

## TWE was Stalin's foreign policy up to 1941 consistent with domestic ideology ?

Stalin's Revolution from Above, encompassing as it did the Great Break with Lenin's NEP, saw the establishment of what became known at the time as Marxist-Leninist-Stalinism, and which later became known as the Stalinist system. This was based around a domestic policy of Socialism in One Country which ostensibly sought to safeguard the Soviet Revolution at home as opposed to risking everything in a perpetual crusade for worldwide revolt. This meant a focus upon socio-economic reinvention, political control, and development of military capabilities. Should this in turn have meant that Stalinist foreign policy should have been solely focused upon ensuring the survival of the USSR along similar lines? How can any inconsistency along these lines be justified?

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The crash collectivisation and industrialisation involved in Stalin's Five Year Plans saw, as Figes notes, not only an economic revolution of the countryside, but also a reinvention of the social policies of Lenin too. This targetting of the rural areas lay in Stalin's deep distrust of a reactionary peasant whose innate capitalistic nature had in his eyes surfaced time and again in the Civil War, the Scissors Crisis and under NEP. Such tacit encouragement of individual preoccupation railed against the very heart of what Stalin hoped to accomplish. This needed addressing if he was to consolidate control over the USSR, and ensure that the 100 years gap he believed existed between the West and themselves could be overcome in time for their inevitable attack. In terms of the foreign policy pursued at the same time, these goals can be clearly seen in the development of the Popular Front of the Comintern, whose actions especially in the 1930s can clearly be seen opposing the right wing embrace of Western European big business, with this most notably evident in the Spanish Civil War. The organisation of International Brigades from across the Western European left, and the integral role the Soviet Union played in Republican resistance epitomised this struggle. This role however in itself incapsulated the paradox that lay at the heart of the Comintern of the Stalinist era, given that its intrinsic mission was to promote the very thing that Stalin opposed domestically. The permanent revolution it sought was fundamentally opposed to the survivalist emphasis of Socialism in One Country. As Paul Preston argues, this meant that although the Soviet Union was actively involved in the anti-Fascist struggle in Spain, its priorities always remained strictly self-serving insomuch that a prolonging of the conflict seemed to serve its interests far more than a quick decisive victory over the far right. How could it be any different given the mission at home, a mission which inevitably framed the policy pursued overseas? Any hope the Republicans had therefore of a swift Soviet backed counterattack soon disappeared with that backing coming at the price of control over tactics and strategy.

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This control over the Republican cause in Spain was more a reflection therefore of the domestic consolidation of power that Stalin undertook throughout the 1930s using both repression and indoctrination. The tactics used in Spain were similar with propaganda of the

time depicting USSR as saviours of the cause, whilst all the while the Soviet advisors and commanders authorised savage internal reprisals against those who sought to challenge their authority, most notably the Trotskyite left during the civil war within the civil war of Barcelona. As this was unfolding in Spain, Stalin was authorising the radical escalation of the Great Purge of 1937, a move long suspected by Western historians such as Conquest whose recent perusal of archival documents revealed the validity of his 1968 conclusions in 'The Great Terror'. That Stalin would put his signature to documentation authorising the random executions of citizens within the USSR in an attempt to flush out suspected fifth columnists, and not have the hand on the tiller of similar operations over in Spain is not plausible. However, the diplomacy which represented his rule when in the hands of individuals can still be seen to belie this theory that control in all areas of foreign policy was complete. The career of Litvinov for instance seemed to buck the trend for yes men in all areas of importance. A multilingual career diplomat, Litvinov was at the hub of many of Stalin's attempts in the early to mid 30s to woo the West into an anti-Fascist alliance. That Stalin was prepared to engage on such a course in itself, seems to be inconsistent with his anti-West, pro-Soviet domestic policies. However as Kudryashov argues, such a course did not necessarily mean that Stalin truly saw the end game in those simplistic terms, with Soviet diplomacy frequently far more Machiavellian in terms of strategy and aims. Instead, it was the prolonged employment of an individual such as Litvinov, at talks which were given credence by the number of attempts such meetings were proposed by the USSR, which suggests that control was not total. Litvinov's sympathies can best be seen in his continued attempts to ally the Soviet Union with the West, with his urbane lifestyle and high profile friendships with celebrities such as the Marx Brothers indicative of his idiosyncrasy. It wouldn't be enough to save him from dismissal in 1939, after which he informed the British as to the agreement made between Nazi Germany and Stalin and then was made ambassador to FDR's Washington.

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The Non-Aggression Pact that saw Molotov replace the Jewish Litvinov in 1939 was the end of a long and tortuous process by which the USSR hoped to establish some form of diplomatic platform which fundamentally guaranteed the defence of the realm. At home, the heavy industry of the Five Year Plans had allowed the creation of an industrial base which could produce a modern army, and which would in the Great Patriotic War overtake German military production en route to superpower status. Abroad, the dialing down of the 'social fascist' cries of the 1920s Comintern and creation of the Popular front in the 1930s was a reflection of the regime's desire to seek a future within the auspices of collective security. Overy's post-archives 'Russia's War' reveals that it is with this aim in mind that Stalin personally orchestrated the search for alliance from 1933 onwards in a desperate attempt to ward off the growing aggression of an increasingly confident and expansive Nazi Germany. Not that this meant that Stalin and National Socialism weren't on speaking terms – far from it. As Stalin was signing the death warrants of over 75% of his Red Army officers in 1937 (and undoing a lot of the hard work the industrialisation of the USSR

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had completed), he was at the same time attempting to arrange the revival of Soviet-German trade with Hermann Goering. A year later, the appeasement of the UK and France after Munich, along with their determined reluctance to join forces, meant that the possibility of a UK-France-USSR agreement that Litvinov had pursued with such vigour was eventually seen as the chimera it was. Which left a return to the days of Rapallo as the only option, with Germany and USSR using each other as a means to an end with no real interest in the other's long term well-being. However, what marks all of this is the continued search for military security which dominated 1930s Eurasia, and especially Stalinism at home and abroad.

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Looking at the areas in which Stalinism attempted to remould the USSR into a Great Power able to resist the inevitable onslaught from the West, one is struck by the consistency with which decisions are made by those in power in the USSR to try and safeguard their own future at whatever cost, whether that be at the expense of their own international credibility or ideological honesty. Decisions were made which reversed previous policy without apology, or which demanded close relations with implacable foes. However, once the inevitable onslaught that Stalin predicted swept into Soviet territory, the sacrifices demanded by the policies implemented both home and abroad could be argued to have been worthwhile in terms of providing the people there the ability to survive the following four years. The consistency therefore of foreign policy with the most pervasive elements of Stalin's Socialism in One Country ethos can be seen in the eventual victory of the Great Patriotic War.

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