THE LESSER TERROR

Soviet State Security, 1939–1953

Michael Parrish

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Col. General V. S. Abakumov, Minister of State Security, 1946.

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In order to keep this title in print and available to the academic community, this edition was produced using digital reprint technology in a relatively short print run. This would not have been attainable using traditional methods. Although the cover has been changed from its original appearance, the text remains the same and all materials and methods used still conform to the highest book-making standards.

Pour Cecile Gul,
Meudon, France, avec mon estime et de tout mon Coeur.
Heureux sont ceux qui la connaissent.

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Anyone who studies history and still expects human beings to be rational is truly an optimist.

–Thomas Sowell

It is characteristic of all movements and crusades that the psychopathic element rises to the top.

–Robert Linder

Truth will come to light; murder cannot be hid long.

–Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*

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Contents

Photo essay follows chapter 6.

Foreword

Historians will be debating the nature of Stalin's regime for decades to come. Has any state ever wreaked such violence on itself? Human history has seen plenty of conquering empires, and—as people in the Baltic states and Eastern Europe can attest—Stalin's Soviet Union was one of them. But what made his long rule so remarkable and so baffling was that its greatest violence was directed against its own people. There are few instances of such a massive self-inflicted genocide.

The main engine of that genocide was the Soviet secret police. It was born within weeks of the October Revolution, has been through a variety of reorganizations and name-changes over the years, and still exists, in less lethal form, today. It will be a long time before we really know this organization's secrets. However, penetrating its veil became markedly easier with the arrival of Gorbachev's *glasnost* in the late 1980s and in the 1990s with the partial opening of archives and the profusion of memoirs published in Russia and abroad.

Michael Parrish has made good use of this trove of material in writing this book. Working with the far more scanty array of sources then available—mainly such things as announcements of police promotions and retirements appearing in the highly censored Soviet press—Robert Conquest did a similar job of looking at the internal bureaucracy of the terror machine in his *Inside Stalin's Secret Police*. That book concentrated on the NKVD, as the force was then known, at the time of the Great Purge of the late 1930s. In this volume, Parrish carries the genealogy further, tracing the rise and fall of groups and individuals in the police bureaucracy from just before World War II until just after Stalin's death.

Because of the vast amount of blood that was shed during the 1930s, we often think of the next decade as a slightly less repressive time in the Soviet Union—or at least as a time when the country fought, and then recovered from, a terrible war. But this book is a reminder of how the police state continued unabated during those years. Under Stalin's direction, the NKVD shot generals who had lost battles, sped up prisoner executions in areas the Germans were about to capture, and deported

whole ethnic groups that had supposedly collaborated, or might collaborate, with the Nazis. Parrish quotes one retired officer who says that the secret police arrested some two million people—enough to form 250 divisions to fight the Germans—during the war years alone. After the war there were further mass arrests of the "Vlasov army" of ex-POWs who had fought with the Germans, more than a million starving Red Army soldiers who were released from German prison camps only to be sent immediately to Soviet ones, participants in imaginary conspiracies in Leningrad and among Kremlin doctors, and, in Stalin's last years, of people whose main crime was to be Jewish. (Anyone whose main crime was to be socialist, in the democratic sense of the word, had already been shot years earlier.)

As Stalin put his stamp on the country, the people who quickly rose to the top of the secret police were those who shared his ruthlessness and measured their accomplishments by the numbers of people arrested, conspiracies discovered, confessions extracted. To fill these quotas, as this volume documents in abundant detail, they eventually turned on each other, finding enough illusory conspiracies to justify the arrest of more than 20,000 members of the secret police itself after Beriia's takeover. Arthur Koestler said it best in *Darkness at Noon*: "Bravo!" The monarchist officer taps in code on his prison cell wall when he learns that a high-ranking Bolshevik has just been thrown in the next cell. "The wolves devour each other."

We will never be able to calculate with complete accuracy how many other people the wolves devoured. It is hard to know even where to begin counting. For example, should we lay the blame for part of the staggering World War II Soviet death toll at Stalin's door because of his obstinate rejection of so many clear warnings of the German attack? This strange blind spot was the flip side of his paranoia about everything else. Even putting aside those deaths, how many other people died as a result of Stalin's orders? A confidential study of such matters was prepared at Khrushchev's orders seven years after Stalin's death—using documents many of which have since been destroyed. The Old Bolshevik and *gulag* veteran Olga Shatunovskaya, a member of the Party commission that did the study, says that between 1935 and the beginning of the war in 1941 more than 19 million people were arrested; seven million of those arrested were executed outright. Recent statements by Russian security officials and by the historian General Dmitri Volkogonov about the death and arrest toll are consistent with the Shatunovskaya's numbers.

Since the NKVD released few prisoners after interrogation, we must assume that almost all of the 12 million people arrested but not shot were sent to the *gulag*. Untold millions, perhaps most of them, died there. If there is still anyone who doubts that huge numbers of prisoners died, I would like him or her to join me for a walk through some of the *gulag* graveyards I have seen, from those in Arctic Kolyma where bones have been bleached white by sun and snow, to that of the great transit camp at Krasnoyarsk where today you can reach down and pick up one dirt-yellowed skull after another, each with a bullet hole through it.

And, beyond these deaths at the height of the terror, we must also count those who perished before 1935—at the hands of the secret police or in the great

collectivization famine—plus the many victims of the various secret police operations mentioned in this book, almost all of which took place after 1941. What a waste of human life, and of effort and riches that could have gone into building a country instead into sending people to their deaths and inspiring fear and passivity in the survivors. Russia is still struggling to recover from the Stalin era today, and will be for many years to come.

Adam Hochschild
San Francisco, CA

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Preface

Oscar Wilde claimed that there was no greater tragedy in life than having all your wishes come true. This may have been the case with Stalin in 1945, when he stood at the apex of power presiding over an empire extending from the Adriatic and Baltic to the Pacific Ocean. The Great Patriotic War, won primarily by the sacrifice of millions of Soviet people despite Stalin's military and political blunders, had left the country in ruins, but at the same time with an unrealistic sense of power bordering on arrogance which proved to be a contributing factor to the ignominious collapse of the Soviet system 45 years later. The victory of the Great Patriotic War was pyrrhic indeed. At the end of the war, Stalin, who had crushed all his domestic and foreign enemies, was proclaimed, at least in the USSR, the Greatest Leader in the history of the world. Despite this, not all was well with the aging dictator, whose physical decline had only increased his ever-present sense of isolation and paranoia. The fact that Stalin was also haunted by the specter of his own immortality could also be seen by his sparing of the academician L.S. Shtern, the Soviet Union's leading gerontologist, from among the Jewish intellectuals sentenced to death in 1952. The years 1945–1953 are perhaps the least known in the Soviet history.

In 1993, Russia's chief archivist, R.A. Pikhoia, stated "...the Russian historians do not know post-war history. We lived in the epoch, but had no idea of what was really going on. Even specialists in this period did not know much....Beriia is considered the arch villain, and yet after the war, he was neither Minister of State Security nor Minister of Internal Affairs, and in fact the organs of state were ordered to compile compromising material against him...."

The foreign policy during this period was marked by caution outside the Soviet sphere, even withdrawal from the most exposed areas, and oppression in the satellites. As John Lukacs has pointed out, Stalin's real interest was security and not revolution, territory, or ideology. One notable exception to this policy was Stalin's approval, despite his better judgement, of Kim il-sung's proposed blitzkrieg to invade South Korea in April 1950. During the post-war years, despite the Sisyphean problems

faced by the Soviet Union, the domestic policy was marked by confusion and inertia. As we are learning now, the pre-war economy, a great deal of it of the Ptomkin Village variety, also failed to recover from the devastations of the war. Meanwhile, Stalin was surrounded by acolytes whose loyalty was only matched by lack of scruples and whose zealous fealty was reinforced by the ever-present fear of arrest. Yet Stalin found pleasure in sowing discord among them, thus spending in intrigues the time and energy which should have gone to tackling the enormous social and economic problems facing the Soviet Union. As early as 1933, O.E. Mandel'shtam, a mere poet, had accurately described Stalin's minions as a "...rabble of thin-necked leaders—fawning half-men for him to play with, they whinny, purr or whine as he prates and points a finger." In pre-Glasnost days, Western social scientists, who in Arthur Laffer's words preferred complicated errors to simple truth, claimed that Stalin ran (mismanaged would be a better characterization) his empire in a collegial mode, similar to the academic departments where the writers toiled. An "embattled" Stalin was portrayed as perhaps an overly stern chairman who had to referee between "radicals" and "moderates" who had their own ideas and agendas. These theories were perhaps also inspired by the fact that academic politics, as the late Charlie Halleck put it, are even more amoral and vicious than those practiced by professional politicians. Unfortunately, under Stalin there was no tenure and the losers would end up in Lubianka dungeons. Under the academic model, Zhadnov was the "auteur" of the "anti-cosmopolitan" campaigns, and Khrushchev the force behind the "Doctors' Plot" rather than mere agents of a policy decided by Stalin. Although this analogy may hold true for the post-Stalin period, it has little relation to reality under Stalin. People with alleged independent power bases, such as Malenkov and Zhukov, would be sent to exile, while others, such as A.A. Kuznetsov, N.I. Voznesenskii and the mighty Abakumov, would be arrested without a hitch and no protest. Glasnost literature and biographies of such men as O.V. Kuussinen (Politburo member 1952–1953, and 1957–1964) should lay to rest the notion that the leading organs of government and Party in the Soviet Union after 1938 were collegial bodies. The true picture that has emerged shows a group of spineless courtiers vying for favors and jockeying for power under a capricious and omnipotent master who never let them forget who the chief capo was, and who reinforced this fact by such acts as sending their wives to the Gulag. The sight of these men trembling before the weakened master in the first week of the war, and even as he lay dying, confirms the essential correctness of Stalin's judgement in choosing his henchmen—nonentities who were nothing more than the extension of his will, trusted to carry out his wishes no matter what the cost. At best, they were no more than scriptwriters in movies produced and directed by Stalin. The historian Iu.S. Aksenov (*Voprosy istorii KPSS*, November 1990) presents evidence that during 1946–1950, the Politburo officially met only 50 times and most of the agenda was taken up with the minutiae of personnel and organizational questions and not with substantive issues. Every meeting of the Politburo in 1949, at the time when the Soviet Union was facing serious domestic and international problems, was dedicated solely to the "Leningrad Affair." Some

of the Western diplomats, such as Averell Harriman, and military officials who came into contact with Molotov, Voroshilov, Merkulov, and other high Soviet functionaries had the clear impression that these men were mere courtiers and "jasagers." The requirement for serving in Stalin's inner circle was to be a short nonentity.

Volkogonov is right when he states that . . . for Stalin, the Politburo was nothing more than a convenient assembly which gave legal force to his will. Acting on the age-old concept of dictators, he had liquidated all his comrades who had known his weaknesses and his failings, and in their place he had put new "comrades-in-arms" who owed their promotions to him...and vying with each other to invent some new epithet with which to praise the "Leader." Frequently, during night-long carousals at his dinner table, Stalin would have ideas and make plans which he would share with his fellow drinkers. Next morning, it would only remain for Malenkov to formulate the "wise decision" as an order of the Politburo. Lenin had translated the dictatorship of the proletariat into the dictatorship of the Party, and Stalin went further by making the dictatorship of the Party into that of one man.

It is extraordinary that despite such keen observers as Harriman, as well as the existence of operative intelligence organizations, both Truman and Churchill felt in 1945 that Stalin was constrained and even cornered by the military leadership, the Politburo, and was perhaps no more than a first among equals. The truth, as Malenkov said, is that the Politburo ceased to function in the 1940s. Stalin remained the one who defined all crucial directions of domestic and foreign policy.

There were of course factions and infighting, but this was based mainly on personal rather than ideological or policy differences (comrade did not mean friend, merely colleague) and, except at the very end, was usually orchestrated by Stalin, whose modus operandi, be it in the inner sanctums of the Politburo, in the Battle of Berlin, or in the far away Nagorno-Karabakh, was to divide and conquer. What the inner circle could not afford to forget was not what had happened to those who had opposed Stalin, but to such men as Chubar, Eikhe, Kosarev, Kosior, Postyshev, and Rudzutak, all bonafide Stalinists who nevertheless were sent to the wall. The manner in which Stalin treated Malenkov, Marshal Zhukov and Admiral N.G. Kuznetsov during the post-war years offers an example of how he, and he alone, continued to make the critical decisions about who ruled the Soviet Union and ran the Communist Party. Stalin failed to see through only Khrushchev, whose clownish behavior concealed smoldering resentment, and even more unlikely, a touch of decency.

Medical science may one day explain Stalin's bizarre behavior, which even included dabbling in such arcane subjects as linguistics, where his previous efforts had included ordering the Leningrad philologist D.V. Bubrikh to invent a brand new language for the Karelians. In all fairness, Stalin's amateur writings in this area ring with Gibbonesque lucidity compared to what passes as scholarship in a field supposedly devoted to the study of how man communicates.

As Walter Laqueur has pointed out . . . historians have on the whole been less shocked by foolishness, cruelty, lack of compassion, missed opportunities and various tragedies than sociologists and students of political science, simply because historians

have been preoccupied with what actually happened rather than with what should have happened.

The Bolshevik legacy of terror was perfected under Stalin and became the hallmark of his rule, including during the post-war period, while other facets of the revolution were allowed to atrophy. Under Stalin's successors, the legacy became a playground for hacks, "facilitators," and opportunists. As Kafka put it...every revolution evaporates, leaving behind only the slime of a new bureaucracy.

After the war, the population of the Gulag, stable since 1939, was increased by deportees and Axis and returning Soviet POWs. In 1948, Stalin began talking about "new enemies." The Minister of State Security, Abakumov, and Kruglov, the Minister of the Interior, were more than willing to indulge Stalin's paranoid fantasies and came up with proposals to set up special camps. We now know a great deal about the "Great Terror" that played such an important part in the consolidation of Stalin's power, but less about the "lesser terror" used in the following years to maintain the totalitarian system. During the period 1939–1953, terror was just as pervasive as it had been during the previous three years, but it was less publicized, claimed fewer victims among those in the top leadership, and had a larger percentage of victims who were either foreigners or minority nationalities of the USSR.

The chief instrument of terror during the post-war period was the Ministry of State Security (MGB), officially headed by V.S. Abakumov from October 1946. Abakumov correctly gauged Stalin's anti-Semitism and his fear of Bonapartism as the main concerns of the security organs. His stewardship was marked with persecution of the Jews and the military. He was also involved in the power struggles among different Party factions inspired, and at this time led, by Stalin, which culminated in the "Leningrad Affair."

This book is also a biography of Abakumov, the longest-serving of Stalin's secret police chiefs, but in examining his role in the Soviet security apparatus, we need to go back to the pre-war period, when he began his rise in the NKVD, to touch on the various operations that were carried out during his ascendancy; and to examine what role, if any, he played in them. Finally, his downfall and its aftermath, which brought the security organs from the realm of lawlessness to a more controlled instrument of socialist "legality" under Khrushchev and his successors, are considered. This study is not intended to be the definitive history of Soviet state security during the latter part of Stalin's rule but should provide a framework for further research. It is mainly a history of massive crimes committed by the Soviet state during 1939–1953, usually initiated by Stalin and always carried out with his approval and consent. Our view of Stalin as the ultimate monster (Genghis Khan with a telephone, in the apt words of Sir Fitzroy MacLean) must be tempered by the fact that millions made the ultimate sacrifice on the field of battle to keep him and the Soviet system in power. Public opinion polls conducted as recently as 1993 show him to be more popular than the "liberator" M.S. Gorbachev. Besides being a catalog of crimes committed by the Soviet state during 1939–1953, usually against its own citizens, this book is also about victimizers and victims (sometimes the same people), the *dramatis personae* in the nightmare that was the Soviet Union

under Stalin. This analysis is definitely not about espionage. Those who still are searching for the fifth (or is it the sixth?) mole or curious about which atomic scientists gave away which secrets to which agent, questions that I find profoundly marginal, will not find the answers here.

I start where Robert Conquest's *Inside Stalin's Secret Police: NKVD Politics 1936–1939* left off and cover some of the same ground for the period after Beriia's appointment. The study makes heavy use of Glasnost publications; Soviet Party documents, particularly those published in *Izvestiia TsK KPSS*, the Central Archives of the Ministry of Defense, the archives of the Military Collegium of the USSR Supreme Court, and the collection of documents edited by N.I. Bugai (Chief, Department on Repressed Ethnic Groups, Russian Ministry for Nationalities and Regional Policy); in *Iosif Stalin-Lavrentiiu Berii: "Ikh Nado Deportirovat"*, the most important source currently available on the deportation and pacification campaigns and the Gulag, and two volumes of NKVD-MVD archives (*Osobaia papka*) published in 1994 by the State Archives of the Russian Federation.

In matters of style—by ignoring its recommendations in toto—I am indebted to the *Guidelines for Bias-Free Writing* (Bloomington, Indiana; 1995), the neo-Stalinist tome on politically correct writing.

The views expressed in this book reflect my own sentiments as a confirmed "Novembrist."

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Acknowledgments

My deepest thanks go to Robert Conquest for his support. Conquest's *The Great Terror*, one of the seminal books of the twentieth century, and his other writings, so refreshingly different from what passes as academic history in the United States, which usually are of the "scholar-squirrel" variety, were the inspiration for the present volume. We do have, of course, our disagreements, not over the nature of the Stalinist system, nor on the philosophy of writing history expounded so brilliantly by him in his 1993 Jefferson lecture, but on the nature of America's response to the Soviet phenomenon. Here I feel more comfortable with the views of another astute observer, Robert Nisbit, who sees the American history of the twentieth century as a relentless march, with occasional pauses, toward socialism at home and adventurism abroad. After all, the architects of the Great Society also gave us the Vietnam War. Over the years the Wilsonian urge to intervene, once a liberal orthodoxy, has been taken over like other unsound leftist ideas by many conservatives. Their advocacy of Pax Americana, at times buttressed by Conquest's writings, contradicts their historical roots and former spiritual inclinations.

Terry Reynolds was responsible for assembling and typing the numerous versions of the manuscript. Without her superb work, as well as patience and understanding, the book would not have seen the light of day. I have been most fortunate in having Terry as a colleague and collaborator for over ten years.

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Chapter 1

Beriia Takes Over

On December 12, 1938, L.P. Beriia, former First Secretary of the Communist Party of Georgia during 1931–1938, and before that Head of Georgia OGPU and Head and Deputy Head of Transcaucasus OGPU, was *officially* appointed Commissar of NKVD, replacing N.I. Ezhov, who had officially held the position since September 26, 1936 (from January 17, 1937, with the rank of Commissar General of State Security), and who had led the "Great Terror."[1] Ezhov had been officially removed from his position on December 8, 1938. Beriia had first been appointed as Deputy Commissar NKVD in July, as first Deputy Commissar on August 22, and as head of GUGB/NKVD (the Main Administration of the State Security, which in the future would function at times as a separate entity under the rubrics NKGB, MGB, and KGB) on September 29. Despite the official announcement, the latest documents (*Voenno Istoricheskii Zhurnal* [*VIZH*], 2/1993) show that Beriia had been the head of NKVD since November 25, 1938, even before Ezhov was officially removed. The text of the order signed by Stalin and Molotov sanctioning Ezhov's dismissal (*Istoricheskii Arkhiv*, 1/1992) also bears the same date.

There are a number of theories for Beriia's transfer from Georgia to Moscow. Roi Medvedev claims that Kaganovich proposed Beriia as Ezhov's Deputy, and Khrushchev adds in his memoirs that Stalin actually contacted Ezhov about a new assistant and recommended Beriia only after Ezhov could not come up with a name, an explanation which seems rather unlikely. Beriia's assistant, Merkulov, as quoted by Amy Knight, claimed that Beriia was surprised and disappointed at his appointment as Ezhov's Deputy, an opinion seconded by Khrushchev, but Beriia certainly had the credentials for his new position. He had served as head of Georgia OGPU and Deputy Head Transcaucasus OGPU (December 1926–March 1931) and head of the entire Transcaucasus OGPU (March 1931–November 1931) before being appointed as the First Party Secretary in Georgia.

Robert Conquest, in *Inside Stalin's Secret Police*, argues that Beriia's first appointment as the Deputy Commissar of NKVD was not necessarily a blow to

Ezhov, but an attempt by Stalin to weigh his options and decide on which satrap would be more useful to carry out his agenda. Stalin was to repeat the same pattern in 1952–1953 even when operating with diminished mental powers. He used both S.D. Igant'ev, the secret police chief, and one of his deputies, M.D. Riumin, but at the time he worked with Riumin alone, thus undermining Igant'ev's authority. This, in fact, may have inadvertently saved Igant'ev's neck after the dictator's death.

In his heyday, criticism of Ezhov was tantamount to suicide, as was discovered by a few brave souls. On June 25, 1937, three days after the opening of a Central Committee meeting, G.N. Kaminskii, Commissar of Public Health, spoke against the terror. A committed Stalinist who had certified that V.V. Kuibyshev and G.K. Ordzhonikidze (a personal friend) had died of natural causes, he apparently had come to the conclusion that the terror had gone too far. According to his surviving daughter, S.G. Kaminskaia (reported in the collection *Oni ne molchali*), he was supported by 12 to 15 people, including I.A. Piatintskii (shot October 30, 1939), M.S. Chudov (shot 1937), M.M. Khataevich (shot February 23, 1939), B.P. Sheboldaev (shot December 16, 1937), and P.P. Liubchenko (suicide with his wife August 29, 1937). Stalin's reaction was swift. He not only defended the terror, but accused Kaminskii of being a counterrevolutionary. Kaminskii was arrested on the same day by M.P. Frinovskii, but was not officially replaced in his post until August 2, 1937, by N.F. Boldyrev, who lasted until September 8, 1939. On February 9, 1938, Kaminskii faced the Military Collegium, whose members included V.V. Ul'rikh, D.Ia. Kandybin, and Zarianov, and was accused of being a part of an "anti-Soviet, diversionary-terrorist, rightist" organization, condemned to death, and shot a day later at age 42. He was rehabilitated on March 2, 1955. In the July 1953 meeting of the Central Committee, Khrushchev tried to blame Beriia for Kaminskii's repression, and this gave rise to another myth, that Kaminskii spoke against Beriia in the February 1939 meeting of the Central Committee, when, in fact, he had been dead for a year (the date February 9, 1939, given in *Who Was Who in the Soviet Union* is a year off).

It is true that as the First Party Secretary in Azerbaidzhan in 1920, Kaminskii and his friend Ordzhonikidze had had run-ins with M.D.A. Bagirov, head of Azerbaidzhan Cheka, and his deputy (at that time, Beriia) that resulted inthe latter's arrest as a suspected Mussavat spy. In this power struggle, Stalin backed Bagirov and Beriia and Kaminskii left Caucasus in 1922. At the 16 Party Congress, Kaminskii personally accused Beriia of having driven A.A. Khandzhian, First Secretary of the Armenian Party, to suicide as well as causing the untimely death of S. Lakoba, the head of the Abkhaz government. Obviously there was no love lost between Kaminskii and Beriia, but it was Stalin who decided the fate of Kaminskii, who was shot six months before Beriia's appointment as Deputy Commissar NKVD. On July 7, 1937, Ezhov personally arrested I.(OSIP)A. Piatintskii (Tarshis), one of those who had supported Kaminskii. Despite 220 hours of interrogation by the investigator A.I. Langfang (survivor of Ezhov years, Lt. General, 1945), Piatintskii refused to confess. His letter to the Politburo on February 23, 1938, published in the collection *Oni ne Molchali*, shows a man of courage who has trouble understanding why he has ended up in prison. Piatintskii survived Ezhov, and even though he had been right about

the terror, he was shot in October 1939 under Beriia at the time when Ezhov was also under arrest. Piatintskii had once said that he only served the working class and not personalities—a statement that was certainly grounds for arrest under Stalin. Piatintskii's wife, who tried to save her husband, was also arrested in 1938. Their son, I.I. Piatintskii, had already been under arrest since 1937.

On April 8, 1938 (other dates given include April 9, 1938 and even as late as September 21, 1938), Ezhov received the additional title of Commissar of Water Transport in addition to the NKVD portfolio and was also practically in charge of GRU. Whether this new appointment to a not-insignificant position was actually a demotion is debatable. Most likely this was part of Stalin's Machiavellian machinations. In his new job, Ezhov was faced with two Deputy Commissars who were not his men. Z.A. Shashkov had been a Deputy Commissar of Water Transport since February 20, 1938. On August 25, 1938, he was joined by Regiment Commissar S.P. Ignat'ev, a graduate of Lenin Military Political Academy. The two men would be watching Ezhov. The fact that they both survived and prospered is a clear indication that their loyalties were elsewhere.

In October, Igant'ev was also appointed as chief political officer and Deputy Commissar of the Navy, now headed by Ezhov's former First Deputy, Frinovskii. For his efforts in March 1939, Igant'ev would be elected as a candidate member to the Central Committee. On April 4, 1939, probably after Ezhov's arrest, Shashkov was promoted to Commissar of River Transport, although he had to wait until 1952 to make it to the Central Committee.

A minor mystery in Ezhov's downfall was that on May 29, 1938, he also received an additional appointment as the acting head of the GRU, whose previous leader, Ia.K. Berzin, had been arrested on November 28, 1937. Ezhov's appointment to this position, which also involved foreign intelligence, adds weight to Conquest's argument that Stalin was still not committed to Ezhov's complete removal from the scene. On the other hand, it is also plausible that Stalin also wanted Ezhov engaged and guessing before the final blow. Regardless, Ezhov was not officially removed from the GRU until the end of 1938.

Ezhov tried to counter the threat to his position by organizing a pathetically fabricated assassination attempt on his own life, helped by Commissar of State Security 3 Rank N.G. Nikolaev-Zhurid, head of GUGB/NKVD counterintelligence. Ezhov also came up with the trial balloon of renaming Moscow "Stalinodar," but his brilliant suggestion was vetoed by Stalin. On October 4, 1938, Ezhov was forced to accept as Deputy Commissar (for economics) G.V. Filaretov, joining Beriia. The role played by Filaretov (who was later purged) in Ezhov's fall is not clear. Overall, 1938 was a bad year for the "Iron Commissar." His decline and fall also led his wife, E.S. Gladun-Khaiutin, a former actress from Odessa, to commit suicide. After Ezhov's arrest, his adopted daughter, born in 1931, was sent to a special orphanage and eventually was exiled in Magadan. She and Iagoda's son may have survived Stalin. Ezhov's daughter later changed her name and may very well still be living. By the summer of 1938 even the ultra-Stalinists such as A.A. Zhdanov and A.A. Andreev, who had been important cogs in the terror campaign, were alarmed about

the rampant chaos in the country caused by repressions, and by late summer and early fall they were joined by L.M. Kaganovich and A.I. Mikoian, two other Stalinist stalwarts.

The arrest of Corps Commissar I.P. Petukhov, once Voroshilov's secretary, on July 4, 1938, could not have made the latter well disposed toward Ezhov, who was creating other powerful enemies on all fronts.

V.D. Uspenskii in *Tainyi Sovetnik Vozhdia* relates how in 1937 the NKVD in Rostov, under V.P. Grigor'ev,arrested the Party leadership in Veshenskii raion (the bailiwick of writer M.A. Sholokhov), including the Party Secretary, L.K. Lugovoi, and prepared a case against Sholokhov, who immediately went to Moscow and contacted Stalin. The result was a meeting of the Politburo in which the two sides confronted each other. The performance of the NKVD officials, L.I. Kogan and P.M. Shchevalev, who tried to blame Grigor'ev was not satisfactory. Ezhov did not help matters when he admitted that he was ignorant of what had happened. He admitted that a mistake had been made and called Sholokhov a friend, but the damage had already been done. Ezhov's cause was also not helped by the August 1938 defection of G.S. Liushkov, head of NKVD in the Far East, to the Japanese, followed by the suicide of I.I. Il'itskii, another close colleague, and by Ezhov's alleged rudeness to Molotov. Despite gathering clouds, Ezhov was at the grandstands on Red Square with Stalin and other functionaries at the May Day celebrations in 1938.

The first crack to appear in Ezhov's armor was the appointment of Beriia as the Deputy Commissar of NKVD in July 1938, probably without Ezhov's consent. By late October, Stalin had apparently decided that Ezhov was a liability when he arranged for a Central Committee Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CC CPSU) Committee made up of Molotov, Beriia, Vyshinskii, and Malenkov to investigate NKVD. There are also claims (by B.A. Starkov) that this committee was headed by L.Z. Mekhlis, another man who had closely worked with Ezhov. In the fall of 1938, five resolutions were passed by the Central Committee on the structure operations and investigative procedures of NKVD (dated from September 13 and 23, October 14, November 17, and December 1). They were all aimed at Ezhov, as were two other related resolutions dating from November 17 and December 8, one suggesting ground rules for arrest and investigation, the other about recruiting "honest" people to do Chekist work. Sudoplatov claims that when Beriia first came on board, Stalin ordered that all of Ezhov's directives also be countersigned by Beriia.

There was another ominous event when on October 25, 1938, Beriia ordered the arrest of the wife of M.I. Kalinin, the head of the Soviet state, an act that must have been sanctioned by Stalin, who was thus signaling to his satraps that a new man was about to take over the machinery of terror. The text of a telegram signed by Stalin and Molotov, dated November 17, 1938 (*Istoricheskii arkhiv*, 1/1992), and sent to NKVD and prosecutorial officials as well as Party leaders, in which the Party and the government tried to dissociate themselves from the Great Terror, shows clearly that Ezhov was about to get the same treatment that had been previously meted out to Iagoda.

On August 18, 1938, when Stalin and his high command gathered for the air show at Tushino, it was Beriia, and not Ezhov, who was part of the inner circle, the latter conspicuous by his absence. There is also a secondhand report by the Bulgarian prisoner Blagoi Popov that Ezhov met in October with Molotov, Beriia, Mikoian, and Tevosian (Deputy Commissar of Heavy Industry); in the meeting he presented evidence and confessions implicating Tevosian in subversive activities. Despite Ezhov's persuasive arguments, he could not make the charges stick and Tevosian was not arrested. By mid-November Beriia, who had begun to assume full responsibility by September-October, was in the driver's seat.[2]

B.A. Starkov suggests that Stalin had originally proposed Malenkov as the candidate to replace Ezhov, but the majority of the Politburo preferred Beriia. Even if such a meeting took place, it could have been only a charade. The "search and screen" process used in the West to hire kindred and politically correct spirits and exclude those who might rock the boat in moribund organizations was not a stratagem favored by Stalin (although at times, he would go through the motions), who was not about to be outvoted by his hand-picked toadies in a matter as critical as the head of NKVD. Stalin could not have come up with a better candidate had he access to a headhunting firm. Beriia was Stalin's candidate to replace Ezhov.[3]

Another account of events given by A.G. Malenkov, son of G.M. Malenkov, first in an article (*Zhurnalist*, February 1991) and later expanded into a short biography, claims that his father began to feel uneasy about the purge in 1937 and in May of that year counseled patience in the Moscow city Party conference. For this he was criticized by the local secretary, Khrushchev, who allegedly owed his position to Ezhov and, in fact, it took Stalin's intervention to prevent Malenkov from being arrested. This, of course, did not keep him from launching purge campaigns in Belorussia, Armenia, Iaroslavl, Tula, Kazan, Saratov, Omsk, and Tambov which claimed many lives and careers. In the Central Committee meeting in January 14, 1938, Malenkov spoke about mistakes made in expelling Party members and measures that had to be taken for their readmission. Malenkov also began to realizethat although Ezhov enjoyed Stalin's complete trust, perhaps the dictator was beginning to feel uneasy about the extent of Ezhov's power and even potential threat. A more likely explanation would be that Stalin orchestrated the whole affair and was the actual author of Malenkov's report. According to A.G. Malenkov, his father risked everything in August 1938 by writing to Stalin through Poskrebyshev (an ally of Ezhov) that NKVD was exterminating thousands of loyal Communists. Stalin then met with Malenkov, who repeated his charges. Stalin wrote, "I agree," on Malenkov's letter and forwarded it to members of the Politburo. Stalin then asked Malenkov whether he had a candidate for the position of the NKVD First Deputy Commissar, and Malenkov in turn consulted one V.A. Donskii, who recommended Beriia. Stalin, however, asked for additional names, and six more were submitted. Stalin chose Beriia.[4] The relationship between Beriia and Malenkov, who on occasion walked arm-in-arm, is always interesting with the two public servants using, but never quite trusting, each other, a perfect example of the bureaucratic state at work. The latest version of Ezhov's fall comes from P.A. Sudoplatov, who in his memoirs,

published in 1994, claims that according to Beriia associates S.S. Mamulov and B.A. Liudvigov, with whom he was imprisoned, Beriia was involved in a conspiracy to remove Ezhov by having the NKVD heads in Iarosval and Kazakhstan write to Stalin in October 1938 that Ezhov planned to arrest the Soviet leadership on the eve of the November celebration of the Revolution.

On September 23, 1938, Ezhov wrote a pathetic letter to the Politburo and Stalin (*Istoricheskii Arkhiv*, 1/1992) in which he defended his record but also admitted to some mistakes such as Liushkov's defection and the temporary disappearance of A.I. Uspenskii, head of NKVD in Ukraine. At the same time, Ezhov swore eternal allegiance to the Central Committee and Comrade Stalin. In February 1939, after he had been replaced by Beriia, Ezhov, now desperate, wrote to Stalin again through the doorkeeper Poskrebyshev accusing Malenkov of being an "enemy of the people." This was followed by a meeting of the Politburo in which Stalin sent both men to another room so they could await his decision. When Ezhov left the room, he was arrested by Beriia. The last time that the "Iron Commissar" was seen in public with other dignitaries was on January 21, 1939, when he was sitting next to Stalin during the memorial meeting of the fifteenth anniversary of Lenin's death. At the 18 Party Congress held during March 10–21, 1939, Ezhov was not listed as a delegate, a most extraordinary thing for an alternate member of the Politburo. It is most likely that Ezhov was arrested on the same date as his First Deputy M.P. Frinovskii (April 6, 1939) although other dates such as April 4, April 10, or even as late as June 10, 1939, have also been suggested. Sudoplatov claims that Ezhov was arrested in March 1939 in Malenkov's office. Even today, the last year of Ezhov's life remains a mystery and there is disagreement about the exact date of his execution. There are claims, including one by his fellow prisoner, microbiologist P.F. Dorovskii, that he was kept in the Sukhanov prison, at times a private preserve of Beriia. A.K. Sul'ianov in *Arestovat' v Kremle* writes about Ezhov after his arrest and claims that he was severely tortured and confessed to everything but cites no sources. Roi Medvedev in *Let History Judge* states that according to Shabalkin, an old Bolshevik and Party official in the Far East who survived the Gulag, Ezhov told fellow prisoner D.A. Bulatov that he had planned to seize power and get rid of Stalin. Sudoplatov, who incorrectly lists 1941 as the date of Ezhov's death, states that Ezhov was personally interrogated by Beriia and B.Z. Kobulov, and Ezhov went to execution singing the *Internationale*. In all probability, Ezhov was put to death on February 2 or 3, 1940 (although dates as late as April 1, 1940, and even 1941 are also given), after a perfunctory appearance before the Military Collegium with Uk'rikh pronouncing the sentence on his former collaborator. The charge against Ezhov was supposedly "groundless repression of the Soviet people."

Ezhov's fate, however, had already been decided. In the indictment filed early in 1940 against the writer I.E. Babel' (*Literaturnaia Gazeta*, No. 18, 1988), under arrest since May 16, 1939, one of the charges was his involvement in anti-Soviet activities with E.S. Gladun-Khaiutin, wife of the "enemy of the people" Ezhov. In Ezhov's safe, incriminating material was found about members of the Politburo, even allegations about Stalin's involvement with the Tsarist secret police. The

problem with the junior Malenkov's story is that other sources agree that Beriia's appointment as the First Deputy Commissar was made in July 1938, a month before the senior Malenkov allegedly wrote his letter. Also, it seems doubtful that Stalin would appoint Beriia on the advice of a nonentity such as Donskii. The fact is that Stalin had known Beriia intimately at least since 1930 and was familiar with the man's flawed past. With his record of unparalleled opportunism, complete lack of moral scruples,and hidden secrets, Beriia had the perfect resumé for the new police chief.

In *Moi Otets*, his rambling apologia for his father, S.L. Beriia is usually reticent about the circumstances which led Stalin to appoint Beriia as Head of the NKVD, but nevertheless he claims that his father did not want the job, despite his background, and twice turned down the Politburo's (Stalin's) offer preferring economic work to police work. He further adds that in February 1941, when NKVD was divided into NKVD and NKGB, Beriia unsuccessfully proposed to Stalin that his Deputy, S.N. Kruglov, be appointed Head of the former, a change that was finally made in January 1946. In view of Beriia's penchant for empire-building and power-grabbing, such claims should be treated with healthy skepticism.

Stalin's greatest asset was his uncanny ability to pick for high office men who did not dream of treason, a dictator's nightmare. Few would have a man's wife killed, as Stalin did Poskrebyshev's, and continue to have him as the closest confidant. There would never be a Brutus in Stalin's court. Stalin was also aware of bad blood between Ezhov and Beriia. In July 1938 or perhaps even earlier, Ezhov had ordered S.A. Goglidze, head of NKVD in Transcaucasus, to arrest Beriia. Goglidze, one of the few top-ranking members of the Iagoda regime to survive into the Ezhov era, took a major risk by informing the fellow Georgian and thus guaranteeing his eternal gratitude and friendship. Beriia then contacted Stalin, and perhaps with assistance from Kaganovich, who also was beginning to feel ill at ease with Ezhov, persuaded Stalin to countermand the order. Iu.B. Borev, however, claims in *Staliniada*, that it was Malenkov who warned Beriia of imminent arrest and arranged for him to come to Moscow and meet Stalin, who then countermanded Ezhov's order. Beriia's son states that Ezhov tried but failed, despite torture, to force Kudriatsev, the Second Secretary of the Party in Georgia, to testify that Beriia was a Trotskist. Ezhov's intrigues against Beriia are also touched upon in books by Suren Gazarian and M. V. Rosliakov and the article by G. Bezirgani (*Kommunist Gruzii*, 11/1990). Rostliakov's account is based on testimony of NKVD investigator A.A. Rusetskii, who survived. Rusetskii, however, dates Ezhov's attempts to compromise Beriia somewhat earlier to the spring of 1938. During his interrogation on August 7, 1953, Goglidze contradicted this by claiming that Ezhov and Beriia always enjoyed cordial relations, and, in fact, Ezhov reminded him to strengthen Beriia's personal security. Goglidze, under arrest, however, had every reason not to pose as Beriia's savior and, in fact, ended up denouncing the former master during their trial.[5] Dr. Johnson, who was right, as always, observed that nothing concentrates the mind more wonderfully than the prospect of hanging. Had Goglidze carried out Ezhov's order, history would have looked at Beriia as another honest revolutionary who fell victim to Stalinist repression.

Beriia's troubles with the organs went back to November 1922, when M.S. Kedrov, GPU representative to Azerbaidzhan, ordered Beriia arrested, who at that time was deputy head of the local GPU as well as the Secret Political Department. Beriia was finally released by the order of S.M. Kirov, then commissar of the Independent 11 Army, but he remembered Kedrov's part. According to Beriia's son, S.F. Redens, Beriia's predecessor as head of the Georgia GPU and Stalin's brother-in-law, also intended to prosecute Beriia, who was, however, saved by the intervention of Ordzhonikidze. The dissolute Redens was shot in 1941, probably, when Beriia settled the score. One of the most important documents in regard to Beriia's arrest was the testimony of N.F. Safronov dating from August 17, 1953, and published in 1992 in *Geroi i Antigeroi Otechestva*. Safronov, in 1920 attached to the prosecutor's office in Azerbaidzhan, testified about the way documents incriminating Beriia were destroyed and about the role played by M.P. Frinovskii, at that time head of the local Cheka. In response to Safronov's inquiry, Frinovskii sarcastically told him that Beriia's file had been sent to the Museum of Revolution. The fact that Frinovskii ended up being Ezhov's closest associate also is proof that the latter was also aware of Beriia's checkered past.

The period of transition from Ezhov to Beriia did not, however, mean a respite in terror. In Belorussia, for instance, the NKVD Head, the soon-to-be-purged A.A. Nasedkin, was carrying out mass atrocities. In one day (November 21, 1938), at the very end of Ezhov's reign, NKVD shot 292 senior government and Party officials, including 26 People's Commissars and Deputy Commissars. These included E.I. Kviring and V.I.Mezhlauk of the Gosplan; M.L. Rukhimovich (defense industry); R.I. Eikhe, M.I. Kalmanovich, and N.N. Demchenko (all in agriculture); M.I. Pakhomov (water transport); I.E. Liubimov (light industry); A.V. Bakulin (transport); I.A. Khalepskii (communications); and A.D. Bruskin (machine construction).[6] On August 3, 1938, B.S. Stomoniakov, Deputy Commissar of Foreign Affairs, was arrested. (He was put to death or died in camp in 1941.)[7] It is difficult to know whether to credit these crimes to the outgoing Ezhov or the incoming Beriia. In November 1938, Beriia was involved in the torture of Marshal V.K. Bliukher and shortly after personally arrested A.V. Kosarev, the disgraced head of the Komsomols who had once mocked him.[8] According to Soviet documents (*VIZH*, 2/1993), Beriia arranged that Bliukher, arrested on October 22, 1938, was put in the same cell as the Commissar of State Security 3 Rank, D.M. Dmitriev. A veteran provocateur whose career went back to the early 1930s and the "Menshevik" case and later the "investigation" of Kirov's murder, Dmitriev had been appointed head of NKVD in Sverdlovsk on July 15, 1936, and on May 22, 1938, head of the NKVD highway department. He had been arrested on June 28, 1938. Despite doing his job as provocateur, Dmitriev was shot on March 7, 1939. Accounts in 1956–1957 of Captain of State Security P.A. Zimin, head of Lefortovo prison; his deputy, Iu.I. Khar'kovets; Rozenblium, head of the medical services; and others indicate that Beriia, B.Z. Kobulov, and B.V. Rodos were present at the interrogations and Bliukher, who was accused of espionage and selling out in the Far East, was savagely tortured and finally died during interrogation on November 9, 1938. According to the 1963

testimony of former NKVD official V.Ia. Golovlev, Beriia called Stalin, who ordered him to the Kremlin. After returning, he relayed to Merkulov, Golovlev, Captain of State Security A.N. Mironov, and investigator V.V. Ivanov (a future Major General) Stalin's order that Bliukher's remains be taken to Butyrsk Prison and cremated.

Beriia also continued the policy of repressing the families of the victims. In the case of Bliukher, his wife was shot. His brother, Air Force Captain P.K. Bliukher, was sent to camps, where he perished in 1943. The Marshal's young son, V.V. Bliukher, somehow survived, to become a General in his own right in the 1980s. In December 1939, A.M. Larina (Bukharin's young widow) was transferred from the Astrakhan prison to NKVD's Lubianka prison and was summoned to the office of the Commissar of NKVD expecting to see Ezhov and finding instead Beriia and B.Z.Kobulov. Larina had met Beriia twice before, first in August 1928 during a visit with her father to Georgia. Beriia was obviously smitten with the pubescent beauty of Larina, at that time 15 years old. During her interrogation, Beriia was conciliatory, although she tried his patience with her defiant attitude, Despite a busy schedule, Beriia continued to supervise some interrogations including that of Mirzoian Party Secretary in the Kazakh SSR and M.P. Shreider, head of the militia.

The overwhelming majority of members and candidate members of the Central Committee elected in the 17 Party Congress held in February 1934 had been arrested and shot during the Ezhov years, but a number who had survived inside or outside prison were executed after Beriia took over. These included P.A. Alekseev, E.G. Evdokimov (1940), A.V. Kosarev (February 23, 1939), S.V. Kosior (February 29, 1939), L.I. Mirzoian (February, 1939), P.P. Postyshev (February 26, 1939), V.Ia. Chubar (February 26, 1939), A.I. Egorov (1939), M.M. Kul'kov (February 27, 1939), B.P. Pozern (February 25, 1939), P.I. Smorodin (February 25, 1939), A.I. Ugarov (1939), and N.A. Filatov. G.Ia. Sokol'nikov (Brilliant) was murdered in prison (May 21, 1939), M.M. Kaganovich was forced to commit suicide (February 1941), and S.A. Lozovskii was shot during the post-war years (August 1952).[9] Purged government and Party officials were not alone in their suffering under Beriia. The brilliant poet B.K. Lishitz was put to death on May 15, 1939—a fate he shared with another distinguished poet and translator, V.O. Stenich.

Unlike earlier victims, these men did not become part of the Stalinist demonology, but simply became non-persons. Stalin was philosophical about the whole matter: "Who remembers the Boiars who were put to death by Ivan the Terrible?" he is supposed to have said. These remarks parallel Hitler's assertion about the Armenian genocides of World War I. It is extraordinary that during the period 1905–1912 in Russia the Tsarist regime executed only slightly more than 6,000 people, a number exceeded on some weeks during the Great Purge.

Beriia's first job was a complete overhaul of the security apparatus with the purge of the Ezhovite high command, which was almost as thorough as Ezhov's getting rid of Iagoda's people after his appointment. Already Beriia had placed his moles in several important positions. Since September 15, 1938, B.Z. Kobulov had been the head of the Secret-Political branch of NKVD's 1 Department. On December

17, 1938, he became deputy head of GUGB/NKVD and head of the NKVD investigation department, and on September 4, 1939 head of the NKVD Main Economic Administration. On September 25, 1939, V.N. Merkulov, a fellow student of Beriia in the BakuTechnical School back in 1918, was appointed Deputy Head GUGB/NKVD and took over the 3rd department (counterintelligence) on October 26, 1938. On December 16, 1938, Merkulov became the First Deputy Commissar NKVD as well as head of GUGB/NKVD. In October 1938, S.R. Mil'shtein was appointed as head of the NKVD Transportation Department. Soon all of Ezhov's deputies except V.V. Chernyshev were removed.

In late summer or fall of 1938 Stalin showed his utter cynicism by appointing Ezhov's First Deputy, the brutal M.P. Frinovskii, a man who quite possibly had not been in a boat in his life, as Commissar of Navy. The date for Frinovskii's appointment has been variously given as August, September, or even as late as November 5, 1938 (September 8 is the most probable date). The official history of the Navy, *Boevoi Put' Sovetskogo Voenno-Morskogo Flota* (Moscow, 1988), states that Frinovskii replaced Army Commissar 1 Rank P.A. Smirnov as Commissar of the Navy on November 5, 1938. The problem here is that Smirnov, who had been the head of the Red Army Political Administration after Gamarnik's suicide and head of the Navy since December 30, 1937, had been under arrest since June 30, 1938 (he was shot on February 23, 1939). It is, however, possible that there was no one in charge of the Navy during July–November 1938. On October 25, 1938, there was more bad news for Frinovskii, when S.P. Igant'ev was appointed as the Chief Political Commissar and Deputy Commissar of the Navy. The former position had been vacant since the arrest of the obscure Corps Commissar M.R. Shaposhnikov (rumored to be a relative of Marshal B.M. Shaposhnikov) on April 21, 1938 (M.R. Shaposhnikov was sentenced and shot on August 22, 1938, and rehabilitated on July 21, 1956). Igant'ev, already Deputy Commissar of Water Transport under Ezhov, now was in the position of watching over the two main executioners of the Great Terror. In March 1939, after Frinovskii's removal and arrest, Igant'ev was replaced by the more professional I.V. Rogov, who stayed in this position until 1946. Igant'ev, however, also remained with the Navy, reaching the rank of Rear Admiral and serving as the Commissar of the Caspian Military Flotilla from July 1942 until January 1947. In March 1939, N.G. Kuznetsov was called from the Far East to join the Naval Soviet, and during the 18 Party Congress held on March 10, 1939, Molotov pointedly asked Kuznetsov rather than Frinovskii to report on naval matters. Soon Frinovskii and P.I. Smirnov-Svetlovskii (not to be confused with the fallen P.A. Smirnov), First Deputy Commissar of the Navy, were dragged away and Kuznetsov was appointed as Head of the Navy. Smirnov-Svetlovskii, caught in the cross fire, was arrested on March 26, 1939; tried on March 16, 1940; and shot the day after. According to Kuznetsov, during meetings of the naval high command, Frinovskii deferred to other members. Frinovskii was removed shortly after and arrested on either April 6 or 26, 1939.[10] In February 1939, Beriia approved the execution of 413 Party, military, and government leaders, including a number of NKVD functionaries associated with Ezhov. Among them were former Deputy Commissar S.B. Zhukovskii, former Head of NKVD in Kirgizia

V.N. Chvertakov, former Head of Gulag and Commissar of Communications M.D. Berman, and the latter's brother B.D. Berman, former Head of NKVD in Belorussia. This group also included L.M. Zakovskii, former Head of NKVD in Leningrad after Kirov's murder and later a Deputy Commissar of NKVD. Zakovskii, born G.E. Shtubis in 1894 in Libau and author of a manual on torture, was a Bolshevik version of Baron Ungern von Shternberg. He had once claimed that, if necessary, he could have made Karl Marx confess that he was an agent of Bismarck.

The killing of Ezhov's high command continued during 1939–1940, claiming, among others, A.P. Radizviloskii (January 1, 1940), I.I. Shapiro (January 2, 1940), D.M. Dmitriev (March 3, 1939), N.N. Fedorov (February 4, 1940), N.G. Nikolaev-Zhurid, Z.M. Ushakov (February 4, 1940), M.A. Trilisser (1940), L.I. Kogan (1939), M.A. Listengrut (1940), E.A. Evgen'ev-Sheptitskii (March 2, 1939), A.A. Nasedkin (1939), A.M. Minaev-Tsikhanovskii (February 25, 1939), I.I. Pliner (1939), and I.Ia. Dagin (1940). Komdiv N.K. Kruchinkin, the former Commander of the Border Troops apparently was not killed until 1941. On February 2, 1940, M.A. Trilisser, a major figure from the Iagoda regime who has somehow survived the Ezhov era by working in the Comintern, was put to death. Most of the NKVD provisional leaders under Ezhov were also purged (Goglidze was a notable exception). Some of the better known were A.I. Uspenskii (Ukraine), A.A. Nasedkin (Belorussia), M.G. Raev (Azerbaidzhan), V.V. Khvorostian (Armenia), D.Z. Apresian (Uzbek SSR), I.P. Lotsmanov (Kirgiz SSR), N.A. Zagvozdin (Tadzhik SSR), and G.F. Gorbach (Far East).

The case of A.I. Uspenskii, the last head of NKVD in Ukraine under Ezhov, however, poses some problems. According to Khrushchev's memoirs, Stalin personally ordered the execution of Uspenskii, who had managed toescape briefly to Siberia. Another document (*Istoricheskii Arkhiv*, 1/1992) claims that Uspenskii was appointed as head of the NKVD in Western Siberia and was not actually shot until 1941. The total number of purged Chekists is estimated to be nearly 20,000. Robert Conquest in *Inside Stalin's Secret Police* stated that of the 122 top leaders (department, branch, provincial, and major city heads) only 21 survived. Of 634 officials holding the "State Security" rank who had received citations under Ezhov only 43 were to serve under Beriia.

Beriia, like his boss, was a man with a long memory and even tried to settle scores with those Chekists who had not been part of Ezhov's group. The old Bolshevik I.P. Pavlunovskii may have been the first head of the Cheka Special Department. In Siberia, he had been instrumental in the defeat of Baron Ungern von Shternberg, one of the most unsavory characters on either side during the Civil War. He had also carried out Trotskii's order to execute Admiral Kolchak. In the late 1920s, he had been the head of Transcaucasus OGPU, where Beriia served as his Deputy as well as the head of Georgia Branch. The two did not get along and Pavlunovskii finally left Caucasus in February 1930 and was not employed again by the secret police. In March 1931, Beriia took over the Transcaucasus OGPU. Pavlunovskii somehow survived the Ezhov years, perhaps in prison, but Beriia had him shot on February 10, 1941. There were also other witnesses from the past whose continued existence

might prove embarrassing. One such example were the four members of the Ural Soviet that had organized the murder of Tsar Nicholas and his family. A.G. Beloborodov, Chairman of the Soviet, and his deputy V.N. Tolmachev (both men would later head NKVD/RFSFR, a rival organization to the Cheka which finally absorbed it in December 1930) had already been shot under Ezhov. Surviving in prisons were two others, G.I. Safarov and F.I. Goloshchekin (Party Secretary in Ekaterinburg). Beriia had the two men shot, Goloshchekin on October 28, 1941, in the massacre of senior military officers in Kuibyshev.

Another personal enemy with whom Beriia was to settle old scores was B.E. Kalmykov, Party Secretary in Kabardo-Balkar, who was tortured by Beriia, Kobulov, and Rodos before being shot on February 27, 1940. Kalmykov had been a friend of Ordzhonokidze. In the summer of 1939, Beriia shifted his attention to Uzbek SSR where thousands of Party officials, including the leaders A. Ikramov and V. Khodzhaev, had been exterminated under Ezhov. On June 3, 1939, he ordered the arrest of A. Pizhurin, assistant to the First Party Secretary and a member of the Supreme Soviet. When the 2 Party Secretary V. Chimburov protested to Stalin, he in turn, was arrested in January 1940. Both Pizhurin and Chimburov survived the Gulag and in 1956 provided critical evidence against their investigator, B.V. Rodos. On May 5, 1941, Beriia ordered the arrest of K.K. Ordzhonikidze, the last surviving brother of his old enemy, S.K. Ordzhonikidze. K.K. Ordzonikidze was to spend 12 years in prison.

Under Beriia, the Gulag high command suffered particularly heavy losses. Executed (some without a trial) were M.D. Berman (March 7, 1939), I.I. Pliner (1939), L.I. Kogan (1939), Z.B. Katsnel'son (1939), and S.G. Firin. Between April 7 and April 9, 1939, the military tribunal of Moscow District NKVD Internal Troops took up the cases of a group of high-ranking Gulag officials: N.I. Izrailev, G.V. Astrov-Shirpanov, Iu.P. Brill' (Solomnovich), V.Z. Matveev, I.G. Ginsburg, A.P. Ermakov, A.L. Sylin-Etin, A.V. Polinosov, L.M. Abramson, Iu.K. Maksimovich, and M.F. Goskin. Israilev, Brill', Ginzburg, Ermakov, Sulin-Etin, Polisonov, Abramson, Maksimovich, and Goskin were sentenced to death, the rest to prison terms. On August 16, 1939, the USSR Military Collegium changed the death sentences of Abramson, Izrailev, and Polisinov and reduced the prison terms of Astrov-Shirpanov and V.Z. Matveev. On August 31, 1939, the USSR Supreme Court changed the death sentences of Ginsburg and Ermakov to 25 years in prison. On August 6, 1955, the USSR Military Colegium set the sentences aside and freed the survivors.

In Frinovskii's case, he was tried by the Military Collegium on March 4, 1940, and shot four days later, to be followed by his wife and his son, a university student in Moscow.[11] Besides being Ezhov's closest compatriot, as mentioned, Frinovskii, as the head of Azerbaidzhan Cheka in 1920, was privy to some of Beriia's darkest secrets. He simply could not have been allowed to survive.

There were also attempts to rein in those in lower ranks who had been running rampant under Ezhov. On February 3, 1939, Beriia, for instance, ordered the arrest of one N.K. Sakharchuk, an investigator in Moscow NKVD, for use of torture. On

January 31, 1939, 30 investigators attached to the NKVD Moscow-Kiev railway security were arrested for having used "illegal" methods, and on February 5, 1939, the same fate fell on the members of the Special Department of Baltic Fleet. In an article written on March 15, 1939, Beriia set out his views about the crucial role of NKVD in protecting the Soviet Union from enemies that were surrounding her.[12] Beriia's campaign for a complete overhaul of the security organs and a purge of former executioners reportedly cost the jobs, and most probably the lives, of over 20,000 officials. There are also claims that after Beriia's appointment, 200,000 prisoners arrested by the previous regime were released.

In his takeover of NKVD, Beriia was helped by his own "Caucasian" mafia, men whom he had known in the 1920s and 1930s when he was consolidating his power base in the Caucasus. They included Georgians such as Tsanava, Rapava, and Goglidc; Armenians such as Merkulov, Dekanozov, and the Kobulov brothers; and Azeris such as M.A.D. Bagirov. Over the years, Beriia's preference for the Caucasians, who included the head of his Chancellery S.S. Mamulov and his chief bodyguard R.S. Sarkisov, (both Armenians) his adjutant and his alleged procurer S.N. Nadaria, a Mingrelian, aroused Stalin's suspicion despite the fact that many of the individuals involved had Russified names. Beriia felt particularly comfortable with fellow Mingrelians, an ethnic minority in western Georgia and Abkhazia, with a strong sense of identity and last names that usually end in the letter *A*. Beriia's Mingrelian entourage included Gagua, Tsanava, Rapava, Shariia, Sadzhaia, and Bziava. The loyalty went both ways. During the "Mingrelian Affair," none of the arrested Mingrelians turned against Beriia despite torture, and I can think of only one, L.F. Tsanava, with whom Beriia had a falling out. The loyalty to Beriia was not dissimilar to the SS's sentiment about Himmler.

Besides Merkulov and B.Z. Kobulov at the central apparatus, by 1939 Beriia had also managed to place a number of his Caucasian cohorts as head of provincial NKVDs. These included A.Z. Kobulov (B.Z.'s brother) (Ukraine), L.F. Tsanava (Belorussia), A.N. Rapava (Georgia, replacing S.A. Goglidze, transfered to Leningrad), S.F. Emel'ianov (Azerbaidzhan), A.N. Sadzhaia (Uzbek SSR), S.N. Burdakov (Kazakh SSR), A.V. Kharchenko (Tadzhik SSR), Z.V. Nikolaev (Altai), I.F. Nikishov (Khabarovsk), M.M. Gvishiani (Far East), I.V. Ivanov (Sverdlovsk), K.F. Firsanov (Orel), and G.T. Karanadze (Crimea). In other areas, Beriia, however, had to make do with survivors from the Ezhov regime. This was not always easy and at times Beriia had to try out different individuals before finding the right man; for example, in Moscow V.A. Kurustkii, and V.(?) Korovin were appointed before being removed (and in all probability shot) and Beriia finally decided on the drunken V.P. Zhuravlev in March 1939. Some of Beriia's colleagues also held dark secrets. There were serious questions about Dekanozov's sexual proclivities and Sh.P. Tsereteli had been a former officer in the old army and in the Georgian Legion and Sumbatov-Topuridze a Menshevik, facts about which Stalin could not have been ignorant.

There were not, however, enough men with "Caucasian" background to run the entire security apparatus and Beriia was forced to retain a number of people who

had served under Ezhov. These included some technical experts such as the indispensable V.M. Blokhin, head of the NKVD execution squads since Iagoda's days, who was to continue to do yeoman's work during the remainder of Stalin's reign. Komkor N.A. Frankel, who had headed the construction of the White Sea canal, was the sole survivor of Ezhov's Gulag high command and eventually took over the NKVD railroad construction which employed slave labor.

Another technician that Beriia decided to keep was K.A. Pavlov, Head of the Dal'stroi Slave Labor Organization since December 1, 1937 when he replaced the founder, E. Berzin, who was purged. In July 1945, Pavlov would become one of nine police officers to receive the rank of Col. General. In 1956, he committed suicide. Pavlov's chief executioner, the illiterate sadist, S. Garanin, was, however, shot as a Japanese spy.

Also surviving into the Beriia era were some "investigation technicians" from the Operation Department, including V.G. Nasedkin, N.I. Sinegrubov, A.N. Mironov, N.N. Selivanovskii (a future Deputy Minister MGB under Abakumov), N.V. Surkov, Ia. S. Vizel', G.E. Ionov, B.P. Obruchnikov, Ia.N. Matusov (interrogator of Tukhachevskii Iakir and A.M. Larina), L.F. Raikhman, A.Ia. Sverdlov, and, most importantly, L.E. Vlodzimirskii, the future head of the yet-to-be-formed Department of Investigation of Especially Important Cases.[13] Sinegrubov and Obruchnikov had, respectively, received on July 22, 1937 the Order of the Red Star and the Order of the Mark of Honor for their "investigative" efforts. By February 1941, Obruchnikov was a deputy Commissar of NKVD, and somewhat later Sinegrubov became the head of the NKVD Transportation Department. Obruchnikov continued to be associated with Beriia, but Sinegrubov faded. Luck seems to have played a part in the purge of secret police functionaries since equally gifted investigators such as V.S. Agas and L.V. Kogan were sent to the wall.

The most prominent survivors of Ezhov's regime included V.S. Abakumov, V.V. Chernyshev, G.G. Sokolov (head of border troops and a Deputy Commissar of NKVD from March 1939), P.V. Fedotov (identified as the alleged head of the Secret Political Department in April 1939, a position also claimed to have been held by B.Z. Kobulov, Abakumov's sponsor) and K.A. Pavlov (head of Dalstroyi camp organizations), the latter's replacement I.F. Nikishov and V.P. Zhuravlev, head of NKVD in Moscow. Besides these men and his own mafia, Beriia took on or perhaps was persuaded to add two other individuals whose roots were elsewhere. S.N. Kruglov had worked with the CC CPSU in the 1930s, and in 1938, and perhaps after Beriia's appointment, was appointed as the liaison between the Central Committee and NKVD. On February 29, 1939, he was appointed as Deputy Commissar NKVD for cadres. In his conversation with F.I. Chuev, Molotov claims that while on Party business in Georgia, Kruglov wrote a report critical of Beriia, the First Party Secretary (1931–1938). This report surely must have been known to the doorkeeper Poskrebyshev, and probably to Stalin, and maybe even to Beriia, and must have played a part in Kruglov's appointment as Beriia's deputy, particularly in such a sensitive position as the head of the cadres. Keeping everyone off balance was the hallmark of Stalin's management style, and it seems that most Deputy Commissars/Ministers were appointed primarily

to watch over their bosses. I.A. Serov's background was in the military, and as late as 1938, he was a student in the Frunze Academy. In September 1939, Serov was appointed as the NKVD head in Ukraine. There is even a possibility that both Kruglov and Serov had served in Stalin's personal secretariat. This would explain their rapid rise. They were both cold, cynical bureaucrats, unlike the more animated thugs who formed Beriia's own entourage, even though the six-feet-six-inches-tall Kruglov also enjoyed taking part in interrogations. Many years later, both were to betray and survive Beriia.

Along with these appointments, Beriia was busy positioning his men in the Party apparatus. At the 18 Party Congress held in March 1939, Beriia and Merkulov were elected as full members of the Central Committee and Dekanozov, Goglidze, Gvishiani, B.Z. Kobulov, Nikishov, and V.P. Zhuravlev as candidate members. Sadzhaia and Tsanava were appointed to the Party Control Commission.[14] Nikishov, although a Slav, was almost a member of Beriia's Caucasus mafia, having served as head of the Border Troops in Azerbaidzhan from 1936 to March 1938 before taking a similar position in Leningrad and finally moving to the head of Khabarovsk NKVD. In December 1939, he took over the Dalstroyi. V.P. Zhurvalev had been the head of NKVD in Kuibyshev, but later served with the Commissariat of Railways. In March 1939, he had been appointed as head of NKVD in Moscow. In February 1941 he was, however, expelled from the Central Committee because of drunkenness. It seems also that Beriia made both personnel and some organizational changes in NKVD—the latter a subject that needs further study. Under Beriia, the Investigation Department, put at first under B.Z. Kobulov, finally became the "Department for Investigation of Especially Important Cases" and was taken over February 1941 by Kobulov's Deputy, L.E. Vlodzimirskii. Kobulov may also have served briefly as head of the "Secret Political Department," but the job eventually went to P.V. Fedotov, another survivor of the Ezhov era. It seems that in April 1940, he was replaced by N.D. Gorlinskii when Fedotov was moved to the Main Counterintelligence Department. Beriia did not keep A.P. Radzivilovskii, the last head of the Economics Department under Ezhov, but he managed to survive without holding a position and testified in 1956 on how Ezhov and Frinovskii fabricated the case against Tukhachesvskii and his colleagues. *Istoricheskii arkhiv* (1/1992), however, claims that Radzivilovskii was repressed in 1940. In 1939, the Operations Department was probably headed by A.N. Mironov or V.N. Gul'st.

At the time of his takeover, Beriia was particularly troubled by the state of the Foreign Department, which handled intelligence. The purges had decimated both the leadership and the agents of NKVD as well as GRU, which was also run by Ezhov from May 29, 1938 to December 1938. An additional problem was the possibility (proved by Alexander Orlov, Ignace Reiss, Walter Krivitsky, and M.A. Shteinberg) that agents defected rather than returning to the Soviet Union to face an uncertain future or worse. Under Beriia, the last head (and the least-known) of the Foreign Department, Z.I. Passov, and his Deputy, the better-known M.A. Shpigelglas, were removed, arrested, and later shot. Contrary to all the other writers, A.I. Vaksberg claims that Shpigelgals, whose real name was S.M. Shpigelglas, survived and served

as an undercover agent in the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAC) during the war. The very junior P.A. Sudoplatov became the acting head, despite his former sponsor, the fallen Shpigelglas, for less than a month before he also came under a cloud. Beriia finally decided on V.G. Dekanozov, an old crony with no experience in intelligence, who was appointed as head of this department. Beriia, however, appointed a committee made up of A. Garanin, V.A. Liagin, A. Liunenko, and P.M. Fitin to assist Dekanozov; and Fitin also served as his deputy. With Stalin's approval, Sudoplatov was also appointed as deputy head with the specific task of eliminating Trotskii. In April 1939, Fitin, a former agriculture journalist, replaced Dekanozov and held on to this position until 1946. Liagin, a trained engineer, born in 1908 and a Party member only since 1939, after spending time as an agent in San Francisco, returned to the USSR in 1940 and was appointed Fitin's deputy. Working behind the enemy lines in Nikolaev, he was arrested and murdered by the Gestapo at the end of 1942. On November 5, 1944, he became a posthumous Hero of the Soviet Union. Until Beriia's arrival, with the exception of A.Kh. Artuzov (1934–1937), the department had been headed by Jews. This would not happen again.

On February 25, 1941, when the NKVD was temporarily divided into NKVD and NKGB, Beriia had as his first Deputy Commissar of the NKVD, S.N. Kruglov, who was joined by V.A. Abakumov, V.V. Chernyshev, I.I. Maslennikov, B.P. Obruchnikov, and G.G. Sokolov (none of them part of his Caucasus mafia). On March 22 and 28, 1941, L.B. Safraz'ian and A.P. Zaveniagin were also appointed as NKVD Deputy Commissars. Over at NKGB, headed by Merkulov since February 3, 1941, I.E. Serov was appointed as First Deputy Commissar on February 25 and joined by B.Z. Kobulov and M.V. Gribov as Deputy Commissars on the same date. In the beginning of the war with Beriia at the height of his power and presiding over a once again unified NKVD, he had in addition to his Deputy Commissars (now joined by the demoted Merkulov) the department heads P.M. Fitin (Foreign), P.V. Fedotov (Main Counterintelligence), B.Z. Kobulov (replaced during the war by Vlodzimirskii) (Investigation of Especially Important Cases), I.M. Tkachenko and possibly P.Ia. Meshik (Economics), N.I. Sinegrubov (Transportation), A.G. Galkin (Militia), G.G. Sokolov and A.N. Apollonov (Border and Internal Troops), V.G. Nasedkin (Gulag), N.D. Gorlinskii (Secret-Political), I.F. Nikishov (Dalstroyi slave labor organization), and P.A. Sudoplatov (Terror-Sabotage)—men who incidentally were all Slavs. This was significant since it shows that the "Caucasian" mafia, although holding a number of high positions in the provincial NKVD, was not omnipotent in the central apparatus. Stalin had not reached the pinnacle in order to allow the existence of independent power bases.

V.S. Abakumov in many ways remains the most enigmatic of Stalin's police chiefs. To my knowledge, Abakumov's picture did not appear in the Soviet press until 1990 (*Nedelia*, 44/1990). The picture, incidentally, differs from those that were published in 1991 in K.A. Stoliarov's *Golgofa*. The photograph, not a portrait, was taken during the post-war period in Germany and showed Abakumov during his campaign for a seat in the Supreme Soviet. In contemporary newsreels, we may be able to get a glimpse of Abakumov during the meeting of the Supreme Soviet

sitting next to his erstwhile enemy Marshal Zhukov. The secrecy surrounding Abakumov seems somewhat unreasonable since a picture of his predecessor V.N. Merkulov had appeared, at least in the Soviet press, in July 1945 when he became the first purely police officer to receive the rank of Army General. There was also a question of his background since it was assumed by some that his name indicated "Caucasian" nationality. The usually reliable *Who Was Who in the Soviet Union* had him born in 1894 and joining the Cheka forces during the Civil War and serving on the Southeast Front. None of this turned out to be true.

The name Abakumov, arguably the second most powerful man in the USSR for nearly five years, has yet to appear in *The USSR: A Record of Events*, the comprehensive chronicle of Glasnost since 1989, or in *Encyclopedia of Russian History* (1994). Every line of the entry for Abakumov in *A Biographical Dictionary of the Soviet Union 1917–1988* (1989) and *The Biographical Dictionary of the Former Soviet Union* (1992) contains errors, including the date of birth and removal from office as well as the claim that Abakumov personally shot Wallenberg and was freed by Beriia after Stalin's death, only to be re-arrested after Beriia's fall. The claim about Abakumov's release by Beriia is also repeated by Andrew and Gordievsky in their history of the KGB. The fact is that from the day of his arrest on July 12, 1951, until his execution on December 24, 1954, Abakumov never left the confines of various prisons. There are also rumors that the archives of Reinhard Gehlen's "Fremde Heere Ost" contain some tantalizing information about Abakumov. The fact that there Abakumov is identified quite incorrectly as a Georgian compatriot of Beriia and Stalin should deflate this claim.[15] After his trial and execution in December 1954, Abakumov, a man of mystery under Stalin, became a semi-nonperson (Khrushchev occasionally spoke of the Beriia/Abakumov machine) and during the Brezhnev era was completely erased from the pages of Soviet history. The massive eight-volume *Soviet Military Encyclopedia* does not mention Abakumov once and devotes about 30 lines (Vol. 2: p. 564) to SMERSH, the war-time counterintelligence organization headed by him. The first volume of the second edition of the same encyclopedia, published as recently as 1990, also has no listing for him, nor is he present in the *Bol'shoi Entsiklopedicheskii Slovar'* published in 1991. In interviews covering over 600 pages with F.I. Chuev, Molotov fails to mention Abakumov, a man who had arrested and sent his wife to exile. Unlike his predecessors Iagoda, Ezhov, Beriia, and Merkulov (in an ill-fitting uniform on May 1, 1946), Abakumov never appeared on the Red Square reviewing stand with other Soviet dignitaries.

The numerous military memoirs published under Khrushchev and his successors universally fail to mention Abakumov, as do the books about the so-called military Chekists. Khrushchev mentions Abakumov in his self-serving memoirs, but only as a mere appendage of Beriia. This is repeated as fact by such Western specialists as Robert McNeal (*Stalin: Man and Ruler*, p. 295). In Conquest's *Great Terror*, Abakumov is mentioned but once. *Victims of Soviet Terror*, a book published as recently as 1993 in the West, makes no mention of Abakumov at all. Abakumov, Zhukov's erstwhile enemy, is also never mentioned in the unexpurgated memoirs of the Marshal published in 1990. F.D. Volkov in *Vzlet i Padenie Stalina* (Moscow:

1992) simply puts Beriia in charge of the secret police for the last 13 years of Stalin's rule and slates Abakumov with Beriia's Caucasian inner circle, which simply is wrong. Even the eminent historian Roi Medvedev, with supposed access to inside information, claims in his biography of Khrushchev that Abakumov was arrested at the same time as Beriia, when in fact he had already been in prison for nearly two years. In her biography of Beriia published in 1993, Amy Knight devotes little space to the complex relations between Beriia and Abakumov, but at least she retreats from her former position that Abakumov was Beriia's protegé.

Actually Viktor Semenovich Abakumov was born in Moscow in 1908 to a Russian family. His father was an unskilled laborer (stoker), his mother a hospital worker and laundress. Abakumov's formal education ended at age 13 when he graduated from a local school (Col. of Judiciary A. Liskin, who interrogated Abakumov in 1951, even questions this). Later, he joined the Red Army and served with the 2 Special Task Moscow Brigade. Demobilized in December 1923, he was unemployed for a period before joining the Komsomols. In January 1930, he became a candidate member of the Party. For the next two years, he was employed by the Commissariat of Supplies and in the "Press" factory. He was also a member of the secretariat and head of the Military Section of the Moscow raion Komsomols. In the beginning of 1932, Abakumov was recommended by the Party to join the NKVD and was assigned to the Gulag and later possibly to the Investigation Department even though his name does not appear as an investigator in any of the better known cases. In his memoirs, *NKVD Iznutri*, written in 1973 and published in 1995, the late P.M. Shreider (arrested in May 1938 as Deputy Head NKVD Kazakh SSR) states that in 1933, when he was employed in the NKVD Economic Department, he was informed by M.A. Deich, the Deputy Head, about a new employee, one Abakumov, who was supposed to have been the adopted son of the unstable N.I. Podvoiskii (1880–1948), former member of the Petrograd Revolutionary Committee and one of the rare old Bolsheviks that Stalin had allowed to survive. Abakumov, however, turned out to be a compulsive womanizer which Shreider felt made him unfit to be a chekist and arranged for his dismissal from the Economics Department only to see him assigned to the GULAG. Abakumov apparently had friends in the higher echelons of NKVD.

Abakumov, however, was kept by Beriia even though evidence has yet to be produced that the two knew each other before Beriia arrived at NKVD in the summer of 1938. As late as 1939, Abakumov was a mere operative agent in the Secret Political Department, now headed by B.Z. Kobulov, one of Beriia's closest associates. It was through Kobulov that Abakumov started his meteoric rise. Sudoplatov claims that in 1938, Abakumov was the investigator in the case against Ia.A. Serebrianskii, who had been the head of special operations for more than ten years in the 1930s. Serebrianskii was condemned to death, but was not shot.

In his memoirs *Special Tasks* (p. 114), Sudoplatov also names Abakumov as the investigator in the case of P. Zubov, even though on page 112, he had already blamed Kobulov, Sergienko, and Rodos for the same act. Zubov was a senior agent who had served as conduit with President Benes of Czechoslovakia but organized an

anti-German military coup in 1938 in Serbia. As a result, he was arrested by Stalin's direct order. Zubov, who was tortured by B.V. Rodos, survived, and despite injuries suffered in prison, worked along with Serebrianskii under Sudoplatov during the war.

In 1939, Abakumov was appointed as head of NKVD Rostov, where he must have performed well, probably purging the Ezhov operatives and was elected in March 1939 as a delegate to the 18th Party Congress. Whom did Abakumov replace in Rostov? During 1937–1938, the NKVD in Rostov, as elsewhere, had waged a campaign of terror, led there by V.P. Grigor'ev, whose persecution of Sholokhov's friends (already discussed) may havecontributed to Ezhov's downfall. It is, however, also possible that Grigor'ev had already been replaced and Abakumov replaced an interim appointee. In Rostov, Abakumov also became involved in "Affair Fokin." Stalin had been extremely annoyed that Trotskii had been allowed to leave the Soviet Union with his personal archives. Ezhov, whose inability to liquidate Trotskii may have contributed to his eventual downfall, blamed several Chekists for this lapse, including P.P. Budanov (Iagoda's secretary), S.G. Volynskii (identified as possible head of NKVD/GUGB 3rd Branch), and F.P. Fokin (head of militia in Rostov). Abakumov personally interrogated Fokin, who had survived Ezhov's downfall in prison, and Fokin was shot in due course. Abakumov must have performed well in Rostov but probably could not equal the record of Beriia's man in Belorussia. L.F. Tsanava managed to arrest 27,000 people within a short time after his appointment, including some of the operatives of his two bloody predecessors, B.D. Berman and A.A. Nasedkin.[16] In *Moi Otets*, Beriia's son puts a completely different spin on Abakumov's tenure in Rostov. Under him, 60% of the political prisoners were released, and he was even accused of excessive leniency. Apparently, these humane qualities prompted Beriia to transfer him to Moscow. Abakumov's duties after his return to Moscow, however, are not clear. Sudoplatov claims that, after his recall, Abakumov was put in charge of investigations, but during this period this responsibility has also been identified with B.Z. Kobulov, L.E. Vlodzimirskii, and even V.T. Sergienko. What is extraordinary about Abakumov's rise is that he neither was a member of Beriia's Caucasus mafia nor came from an independent power base as had Serov and Kruglov. Information provided by the Russian Federation Counterintelligence Service to the author dates Abakumov's appointment as a Deputy Commissar of the NKVD from February 26, 1941.

Before we continue with Abakumov's career, we need to examine the complex relationship between Stalin and Beriia. The talk about a "Beriia Machine" running the security apparatus from 1938 assumes Stalin's complete trust of Beriia, which runs directly against Stalin's psychology. Stalin, who knew something about history, was determined not to have a Fouchet on his hands. Although he obviously respected Beriia's ability as well as his personal company, he was not about to put his trust in a man with a history of opportunism, even a suspected mussavat. A.I. Mikoian was correct when he stated in the July 1953 meeting of the Central Committee that Stalin's division of Beriia's empire (in February 1941 and then again in April 1943) showed a lack of trust. At times, Stalin encouraged, or at least tolerated, criticism of Beriia.

According to Iu.B. Borev in *Staliniada*, when A.A. Fadeev returned from Georgia after attending the Rustaveli jubilee, he told Stalin that the celebration was more about Beriia than the poet. This resulted in Stalin dressing down Beriia, who later on three occasions tried to have Fadeev arrested, only to be stopped by Stalin. Beriia then tried to have Fadeev replaced as Head of the Writers Union by writer and scenarist P.A. Pavlenko (1899–1951), a suggestion that was pointedly ignored by Stalin. P.K. Ponomarenko, the Party leader in Belorussia, was another man that Beriia repeatedly tried to compromise. Instead, Stalin would appoint Ponomarenko to the Party Presidium. Even during the Khrushchev years, Ponomarenko would display a bust of Stalin in his office. When Beriia vetoed Admiral Isakov's decision to send a naval officer to London, Isakov went directly to Stalin, who overruled Beriia. Beriia later complained to Isakov that they could have settled the matter between themselves. On more than one occasion, Beriia suggested to Stalin that Erenburg, who had most of his colleagues in the NKVD custody, should also be arrested. Stalin ignored this. Events of recent years prove the essential correctness of Stalin's position in not trusting Beriia or, for that matter, any other Georgian politician. In *Twenty Letters to a Friend*, Madame Alliluyeva, for understandable reasons, makes the following extraordinary remarks:

> Beriia was more treacherous, more practiced in perfidy and cunning, more insolent and single-minded than my father. In a word, he was a stronger character. My father had his weaker sides. He was capable of self-doubt. He was cruder and more direct than Beriia, and not so suspicious. He was simpler and could be led up the garden path by someone with Beriia's craftiness. Beriia was aware of my father's weakness.[17]

Alliluyeva, as well as others, has also spoken of Beriia's excessive flattery of Stalin, as if he were alone in what was the foremost requirement for survival in Stalin's court.

Alliluyeva goes on to blame Beriia for Kirov's murder even though Beriia was thousands of miles away and evidence points to a Stalin/Iagoda complicity. Khrushchev and Marshal Zhukov also speak of the Beriia/Abakumov combine as if it were a separate entity operating on its own rather than a willing and subservient tool of Stalin's tyranny. Stalin himself encouraged this mythology when in 1940 he told aircraft designer A.S. Iakovlev, "Ezhov—a scoundrel, in 1938 he killed many innocent people and for this we had him shot." At another time, Stalin would refer to Ezhov as a "double-dealing secret agent of imperialism." It is interesting to note that while most of Ezhov's henchmen were exterminated, his colleagues in the Party and government such as Molotov, Voroshilov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, Shkriiatov, Mekhlis, Poskrebyshev, and Shchadnenko—who also under Stalin had played major parts in the Great Terror—all survived. At the Central Committee meeting in July 1953 after Beriia's fall, Khrushchev chimed in with remarks very much like those made by Svetlana Alliluyeva. After denouncing Beriia as being the devil incarnate, he added that Beriia securely hooked his dirty paws into the soul of comrade Stalin; he knew how to force his opinion on comrade Stalin. He found ways to raise doubts

while examining one question or another; he found ways to cast a bad light on certain comrades. For a time, Beriia was able to turn Stalin against one worker or another. His main qualities were his gall and impudence. These self-serving remarks about Stalin, the ultimate manipulator, being manipulated just do not ring true. Stalin did not need prompting from Beriia, or for that matter anyone else, to wage terror.

On the crucial question of executions, there is little doubt that at above a certain level they could only be carried out with Stalin's approval. Can anyone believe for one moment that Beriia or Abakumov on his own could have arrested Poskebryshev's wife and kept her in prison for three years and then shot her without approval from Stalin? Soviet documents released in recent years about Trotskii's assassination, the Soviet Generals returning from German captivity, and the "Leningrad Affair" show how Stalin "micromanaged" the terror, providing guidelines and hints for his executioners.

Svetlana Alliluyeva has an understanding of the modern bureaucratic state in both its Stalinist and welfare state manifestations, if not of her own father's psychology when she further writes, "Who had contrived all these stratagems? Not he. It was the system of which he himself was a prisoner and in which he was stifling from loneliness, emptiness and lack of human companionship."[18] The sad fact is that the quality of friendship and loyalty is as alien to a modern bureaucrat as is efficiency. All that matters are power, empire-building, and turf.

Lenin, a more objective observer who was not above using Stalin when it was called for, was on the mark when he called Stalin a man without sentiments, and, in fact, Stalin's life is proof positive of Swift's claim that loyalty is the high mark of a civilized man. The only occasion in which Stalin acted out of character was his reluctance to execute the former Bolshevik members of the Fourth State Duma, but even here there was a caveat. Former members A.E. Badaev (1883–1957), F.N. Samoilov (1882–1952), and M.K. Muranov (1873–1959) were spared, although except for Badaev they were forced into retirement by 1940 (one former member, R.V. Malinovskii, had already been shot in 1918 when he was exposed as a Tsarist spy, and another member, N.G. Shagov, also died in 1918). The best known of the group, G.I. Petrovskii (1878–1959), candidate member of the Politburo (1926–1939), after whom Ekaterinoslav had been renamed Dnepropetrovsk, would be removed from all positions in 1939 and allowed to rot away as Deputy Director of the USSR Revolution Museum, under the aforementioned Samoiov, but several members of his family were shot. There was also softness towards poets as indicated by the fact that Pasternak and Akhmatova, although targeted, were allowed to survive.

Stalin has also been compared to Ivan the Terrible, but the fact remains that the old despot at times was overcome by a sense of guilt over his monstrous crimes. Not an iota of evidence exists that shows Stalin to have felt a tinge of conscience over the sufferings for which he, and he alone, was responsible. Volkogonov is on the mark when he states that Stalin despised pity, sympathy, and mercy, and all that mattered to him was naked power. Stalin also once told Iagoda that he preferred obedience through fear rather than conviction because the latter was subject to change. If the protagonist in *What Is to Be Done?* is right in saying that "a man with a

desperate admiration of goodness can't be but a somber monster," then surely a man who is indifferent to evil must be even more monstrous. Stalin was such a man, and the key to his personality can best be found in his unbridled admiration for S.G. Nechaev (also a favorite of Lenin), the merciless nineteenth century Russian revolutionary for whom violence and cruelty were the central facts of life. Nechaev, who called blood and violence the "midwife of history," frequently discussed with fellow revolutionary P.N. Tkachev the number of people from the old society who needed to be destroyed in order to create a happy future. Cruelty and envy formed the core of Stalin's character indicated on numerous documents by the use of his favorite acronym, VMN (highest measure of punishment), against the names of thousands of victims. Shakespeare's Richard III, deformed, vindictive, power-mad, with an unbounded confidence in his own judgement, personified Stalin. At times he was Nero-like in his childish ideas, tyrannical principles, and lunatic actions. Stalin's cruelty was congenital and the seminary training proved invaluable in teaching him that doctrine could be used to justify anything. Hitler, for one, was simply bowled over by Stalin's elegant phraseology justifying the rape of the Baltics. Marxism-Leninism provided Stalin with the necessary excuse that social engineering could create paradise on earth. On his way up, Stalin would slap backs; in the pinnacle of power, he only knew how to stab them. He also, Al Capone-like, believed that hearts and minds would follow twisted arms. Stalin sought power for the sake of power, and once he achieved absolute power, he used others as toys. As Gore Vidal, in an extraordinary admission for an American liberal, has said, to learn the simple fact that men seek power in order to wield it one must wade through a sea of evasions such as history as sociology, leaders as teachers, bland benevolence as a motive force when, finally, power is an end to itself.

Stalin exemplified Oswald Spengler's Faustian man, totally unrestrained by principles or ideals. He was also the personification of the utopian left, as well as the greatest mass murderer ever. There are of course other theories, one blaming Stalin's father for the terror since he supposedly beat the young Josef in his formative years. This, of course, does not answer why Lenin, who had a happy childhood, was equally fond of terror. We get these theories, as well as others (such as blaming Auschwitz on Hitler's toilet training) courtesy of something called "psychohistory," and example of science fiction and humbug that thrives in academia.

To paint Beriia simply as Stalin's "alter-Iago" simply does not ring true in view of historical facts. It is extraordinary that even today the name of Beriia continues to be used as the generic for terror during the last 14 years of Stalin's rule. Stalin used Beriia just as he had used Iagoda and Ezhov and was to use Abakumov and Riumin. It is true that on occasions when his own survival was at stake, Beriia would play up to Stalin's worst instincts. A case in point was in 1944 when Beriia, aware of Stalin's dissatisfaction over NKVD's failure to forestall the German subversive efforts in the Caucasus, suggested additional nationalities for deportation, but Stalin needed little prodding from Beriia. By every standard, Stalin was a bigger monster than the reptilian Beriia, who at least showed consistent loyalty to his friends—

a concept totally alien to Stalin. Beriia rarely sacrificed any of his own henchmen in the manner which was routine for Stalin. In fact, Beriia only purged two of his senior operatives, Rukhadze and Tsanava, after they had doublecrossed him. Beriia, within reason, also tried to protect his Jewish operatives during the post-war anti-Semitic campaigns and made sure that the Jewish nuclear scientists who were working for him were left unharmed. After Stalin's death, Beriia reinstated his Jewish colleagues, who had been shunned and even imprisoned during Stalin's last years. In July 1946, for economic reasons, Beriia recommended that 100,000 invalid prisoners, incapable of "useful" work, be released. On the surface, Stalin agreed, only to add a proviso that negated this sensible suggestion. The family life of the philanderer Beriia was a paragon of stability compared to the cruel soap opera of Stalin's relations with those closest to him. So far as Beriia's alleged craftiness, we only need to see how he was outmaneuvered by the Khrushchev/Malenkov combine after Stalin's death.

Abakumov, who was a major force in the post-war anti-Semitic campaigns, also protected his Jewish colleagues such as Raikhman, Broverman, and Shvartsman. In fact, according to Army General P.I. Ivashutin, who was in a position to know, Abakumov was always considerate to those who worked for him. Since 1953, except for the stagnation period when discussion of Stalin's crimes became taboo, Beriia and, to a lesser extent, Abakumov have served as convenient scapegoats for Stalin's crimes. It is extraordinary that when the Soviets finally admitted their responsibility for Katyn, Gorbachev's official statement did not mention Stalin and pretended that Beriia was the instigator rather than the executioner of a policy ordered by Stalin. The fact that terror came to an end with Stalin's death also points out that he, and he alone, was the moving force behind it.

The glasnost literature has many examples of how Stalin pulled the strings of terror (some referred to in this book). Stalin had almost daily contacts with the hanging judge Ul'rikh who passed out the death sentences. Stalin would replace Beriia's name with B.Z. Kobulov on the document sanctioning the killing of the Polish POWs. On other occasions, for reasons that had nothing to do with charity, he would commute the death sentences of G.N. Kupriianov (Party Secretary in Karelia) and gerontologist L.S. Shtern. Sometimes Stalin's "micromanagement" would take bizarre turns. Archives of the Ministry of Defense indicate that on August 18, 1943, among the many documents that crossed Stalin's desk was a report by Commander of the Red Army Armor, Col. General of Tank Troops, Ia.N. Fedorenko, and his Political Commissar, Lt. General of Tank Troops N.I. Biriukov, about the fate of the little known Maj. General of Tank Troops A.A. Kotliarov (also listed as Kotliar). Kotliarov, Commander of the obscure 58 Tank Division, 30 Army (commanded at the time by K.K. Rokossovskii), had committed suicide on November 20, 1941, after the decimation of his unit. Stalin immediately took an interest in the matter, ordering the alteration of records so Kotliarov was listed as killed in action and then ordering that his name be stricken off the ranks of the Red Army. Nothing ever escaped Stalin's attention. In his memoirs (*VIZH*, November 1993), Col. General I.S. Glebov relates the circumstances that led to the demotion of Army General