furrows of a plowed field, Dr. Armando L. Bejarano, Governor of Morelos, officially welcomed the Carters, saying,

Here in Ixtlilco..., which is Mexico, great events occur that are inspired by emotion and faith, not by material things, and as a result exemplary friendship is born, and from this beautiful union, the visit of the President of the United States to the people of the dark eyes (ojos negros), of the dark skin, and of the calloused hands.¹²

In reply, President Carter thanked Governor Bejarano for his words, adding that he was pleased to visit Ixtlilco, "a town much larger than the one in which I was born which has 600 inhabitants and is called Plains, in the State of Georgia."¹³ Later the party toured a nearby swine facility financed by the Programa de Inversiones Publica para el Desarrollo Rural (Program of Public Investment for Rural Development), better known by its acronym PIDER, which program was briefly explained by Secretary Merino Rabago.¹⁴ No sooner had he finished his remarks than a campesino presented a toasted peanut to Carter who graciously accepted it, removed the shell, and ate it, saying, "It is larger than those that I grow."¹⁵ A few minutes later the party made a brief stop and tour of the El Grande Irrigation Pumping Station where the President and Rosalynn spoke with Mr. Refugio ("Cuco") Sanchez Dominguez, the pump operator, his wife Macelina, and their five children.¹⁶

Now the group would head for Ixtlilco, ten minutes away by car, where the people patiently awaited their distinguished visitor and his wife. Also awaiting him were more than a score of reporters, some with

typewriters balanced on their knees, seated where they could find seats on the benches in the plaza. By now many had acquired a good sunburn. A detachment of Mexican soldiers were at street corners and on the roof tops of houses along the street of entrance. Secret Service appeared to be everywhere, each with an earphone in one ear which had prompted several questions earlier from the townspeople as to why so many Americans were deaf.

The first stop was the 600-student "Jaime Nuno Primary School" where Carter received a briefing on Ixtlilco el Grande, "before and after," under the PIDER program. The people of the town had built the school themselves with their own labor. Met at the door by the principal, Mr. Verulo Sanchez Rosas, a smiling Carter, dressed in a white, long-sleeved guayabera (a cotton shirt worn in Mexico and the tropical areas of Latin America) and tan slacks, and Rosalynn in a simple print dress, entered the school building as a mariachi band (musicians playing wind and string instruments in charro or Mexican rodeo attire) played nearby. The couple entered a first-grade classroom where seven-year old Cain Rodriguez welcomed them, saying: "Mr. President of the United States and wife, have a pleasant stay in this school which receives you with open arms."¹⁷ Visibly impressed, the President glanced at Rosalynn and first one, then the other, bent down, embraced the youth, and kissed him. From the classroom the couple went to the patio where they were serenaded by the school estudiantina (a choral group accompanied by guitar music). Carter spoke to the students, saying: "Thanks to everyone. It is a very pleasing experience for me and my wife to be here with you. Excellent music, lively and intelligent children. And above all, what a great display of affection from all of you."

Leaving the school, the presidential party crossed the cobblestone street to the tiled plaza, in front of the town hall, which was well shaded with laureles de Indias (a variety of laurel trees). A journalist described the scene as follows:

Carter moved with winning ease among the villagers, sampling their peanuts, inspecting their pigs, expertly slicing a large cantaloupe and awarding his pocketknife to the farmer who grew it. The Ixtlilcans [were] enthralled..."¹⁸

Shortly thereafter, the President and Rosalynn, followed by others of the party, went to the other side of the kiosk for an ambigu (buffet, luncheon) consisting of tasty Mexican dishes. The Carters picked up plates and served themselves. According to the Excelsior reporter

First [they took] carne asada (broiled meat), then guacamole (mashed alligator pear garnished with onion, salt and pepper) followed by pieces of chicharron (cracklings) which were eaten immediately; he [Carter] took two quesadillas de seso (corn turnovers stuffed with brains), more chicharron, this time with green sauce, and then a chile en nogada (stuffed pepper covered with a pecan sauce). At the basket of hot tortillas (thin corn cakes) he put three on his plate. Seeing carnitas (pieces of pork traditionally fried in deep fat), he took some with his fingers, devouring them immediately. Then, observing that Rosalynn's plate was well filled, he smiled and the two went to eat... accompanied by the governor and others, all this to the music of mariachis and the estudiantina which the U.S. reporters never stopped taping... The Carters drank aguas frescas (drinks of non-carbonated water flavored with lime, jamaica -- the dried seed of a flower -- and tamarind). For dessert they took higo en almibar (figs in sugar syrup).¹⁹

After he had polished this off, the President went to the microphone and said in fluent Spanish, "Rosalynn and I are very pleased to be here with you. You are generous people and you do not treat us as foreigners.

We feel like we are at home and in our home town too." He then said that he realized that personnel of the White House "had caused the villagers much bother the past few weeks and you have put up with it. For this I thank you very much." Referring to what he had observed in Ixtlilco, he stated that this represented a new way of life, improvement for all the people of the town, which is evident from the liveliness of the children and the happy looks of the adults and of the community in general. He then praised the luncheon, saying, "Never have I had such a delicious meal from such an extraordinary cuisine." Continuing, he said that "Rosalynn and I are delighted with Mexican food, and they prepare it for us in the White House at least once a week. Today this has been the best of all." After the applause he continued, "I hope the cook gives the recipes to Rosalynn so that she can prepare these dishes for me at home." Returning to the progress the village had achieved under the PIDER program, he said that he knew what it was to live in a small town "because Rosalynn and I live in a small agricultural community, Plains, Georgia, which is not even half the size of Ixtlilco el Grande, since it has scarcely 600 inhabitants. When I was young we didn't even have electricity, nor running water, nor medical service, nor a school. Those were sad days... But when we began to get everything, there was a radical change in our lives because we understood that it takes great efforts to satisfy needs. And so it is with you. And I am glad about this."

In an emotional ending, Carter finished with these words: "Once more, thanks to our new friends... We shall never forget today. Long live Mexico! Long live Ixtlilco el Grande! Thanks to all." He then announced that Rosalynn wanted to say a few words whereupon she stepped up to the microphone and in perfect Spanish said, "I am very content and I have enjoyed my visit. Many thanks." The Mexicans reacted to these warm, simple statements of affection and appreciation, spoken in their language, with hearty applause.

A walk through the parish church, St. Michael's Catholic Church, situated at the opposite end of the plaza from the town hall, was the final event of the visit. The Carters, accompanied by the wife of the Governor, were met at the door by the priest, Rev. Pedro Camacho. He had studied for the priesthood at a seminary near Las Vegas, New Mexico, and had been ordained by Archbishop Gerkin of Santa Fe in 1941. Father Camacho conducted the Carters and Mrs. Bejarano on a tour of the one-hundred year old church with its picture behind the altar of the Archangel Michael clad in boots and with sword upraised in his right hand. On a wall was a sign that read "Quien como Dios" (Who Else But God).²⁰ Telling Fr. Camacho good-bye, the Carters then entered waiting automobiles that would take them back to the helicopter landing site, thence to Mexico City 70 miles away. The party was over. A memorable sight was Ambassador Lucey seated on the tailgate of a station wagon as the caravan left Ixtlilco to the cheers and handwaving of its inhabitants.

Presidential visits have little, if any, lasting effect on a metropolis such as Mexico City, but the visit of President Carter and Rosalynn to Ixtlilco el Grande was one the people of that town would never forget. For the first time in history a U.S. President had given up the glitter of the capital to spend a few hours of an exhausting schedule to be with the poor but proud people of rural Mexico.²¹ By mixing with them, eating with them, and conversing with them in their own tongue, he showed that he cared about them and their way of life. And he brought along his wife to also share these moments of friendship and good neighborliness. In going beyond the routine requirements of a state visit so as to be with peasants, the most neglected, impoverished sector of Mexican society, Jimmy Carter, the 39th President of the United States, had brought honor to himself and to his country.

ENDNOTES

*E.V. Niemeyer, Jr., is a Program Specialist II with the International Office, the University of Texas at Austin. At the time of the Carter visit to Mexico, he was serving as Branch Public Affairs Officer, American Consulate General, Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, Mexico. He was called on to serve with the special detail that prepared for the visit of President Carter to Ixtlilco el Grande and remained with the Presidential party while there.

¹In the published excerpts of his memoirs, Carter does not mention his state visit to Mexico. His only reference to Mexico concerns the problem arising from the Shah of Iran's stay in Mexico, his trip to the United States for medical treatment in late 1979, and Mexico's subsequent refusal to readmit the exiled ruler. See Keeping Faith, Memoirs of a President: Jimmy Carter (New York, 1982), pp. 452-456, 468.

²The News, Mexico City, February 15, 1979.

³Ibid.

⁴Excelsior, Mexico City, February 16, 1979.

⁵For an opinion on the importance of dignity and mutual respect in U.S.-Mexican relations, see Alan Riding, Distant Neighbors: A Portrait of the Mexicans (New York, 1985), pp. 316-328, 339. See also John C. Condon, Good Neighbors: Communicating with the Mexicans (Intercultural Press, 1985), pp. 18-19.

⁶That Carter did know how to use humor effectively on a state visit is shown by his remarks at a formal dinner held in his honor in Caracas in March, 1978, when he replied to a toast offered to his health by Venezuelan President Perez with these words: "I speak Spanish a little better than I understand it; it is possible that I have misunderstood some of the words of the President and I am sure that he will correct me tomorrow if I am mistaken. But I want to thank him for his offer to reduce the price of petroleum five

percent each year for the next five years and to lend the United States enough money to balance its budget next year. Many thanks, Mr. President." The jest was received with spontaneous laughter and applause. "El President Carter en Latinoamerica: La Nueva Realidad" (republished from Horizontes de las Americas, No. 26, U.S. International Communication Agency, n.d.). Materials Pertaining to President Carter's Visit to Mexico, February 14-16, 1979, found in E. Victor Niemeyer, Jr., Collection (hereafter cited as EVNC), Benson Latin American Collection (hereafter cited as BLAC), University of Texas, Austin, Texas.

⁷A municipio is comparable to a county in the United States. The name Ixtlilco is from the Nahuatl language, spoken by the Aztecs who inhabited this area of Mexico, and translates as "where she of the dark eyes is." "Grande" distinguishes it from "Ixtlilco el Chico," a nearby town smaller in size.

⁸"Ixtlilco el Grande y Sus Alrededores," fact sheet in EVNC/BLAC.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Personal reminiscence as recorded in "Cocoyoc and Ixtlilco el Grande," EVNC/BLAC. The author was present at this discussion and served as interpreter. Diaz could speak some English, but Lee knew no Spanish.

¹¹Helicopter Manifest for the President and Mrs. Carter's Visit to Ixtlilco el Grande, February 15, 1979, EVNC/BLAC.

¹²Excelsior, February 16, 1979.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴The PIDER Program, fact sheet in EVNC/BLAC. PIDER is a nationwide Mexican program partly supported by the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank. Beneficiaries are peasant groups located in regions that possess production resources but lack the

