THE SOVIET COUNTERINSURGENCY IN THE WESTERN BORDERLANDS

ALEXANDER STATIEV

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The Soviet Counterinsurgency in the Western Borderlands

The Soviet Counterinsurgency in the Western Borderlands investigates the Soviet response to nationalist insurgencies that occurred between 1944 and 1953 in the regions the Soviet Union annexed after the Nazi-Soviet pact: eastern Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. Based on new archival data, Alexander Statiev presents the first comprehensive study of Soviet counterinsurgency that ties together the security tools and populist policies intended to attract the local populations. The book traces the origins of the Soviet pacification doctrine and then presents a comparative analysis of the rural societies in eastern Poland and the Baltic states on the eve of the Soviet invasion. This analysis is followed by a description of the anti-Communist resistance movements. Subsequently, the author shows how ideology affected the Soviet pacification doctrine and examines the major means to enforce the doctrine: agrarian reforms, deportations, amnesties, informant networks, covert operations, and local militias. The book also demonstrates how the Soviet atheist regime used the church in the struggle against guerrillas and explains why this regime could not curb the random violence of its police. The final chapter discusses the Soviet experience in the global context.

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To
John Ferris

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Glossary

Abwehr	German military intelligence
AK	*Armija Krajowa* (Home Army)
CC	Central Committee
Cheka	*Vserossiiskaia Chrezvychainaia Komissiia po bor'be s kontrrevoliutsiei i sabotazhem* (The All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counterrevolution and Sabotage, the Bolshevik secret police in 1918–1922)
GHQ	General Headquarters
GUBB	*Glavnoe upravlenie po bor'be s banditizmom NKVD SSSR* (Head Directorate for the Struggle against Banditry)
GULAG	*Glavnoe upravlenie lagerei* (Head Directorate for Labour Camps)
kolkhoz	*kollektivnoe khoziaistvo* (collective farm)
LAF	Lithuanian Activist Front
LLA	*Lietuvos Laisves Armija* (Lithuanian Liberation Army)
MGB	*Ministerstvo gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti* (Ministry of State Security after 15 March 1946)
MVD	*Ministerstvo vnutrennikh del* (Ministry of Internal Affairs after 15 March 1946)
NCO	Noncommissioned Officer
NKGB	*Narodnyi komissariat gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti* (People's Commissariat of State Security, until 15 March 1946), separated from the NKVD on 14 April 1943
NKVD	*Narodnyi komissariat vnutrennikh del* (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs, until 15 March 1946)

OBB	*Otdel po bor'be s banditizmom NKVD* (Republican or provincial section of GUBB)
Omakaitse	Estonian Home Guard during the German occupation
OUN	Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists
PCNL	Polish Committee of National Liberation, the pro-Communist government of Poland
provod	OUN's leading agency at various levels
SB	*Sluzhba bezpeky* (OUN's Security Service)
SD	*Sicherheitsdienst* (German Security Service)
SMERSh	*Smert' shpionam* (Soviet Military Counterintelligence Service)
sovkhoz	*sovkhoz sovetskoe khoziaistvo* (state farm)
UNKVD, UNKGB	Provincial NKVD and NKGB branches
UPA	*Ukrains'ka Povstans'ka Armiia* (Ukrainian Insurgent Army)
VKP(b)	*Vsesoiuznaia Kommunisticheskaia Partiia (bol'shevikov)* (Communist Party of the Soviet Union)
VLIK	*Vyriausias Lietuvos Išlaisvinimo Komitetas* (Supreme Committee for the Liberation of Lithuania)

Introduction

When Soviet partisans made their first deep raids into western Ukraine in early 1943, they met thousands of nationalist guerrillas. Some of them had rifles, often without sights or magazines; others carried only sabers, pikes made out of scythes, axes, or dummy rifles fitted with window bolts imitating a rifle bolt, so they looked real from a distance. They also had a few dummy machine guns with rattles and wheelbarrows equipped with tin funnels amplifying the sound of a rifle shot. The latter were meant to create the impression of artillery cannonade.[1] Although the Soviet partisans scorned the weaponry of these guerrillas, they were surprised by the numbers of nationalists and their support from the local population. The partisans had orders to maintain neutrality toward the nationalists; they also had to urge any independent guerrilla force to fight the Germans. The nationalists, however, rejected any cooperation with the Soviets; the armistice between them only lasted for several months.[2] After the Red Army reoccupied the territories the USSR had gained in 1939–1940, the Soviet administration faced an armed resistance in all western regions but Moldova. The two arms of the Soviet police, the NKVD and NKGB,[3] quickly wrecked the urban nationalist underground, but they could

[1] General Vasilii Begma, head of Rovno Partisan HQ, "Spravka o sotoianii garnizonov vraga na territorii Rovenskoi oblasti [Information on Enemy Garrisons in Rovno Province]" (September 1943). Tsentral'nyi derzhavnyi arkhiv hromads'kykh ob'iednan' Ukraïny [Central State Archive of Public Organizations of Ukraine, hereafter cited as TsDAHOU], f. 1, op. 23, d. 585, ll. 52, 53; Volodimir Serhiichuk, ed., *Desiat' buremnykh lit* (Kyiv: Dnipro, 1998), p. 13; "OUN i UPA u druhii svitovii viini," *Ukraïns'kyi istorychnyi zhurnal (UIZh)* 4:96, 1994; V. I. Klokov, *Kovel'skii uzel* (Kiev: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1981), p. 198.

[2] Vasilii Sergienko, deputy head of the Central Partisan HQ, to Pavel Sudoplatov (12 December 1942). Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii [Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History, hereafter cited as RGASPI], f. 69, op. 1, d. 747, l. 165; A. V. Kentii, *Ukrains'ka povstans'ka armiia v 1942–1943 rr.* (Kyiv: 1999), p. 198.

[3] After February 1941, the Soviet police consisted of two major branches, People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs, *Narodnyi komissariat vnutrennikh del* (NKVD), and People's Commissariat of State Security, *Narodnyi komissariat gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti* (NKGB). The NKVD dealt predominantly with internal threats to security, whereas NKGB dealt with external ones, although in practice their authority overlapped. In July 1941, the NKGB was merged with

not control rural areas for several years. The guerrilla war remained the major obstacle to the sovietization of these regions until the early 1950s.

This book examines the Soviet fight against anti-Communist resistance in western Ukraine, western Belorussia, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia in the period following their incorporation into the USSR after the Nazi-Soviet pact (Figure I.1).

Insurgency is defined in this study as a large-scale popular armed resistance – a people's war – and *counterinsurgency* as a complex of military, security, and social policies aimed at terminating such a war.

This book is not a history of the Soviet police force. The reactions of the Soviet state to other types of resistance, such as strikes, riots, political conspiracies, isolated cases of political terrorism, and campaigns of civil disobedience, are beyond the scope of this study. My goal is to investigate the Soviet counterinsurgency model employed in the western borderlands and assess its rationality in the context of a totalitarian state that faced armed resistance during the apocalyptic fight on the Eastern Front and the dawn of the Cold War.

Frontier regions have a unique social environment. They are populated by people with diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural identities that may be ranked in different ways. Ethnic identity may be either the dominating identity or subordinated to citizenship. I will call the former *simple* and the latter *nested* identity.[4] The simple identity presumes clear-cut boundaries among ethnic, racial, and religious groups. It is *exclusive;* for instance, one either is a Galician Ukrainian or not. The nested identity is *inclusive;* persons with such an identity see themselves as belonging to one group at one level and to another at a different level. In the other words, a person regarding himself or herself as Galician Ukrainian still can identify at different levels with other West Ukrainians, with all other Ukrainians, with the East Slavic community that along with Ukrainians also includes Russians and Belorussians, and with fellow citizens regardless of ethnic background (Figure I.2). For such people, one or another level may be operative in different contexts; these individuals readily change one identity for another in response to circumstances. For a person with a simple identity, the circle of people perceived as "us" is far narrower. A multiethnic state usually supports the nested identities of its people, thus establishing citizenship as the identity of the highest rank.

Many of the borderland people cherish their simple identities as a vital part of self that distinguishes them from the rest of the world; the identities of others are blurred by intermarriages, daily interaction with their multicultural neighbors, or the temptation to present themselves as members of

the NKVD. In April 1943, they were again separated. In March 1946, the NKVD and NKGB were renamed the Ministry of Internal Affairs, *Ministerstvo vnutrennikh del* (MVD), and the Ministry of State Security, *Ministerstvo gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti* (MGB).

[4] O. M. Mladenova, "Etnonimiia i natsional'noe samosoznanie," *Voprosy onomastiki* 5: 66–70, (2008).

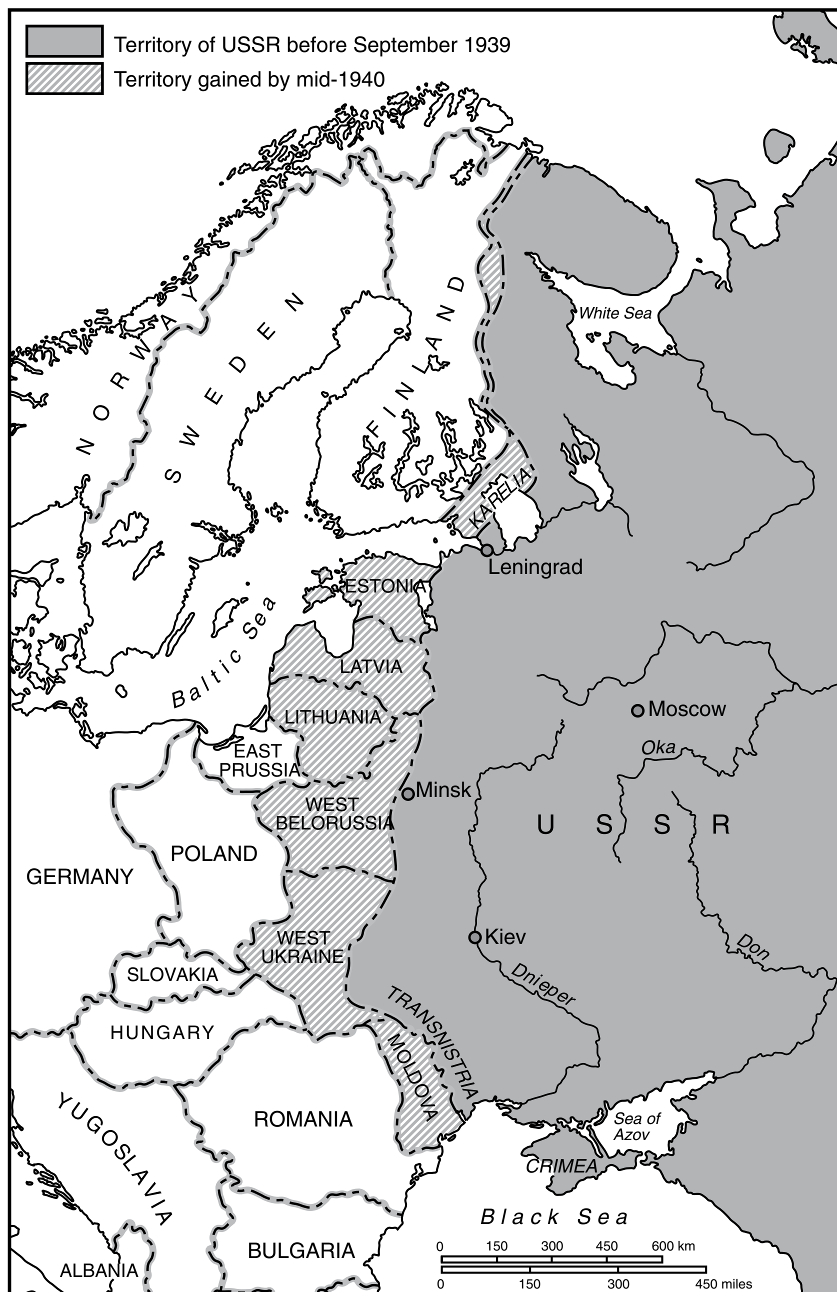

FIGURE I.1 The western borderlands. Based on a map appearing in Thurston and Bonwestsch. *The People's War: Popular Responses to World War II in the Soviet Union* (2000).

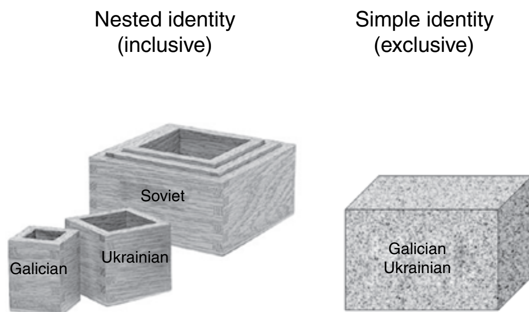

FIGURE I.2 Nested and simple identities in Galicia, western Ukraine.

social, ethnic, or religious groups favored by the state. Borderland people maintain close ties with relatives abroad, and some of them have lived in neighboring states with different social systems. Since information about the outside world is more easily available to those residing near frontiers, people living in the borderlands tend to mistrust government propaganda and question the value system adopted by mainstream society as well as the notions it accepts as absolute truths. With their less-than-perfect loyalty to the state, frontier communities are receptive to separatist ideas and resist the government's effort to fully integrate them into the dominating culture. People of the Basque Country, Alsace, southern Tyrol, Transylvania, Kashmir, and Tibet stubbornly maintain their simple identities despite efforts by the Spanish, French, Italian, Romanian, Indian, and Chinese governments to assimilate them. Yet sizable parts of every borderland ethnic community affiliate with their state; they seek integration into the majority and dislike the unrest stirred by their neighbors with a simple identity. The integration proceeds more smoothly in countries with a tolerant political culture and high living standards, but poverty and oppression tend to perpetuate the simple identity.

When the Soviet state annexed neighboring lands in 1939–1940, the living standard of their populations dropped, and they found the Soviet system far more authoritarian and interventionist than previous governments had been. Stalinists sought to crush any dissent, to establish an exact copy of the Soviet system with total control over the local societies, and to foster loyalty to the state by replacing simple with nested identity. These policies, implemented frantically and savagely, provoked popular resistance that emerged in the spring of 1941 and continued until the early 1950s. This struggle cost roughly as many lives as the United States lost in the European military theater during World War II. This conflict cannot be reduced, as was usually done during the Cold War, to a straightforward confrontation between nationalist resistance and Soviet security forces. Rather, it was a multidimensional and complex phenomenon, and for some groups involved, the fight between pro- and anti-Soviet forces was secondary to the conflict's other components.

Any insurgency consists of a relatively small group of hard-core militants and a much larger group of active supporters who join for various motivations not necessarily coinciding with those of their leaders. An even larger number of people give the rebels passive and conditional support without joining them. Even if insurgents offer an attractive agenda, they can enlist only a small minority of the population and secure at best the passive support of the majority. Some local people actively oppose the guerrillas, and many, usually most, prefer to stay neutral in the conflict. Both guerrillas and government deny them this option, forcing them to choose sides.

Suppression of rebellion by force alone costs many bystanders' lives and is often counterproductive. Pacification theories state that counterinsurgents should balance political and military measures, giving primacy to the former. The government has to identify the causes of the unrest, develop reforms targeting its roots, and simultaneously apply coercion to its manifestations. It should coordinate civilian and police agencies toward the desired goals. The correct proportion of stick, carrot, and pro-government propaganda should pull guerrilla fish from the water in which they swim, attract the passive part of the local population, and intimidate rebel supporters into neutrality. The state ought to offer amnesty combined with relentless pressure so as to make most insurgents feel that surrender involves less risk than continuing the resistance. It also should raise paramilitary forces from beneficiaries of its policy to perform routine defensive missions, thus relieving security troops for offensive operations. This militia also helps the authorities to internalize the conflict by involving local people in the fight on the government side. The army should adjust its strategy, organization, and weaponry to counterinsurgency, rejecting conventional military doctrine. Finally, the government must monitor the operations of the security forces closely, promptly punishing random violence that may frustrate the best strategy.

Most counterinsurgents have understood these postulates, but the friction of pacification has not allowed them to follow the ideal script. Some governments have misinterpreted the cause of unrest, and their reforms intended to undermine the appeal of the insurgents have been irrelevant. Others have abstained from reforms because they conflicted with the interests of ruling elites or seemed economically unwise. Civilian institutions, army, and police have failed to coordinate their actions and have thus hindered each other. State agencies have not been able to establish communication with the population, and their propaganda therefore has remained futile. The fine balance between repression and clemency has been hard to define. Armies have tended to view counterinsurgency merely as a limited conventional war; consequently, a reluctance to take casualties and reliance on firepower has made civilians the major victims of counterinsurgency operations. The raising of a pro-government militia always has been tricky because the state could not assess the loyalty of recruits. Security forces have engaged in random violence that only undermined the government's policy. Usually states have tilted toward coercion far beyond the rational limits and neglected nonviolent means of

pacification because military actions and repressions seemed to be the simpler solution. They have focused on destruction of the insurgents rather than their civilian infrastructure and neglected to control the civilian population that supplied guerrillas with reinforcements exceeding their casualties.

This study examines how the Soviet government tackled these problems. It begins with the origins of the Soviet counterinsurgency doctrine and identification of its major components, followed by an analysis of the borderland societies on the eve of the Soviet invasion and the impact of the brief Soviet presence in 1939–1941, the German occupation in 1941–1944, and the Soviet reconquest in 1944. Afterward, I proceed to a survey of the anti-Communist resistance movements. The resistance occurred predominantly in the countryside, and most insurgents were farmers; this is why I primarily address relations between the state and farmers rather than other social groups. Since, in this type of warfare, political strategy matters more than military actions, I focus not on combat itself but on the pacification doctrine and the major means chosen to enforce it. I show how the state system and ideology shaped the Soviet counterinsurgency and discuss the causes for its successes and failures. In conclusion, I contrast the Soviet experience with that of other states.

Since this study compares the evolutions of unique societies, insurgencies, and pacification methods in four distinct historical periods (the interwar years, the first Soviet occupation in 1939–1941, the German occupation in 1941–1944, and the Soviet reconquest after 1944) and five distinct regions (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, western Belorussia, and western Ukraine), it is more convenient to structure the text by blending chronologic and thematic principles rather than working within a strict chronologic or thematic framework. I introduce readers to each stage of the conflict by analyzing all concomitant resistance movements in a given period and then proceed to the next period. Every counterinsurgency strategy, however, is examined only once, from the beginning of the conflict to its end. This methodology preserves the narrative unity of both individual social conflicts and the strategies used to solve them across all these regions.

It was the Soviet Communist party alone that formulated the counterinsurgency strategy. Except for a few senior police officials, who simultaneously belonged to top party agencies, the security forces had no say in strategy. Their authority was limited purely to tactics. In order to ensure that regional party committees would follow Moscow's directives, in November and December 1944, the Politburo established watchdogs in the Baltic republics in the form of bureaus responsible to the Communist Party Central Committee [VKP(b) CC bureaus]. These bureaus, headed by trusted officials from the old territories, monitored the work of the regional Communist parties and reported to Moscow. The pacification strategy in the Baltic region stemmed from permanent clashes between local leaders, who attempted to moderate the policy dictated by the center, and the bureaus given the task of enforcing it. Moscow presented the bureaus as mere intermediaries between regional leaders and the Politburo, but usually the bureaus had more real power than did the first

secretaries of regional Communist parties. The resistance of Baltic administrators delayed rather than altered the implementation of policies directed by the center. By 1947, Moscow overcame the resistance of the Baltic leaders, and in March of that year it dissolved the bureaus. Nikita Khrushchev and Panteleimon Ponomarenko, the first secretaries of the Ukrainian and Belorussian Communist parties, had well-established reputations and high prestige in the party hierarchy. They had greater freedom of action in pacification matters than their Baltic counterparts, yet this freedom usually was limited to tactics. The uniform pacification strategy formulated by the Politburo had to be implemented in every republic.

While the party set the strategic pacification objectives, the security forces had to develop tactical means to meet those objectives. The Red Army rarely fought guerrillas. Regulations dating back to the collectivization in the old territories prohibited the use of regular forces against insurgents.[5] The two major security agencies engaged in counterinsurgency were the Head Directorate for Struggle against Banditry [*Glavnoe upravlenie po bor'be s banditizmom* (GUBB)] and the Head Directorate for NKVD Security Troops (*Glavnoe upravlenie vnutrennikh voisk NKVD*). The GUBB, organized on 1 December 1944, was the major police counterinsurgency agency. It developed police tactics, gathered intelligence, launched covert operations, supervised the militia, and coordinated the efforts of security troops, police, and militia. The GUBB ran "struggle against banditry" sections [*Otdely po bor'be s banditizmom* (OBB)] in every Soviet republic. While people's commissars of internal affairs in the western republics were responsible for the pacification routine, the OBBs were the primary bodies developing police tactics at the regional level.

The basic law enforcement agency in the countryside was the district police force. One officer, assisted sometimes by a few privates, ran the police station responsible for law and order in several villages.[6] He maintained a network of informers, delivered intelligence to the police section in the district center that processed it, and called in NKVD security troops for larger operations. These security units were the major regular armed force employed against guerrillas. However, during the war, they had to perform many other missions as well: securing the rear of the Red Army from cutoff German units and saboteurs, apprehending deserters, conducting deportations, and guarding prisoners. Until the end of the war, most security troops moved behind the Red Army and took no part in counterinsurgency. In 1944–1945, the total number of security troops available for counterinsurgency was below 70,000, excluding the frontier guards who occasionally participated in such operations.[7] During the war, the security troops were formally organized into divisions of

[5] Document No.105 in Hilda Sabbo, ed. *Võimatu vaikida*, Vol. 1 (Tallinn: 1996), p. 260.

[6] Every district policeman had to monitor two villages; Anatolii Rusnachenko, *Narod zburenyi* (Kyiv: Pul'sary, 2002), p. 258. However, because of personnel shortage, policemen often monitored three or five villages.

[7] In 1945, their total number was 167,000 men, and it had dropped to 128,800 by 1946 and to 73,700 by 1947. These numbers embrace all soldiers subordinated to the NKVD and include

about 6,000 soldiers armed only with light weapons. Usually NKVD divisions operated dispersed in companies, platoons, or sections performing independent missions. After the reoccupation of the western borderlands, the security forces found themselves overstretched. These were large areas: Lithuania, a medium-sized western republic, is as big as Ireland, but only 18,497 security troops and frontier guards stayed there by 1947.[8] The government hoped, however, that the political means it planned to use in the framework of counterinsurgency would compensate for the lack of security forces. It underestimated the strength of the opposition in the borderlands and overrated the positive impact of the populist reforms it planned to enforce in the framework of counterinsurgency.

This study presents several key arguments. The first chapter shows how the Soviet counterinsurgency doctrine and its major components – the class principle and the strategic means stemming from it, such as repressions against "class enemies," agrarian reform, deportations, amnesties, and volunteer militia – emerged during the Civil War. This doctrine, modified in response to the Stalinist innovations to communist theories and the increasing totalitarianism of the Soviet state, was later applied to the pacification of the western provinces.

The second, third, and fourth chapters present the historical and social contexts of the confrontation between the nationalist insurgents and the Soviet regime. These chapters compare the rural societies of Eastern Poland and the Baltic region on the eve of World War II, outline the strains they experienced in the interwar period, and discuss how the Soviet and German occupations affected these societies. Each of these chapters presents an overview of anti-Communist resistance groups and their development between 1939 and the early 1950s: their goals, ideology, social basis, strategy; the methods they used to attain their objectives; their strengths and weaknesses; and their relations with the population. The Soviet leaders perceived Russian reality through the prism of class theory. When the Soviet Union incorporated the borderlands in 1939–1940, its government launched a series of populist reforms, seeking to exploit local tensions, win the poor majority over and simultaneously repress the wealthier classes. Although poor farmers benefited from some Soviet reforms, other aspects of the Soviet occupation provoked fear and resentment. Many people in these regions met the German invasion with relief, only to be soon frustrated with the "new order." When the Soviets returned in 1944, a large part of the borderland societies resisted them. Many fought because of ideological reasons, or because they had collaborated with the Germans and feared Soviet reprisals, or because they hated collectivization, but others were

those located within the pre-1939 borders and GULAG camps but exclude the frontier guards. "Spravka o boevoi i operativno-sluzhebnoi deiatel'nosti vnutrennikh voisk [Report on Actions of Security Troops]" (1947). RGVA, f. 38650, op. 1, d. 313, l. 8.

[8] Kruglov to Stalin (4 January 1947). Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv RF [The State Archive of the Russian Federation, hereafter cited as GARF], f. 9401, op. 2, d. 168, ll. 4–6. Document

drafted by the guerrillas or found themselves among insurgents accidentally while hiding from German and Soviet conscriptions. The primary target of every major resistance group was not the security forces, but local civilians perceived as Soviet collaborators and, in some cases, ethnic minorities. With time, those who benefited from the Soviet populist policies, those impressed with the might of the Red Army and victims of nationalist terror, as well as opportunists, gave the government a conditional support. The nationalist resistance gradually lost steam after its members realized their struggle was futile and the civilians became tired of endless violence.

The following seven chapters reveal the methods the Soviet government used to suppress insurgency and the problems it had to overcome. Each chapter makes a conclusion about the effectiveness of every such method and its rationality in the given context. Agrarian reform was the most important political measure to attract borderland peasants. However, ideology prevented the Soviets from choosing obvious pacification solutions within the framework of this reform, such as distributing land among peasants as private property, abandoning the collectivization project and building economic relations with the peasantry on free market principles. Instead, Soviet leaders engaged in unprovoked repressions on a class basis and enforced collectivization as a means to transform the conservative "petty bourgeoisie" into a progressive rural proletariat. While the Communists succeeded in splitting the rural society by aggravating existing social tensions and creating new ones, collectivization nullified the benefits provided by the agrarian reform and thus undermined the pacification. This policy left those labeled as kulaks no alternative but to fight or be deported; it also caused many of those whom the communists regarded as class allies join their enemies. By driving apolitical wealthier peasants into a corner, the Soviets created an insurgency of their own imagining.

The commitment of Stalinists to class struggle and the adherence to the principle of collective responsibility ensured the Soviet regime would use mass deportations as a tool of security policy. The Soviets deported those perceived as probable supporters of resistance and other potential troublemakers, but they never planned to implement ethnic cleansing in the borderlands, except for the expulsion of the diaspora nationalities. Given the absence of any constraints in using this method, most deportations were rational means toward attaining the desired goals: they helped secure the territorial integrity of the Soviet state, eliminated the civilian basis of guerrilla support, and forced unmotivated insurgents to surrender.

Peasants constituted the majority of the guerrillas. The class perception of the conflict in the borderlands made the communists assume most peasants could be won for the Soviet cause if their class consciousness was awakened. Social reforms and propaganda targeting peasant guerrillas were to boost their

No. 16 in P. Sokhan'l et al., eds., *Litopys UPA, Nova Seriia,* Vol. 7 (Toronto: Natsional'na Akademiia nauk Ukrainy, 1995–2003), p. 147.

class consciousness, while generous amnesties allowed unmotivated fighters and army draft evaders to return to civilian life. Amnesties, combined with severe pressure applied on relatives of insurgents, succeeded in draining the pool of resistance manpower.

The Soviet leaders viewed the volunteer militia as a vital element of a strategy that would help them transform counterinsurgency into a class war. A minority of militia fighters joined because of ideological considerations while most did so out of self-interest or because guerrilla terror forced them to side with the state. Militias helped the authorities internalize the conflict; furthermore, they outnumbered the guerrillas and thus undermined the resistance's claim to represent the aspirations of their nations.

Although the primary subject of this book is Soviet strategy, one chapter investigates the tactical tools police used against insurgents: NKVD security units, informant networks, interrogation techniques, intimidation of civilians, and covert operations. Most other states also employed these tools, but the Soviet versions had some unique features stemming from ideology, political culture, previous experience, and the specific borderland social environment. The police showed remarkable flexibility in adapting its tactics to the changing nature of guerrilla war. While initially regular security units carried the brunt of counterinsurgency, later the police increasingly relied on more sophisticated methods. Having created a vast informant network and widely employing converted guerrillas for covert operations, the police shattered the morale of the rebels and provoked the nationalist counterintelligence agencies to launch self-exterminating purges that killed many loyalists, driving a wedge between the resistance and civilians horrified by the chaotic guerrilla terror. Given the unlimited coercive capacity of the Soviet state and its determination to suppress the insurgency at any cost, the ruthless methods used by the police in fact reduced the "collateral damage."

The employment of the church in the pacification of the borderlands was a new component of Soviet strategy. The reversal of the religious policy Soviet leaders had pursued after the Bolshevik Revolution occurred mainly due to geopolitical considerations about the post–World War II status of the borderlands and the East European countries, rather than because of concerns over nationalist resistance. However, once the state began regarding the church as its servant, it left the clergy no option but to accept this role and back government orders with its moral authority or be purged. This policy brought mixed results across the borderlands, although most clerics, prompted by state pressure, Christian ethics, and sincere desire to terminate the civil war among their countrymen, complied with the government's requests and called upon the guerrillas to stop fighting.

As would any other state engaged in counterinsurgency, the Soviet regime had to struggle against random violence committed by its police, local officials and militia. This violence was exacerbated by the savage fight on the Eastern Front, the thirst for revenge against those perceived as Nazi collaborators, and the social revolution imposed from above as a chosen counterinsurgency

method. Despite the centralized administrative system, the government exercised only weak control over security forces and local officials in the rebellious regions. The enormous power these representatives of the authorities enjoyed in the absence of control created a sense of impunity, which led to widespread abuse. The senior party leaders, police, and military commanders realized pacification suffered from arbitrary violence and severely punished hundreds of criminals in police and army uniforms. Yet, the Soviet state fought the abuses inconsistently and could not eliminate them, which drove their victims to the guerrillas.

The last chapter highlights the peculiarities of nationalist resistance and Soviet counterinsurgency in the global context. The nationalists, isolated from external support, faced an enemy with unlimited political will, high morale after defeating Germany and a wider palette of coercive means than the one possessed by most counterinsurgents. In the long run, their struggle was doomed, but in the short run some nationalist groups did attain impressive successes against an enemy that was stronger and more determined than most other regimes in fighting popular resistance. As for Soviet strategy, it stemmed from one center: the Soviet regime had more leverage over local administrations than that exercised by most other governments engaged in pacification, which narrowed the gap between intent and implementation. Quasi-Marxist ideology sometimes imposed irrational strategies, but the Soviet counterinsurgency was more pragmatic and efficient than those conducted by Nazi Germany and most Latin American military dictatorships, while the strategies of democracies also suffered from ideological determinism that hampered pacification. Democracies fighting guerrillas in the Third World also used such methods as mass deportations, intimidation and torture during interrogation; like the Soviets, they were ignorant of the local conditions, and their soldiers also relieved their frustration on civilians in orgies of random violence. Soviet pacification was intended to be more ruthless than the antiguerrilla campaigns conducted by democracies, but it is open to debate whether the Soviets inflicted more victims to civilians than democracies did facing similar challenges.

Most writings on the conflict in the western borderlands explore the resistance movements rather than the Soviet response to them.[9] A handful of works that address Soviet policies focus on a single region or aspect of

[9] Albertas Gerutis, ed., *Lithuania: 700 Years* (New York: Manyland Books, 1969); Yuriy Tys-Krokhmaliuk, *UPA Warfare in Ukraine* (New York: Society of Veterans of Ukrainian Insurgent Army of the United States and Canada, 1972); Anatolii Rusnachenko, *Narod zburenyi* (Kyiv: Pul'sary, 2002); M. V. Koval', *Ukraïna u druhii svitovii i Velykii Vitchyznianii viinakh* (Kyïv: Instytut istorii Ukraïny, 1994); M. V. Koval', ed., *Ukraïna u druhii svitovii viini* (Kyïv: Instytut Istorii Ukraïny, 1995); Mikola Lebed', *UPA: Ukrains'ka povastans'ka armiia* (Suchasnist', 1987); Taras Bul'ba-Borovets, *Armiia bez derzhavy* (Winnipeg, Canada: Volyn, 1981); Juozas Daumantas, *Fighters for Freedom: Lithuanian Partisans versus the USSR (1944–1947)* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1975); Arvydas Anušauskas, ed., *The Anti-Soviet Resistance in the Baltic States* (Vilnius: Du Ka, 2000); Sergei V. Zubrenkov, "Vooruzhennoe protivodeistvie natsionalistov Sovetskoi vlasti v Litve" (Ph.D. disseration, Moscow State University, 1999); Mart Laar, *War in the Woods: Estonia's Struggle for*

counterinsurgency.[10] Nobody, however, has attempted a study of Soviet policy in the western borderlands as a whole, a study that would illuminate the strategic decision making across all these regions where cultures, allegiances, dominating ideologies, the balance of political forces, and social strains were different, as were the mentalities of local officials tasked to enforce Soviet prescriptions. This is the first attempt to conceptualize the Soviet pacification strategy in this broad context and analyze it as a combination of political, military, and security policies intended to destroy rebellion and advance socialism.

Survival (Washington: Compass Press, 1992); V. P. Iampol'skii, "Kak trezubets vplelsia v svastiku," *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal (VIZ)* 2, 1996; N. D. Plotnikov, "Smertonostsy," *VIZ* 3, 1991; V. Zarechnyi, "Al'ians: OUN – SS," *VIZ* 4, 1991; Liudas Truska, "Voina posle voiny," *Rodina* 7, 1997; S. Kuznetsov et al., "Vooruzhennoe natsionalisticheskoe podpol'e v Estonii v 1940kh-1950kh godakh," *Izvestiia TsK KPSS* 8, 1990; B. I. Kaptelov, "OUN na sluzhbe u fashizma," *VIZ* 5, 1991; Aleksandr Diukov, *Vtorostepennyi vrag: OUN, UPA i reshenie "evreiskogo voprosa"* (Moscow: Regnum, 2008).

[10] Jeffrey Burds, "*Agentura*: Soviet Informants' Network in Galicia, 1944–1948," *Eastern European Politics and Societies* 11/1 (1997); Jeffrey Burds, "Gender and Policing in Soviet West Ukraine, 1944–1948," *Cahiers du Monde russe* 42/2–3–4 (2001); Jeffrey Burds, *The Early Cold War in Soviet West Ukraine, 1944–1948*, Vol. 1505 The Carl Beck Papers, Pittsburgh: Center for Russian & East European Studies, 2001, George Reklaitis, "A Common Hatred: Lithuanian Nationalism during the Triple Occupation, 1939–1953" (Ph.D. dissertion, Boston: Northeastern University, 2003); Ivan Bilas, *Represyvno-karal'na systema v Ukraini 1917–1953* (Kyiv: Lybid', 1994); Andris Caune, ed., *The Hidden and Forbidden History of Latvia under Soviet and Nazi Occupations, 1940–1991* (Riga: Institute of the History of Latvia, 2005); Elena Zubkova, *Pribaltika i Kreml', 1940–1953* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2008); Tynu Tannberg, *Politika Moskvy v respublikakh Baltii v poslevoennye gody (1944–1956)* (Tartu: Tartu University Press, 2008), Vytautas Tininis, ed., *Komunistinio režimo nusikaltimai Lietuvoje, 1944–1953 m.* (Vilnius: Tarptautine komisija, 2003); Kristi Kuuk and Toivo Raun, eds., *Soviet Deportations in Estonia: Impact and Legacy.* (Tartu: Tartu University Press, 2007).

1

Origins of Soviet Counterinsurgency

Chto s popom, chto s kulakom vsia beseda –
V briukho tolstoe shtykom miroeda!
[Don't talk with a priest or a kulak –
Just stab the bloodsuckers' fat bellies with your bayonet!]
Dem'ian Bednyi, "Red Army Song"

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Russia was an agrarian state: 80 percent of its population lived in the countryside. Most arable land in the European part of Russia belonged to the aristocracy, the Crown, and the church, whereas most peasants suffered from land shortage aggravated by the antique organization of peasant labor and backward agricultural methods. After the Bolsheviks took power in November 1917, they promptly addressed this grave problem that had tormented the Russian countryside for half a century. They enforced a radical agrarian reform, which secured the support of peasants throughout the revolution and most of the civil war that followed it. However, in 1919, when the Bolsheviks began confiscating peasant grain in the name of the starving proletariat, they provoked a wave of large rural uprisings, which they doggedly fought until early 1921. This chapter discusses the origins of Soviet counterinsurgency doctrine and its evolution during the interwar period. The lessons the Soviet leaders learned from the experience of the revolution and the civil war, coupled with the security policies developed afterward, laid the foundation for the class-based counterinsurgency model they later applied in the western borderlands. In essence, this model was a combination of populist reforms, social revolution directed from above, and ruthless coercion of those questioning party policies.

"The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles," wrote Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. They defined the classes according to their relation to the means of production: The bourgeoisie were "owners of the means of social production and employers of wage labour," whereas the proletariat were "the class of modern wage labourers who, having no means of production of their own" were "reduced to selling their labour power in order

to live."[1] Peasants also owned means of production – land, horses, and tools – and some hired wage labor. Accordingly, Marx defined them as reactionary petty bourgeoisie striving to enhance their private property but destined to "decay and finally disappear in the face of modern industry."[2]

The Bolshevik attitude toward the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie, the major owners of the means of production, was straightforward. They were class enemies of the proletariat doomed by social evolution, and their resistance to the natural historical process, active or passive, had to be crushed by any means. The Bolshevik policy toward peasantry, however, was more complex because it was shaped under circumstances that defied their theories. The Bolshevik Party initially oriented itself solely to the urban proletariat that was, according to Marx, the hegemonic class of the forthcoming Communist Revolution. Marxists had no interest in peasants. However, after a series of spontaneous peasant revolts in 1902–1907 against unequal land distribution, Vladimir Lenin appreciated the great potential for rebellion that peasants had accumulated. Given the social composition of Russia, Lenin argued, the proletarian revolution was possible only if supported by peasants. The Bolsheviks embraced peasantry as the "class ally" of the proletariat and sought to exploit its revolutionary potential for their own goals. The Marxist definition of peasants as petty bourgeoisie determined Soviet policy in the countryside, which was erratic, but followed one general trend: When Soviet authority was shaky, the Communists placated the peasants. However, they perceived the pro-peasant policy as a regrettable necessity, a movement away from Marxist theory, and sought to return to the ideologically correct path as soon as possible.

The Bolsheviks divided the peasantry into three groups: *bedniaks* – sharecroppers renting agricultural equipment and draft animals; *seredniaks* – peasants of average prosperity who were self-sufficient farmers producing foodstuff for trade on the free market but hiring no permanent labor; and *kulaks* – large-scale operators who employed full-time laborers. Although these concepts had emerged in peasant society before the Bolshevik Revolution, the definition of each group had been informal, vague, and unimportant and the boundaries between them blurred: Well-to-do peasants with the same amount of property could pass for *kulaks* in a poorer region and *seredniaks* in a wealthier one. Having originated as a pejorative designation for moneylenders and merchants, the term *kulak* expanded at the beginning of the twentieth century to include wealthier farmers. Farmers both respected and envied their prosperous neighbors; they resented *kulaks* but strove to join them, and they despised fellow villagers with a lower economic status than their own. After the Bolshevik Revolution, the consequences of this informal classification of peasantry into three groups suddenly became significant. The party regarded agricultural laborers who owned no means of production, as well as

[1] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (New York: A Signet Classic, 1998), p. 50.

[2] Ibid., p. 63.

bedniaks, as junior partners of the urban proletariat and called for benevolent neutrality toward the rural majority, the *seredniaks,* while treating *kulaks* as class enemies.[3]

The night after the Bolsheviks overthrew the Provisional Government, they issued two crucial decrees that won many peasants to their cause. The Decree on Peace let the Russian Army, consisting mainly of peasants, going home after three years of frustrating fight. The Decree on Land ordered the nationalization of all arable land, its confiscation from landlords and the church, and its distribution among peasants in equal parcels per person as a free lease. This agrarian reform proffered immediate and substantial benefits to many at the expense of few. It secured the consent of most peasants and generated vigorous support among the poorest ones. The Declaration of Rights of the Peoples, announced by the Bolsheviks on 15 November 1917, was another important aspect of the revolution. It gave equal rights to all nationalities and thus attracted the ethnic minorities. The Bolsheviks raised a numerous and enthusiastic Red Army from peasant soldiers, who, fed up with the fighting, had recently deserted the fronts of World War I. Those who had acquired land and made a swift and unexpected rise from the bottom to the top of rural society – unimaginable under any other authority – joined the Reds. Ethnic minorities – Estonians, Latvians, Jews, Chinese, Bashkirs, and others whom the Imperial government had treated as second-rate citizens – were among the most reliable of Soviet soldiers.[4]

Although these decrees were brilliant political moves on the part of the Bolsheviks, the subsequent so-called War Communism alienated many peasants. Because market relations were not supposed to exist in a Communist social system, the Bolsheviks attempted to accelerate the pace toward the toilers' paradise in the late 1918 by banning the free market and introducing a barter economy, which turned during the next harvest into confiscation of peasant grain without compensation. This policy caused mass peasant uprisings between 1919 and 1921, the largest being those in eastern Ukraine, Tambov Province, and Siberia, which involved perhaps as many as 100,000 guerrillas supported by millions of peasants.[5] Lenin believed that the Bolsheviks faced the gravest "internal political crisis. ... That was the first ... time in the history of Soviet Russia that feeling ran against us among large masses of peasants,"[6] and therefore, these rebellions were "far more dangerous than all the Denikins,

[3] Although the flaws of such an artificial classification of peasants are obvious, the use of communist terminology while discussing Soviet decision making is unavoidable because the state conducted its rural policy on the basis of these notions, and the peasants also used them.

[4] Vladimir Brovkin, *Behind the Front Lines of the Civil War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 159, 383.

[5] More than 40,000 peasants fought the communists in western Siberia and about 16,000 in Tambov region in early 1921; V. I. Shishkin, ed., *Za sovety bez kommunistov: Krest'ianskoe vosstanie v Tiumenskoi gubernii* (Novosibirsk: Sibirskii khronograf, 2000), p. 17; V. Samoshkin, *Antonovskoe vosstanie* (Moscow: Russkii Put', 2005), p. 67.

[6] Lenin, "Five Years of the Russian Revolution and the Prospects of the World Revolution," in *Selected Works,* Vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress Publisher, 1977), p. 663.

Yudenichs, and Kolchaks put together."[7] After the Reds engaged in an extensive, multifaceted counterinsurgency campaign against peasants, they began developing a special doctrine to explain the unanticipated resistance of "class allies" and to offer a solution to the problem.

In their campaigns against peasant rebels, the Bolshevik party adopted some security policies used by the Imperial government, including reliance on secret police, the principle of collective responsibility, and methods stemming from this principle, such as deportations and hostage taking.[8] However, the targets of the Imperial and Bolshevik security policies were different, and while some continuity in counterinsurgency methods is apparent, the differences between them were more significant than were the similarities. Imperial Russia used ethnicity, citizenship, religion, and previous record as criteria of loyalty. It treated foreign residents with greater suspicion than it did Russian citizens. Orthodox believers were more trustworthy than those of other faiths. Slavs were preferable to non-Slavs, and individuals who had belonged originally to suspicious groups but had proven their loyalty to the Russian state by their deeds earned a privileged status. The Bolsheviks distinguished friends from foes on a class basis; ethnicity, citizenship, and religious affiliation played no role in their security decision making.

Surprised by the peasant reaction to War Communism, the Bolsheviks attributed it to the petty bourgeois nature and ignorance of peasants rather than to the flaws of their policies.[9] Ideology, rather than experience, made Bolsheviks regard *kulaks* as the major class enemy after landlords and the urban bourgeoisie had been crushed. *Kulaks* incited *bedniaks* and *seredniaks;* otherwise, they would not fight their benefactors. This explanation made further analysis unnecessary. While the *kulaks* were the backbone of some insurgencies, most peasants who resisted grain confiscations were in fact *seredniaks,* the majority of the rural population. A district party committee in the Volga region reported on the social composition of the insurgents: "The *kulaks* help the

[7] Orlando Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 321; Anton Denikin, Nikolai Yudenich, and Alexandr Kolchak were the most important leaders of the Whites.

[8] In the late 1850s, Russia exiled Crimean Tatars to the Ottoman Empire, accusing them of mass treason during the Crimean War. In the 1860s, the government expelled the hostile mountaineers from the Caucasus. During World War I, the Russian government deported about 255,000 Germans and others who shared ethnicity with the enemy powers from western regions into the interior. In 1910, the Russian Army proposed to intern hostages taken from the families of the Kazakh rebels, which would "compel the more moderate elements of the population to return to a peaceful life." Peter Holquist, "To Count, to Extract and to Exterminate: Population Statistics and Population Politics in Late Imperial and Soviet Russia," in Ronald G. Suny and Terry Martin, eds., *A State of Nations* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 117–121; Vladimir Auman, ed., *Istoriia rossiiskikh nemtsev v dokumentakh* (Moscow: MIGUP, 1993), pp. 38–40; S. G. Nelipovich, "Repressii protiv poddanykh 'Tsentral'nykh derzhav,'" *VIZ* 6:41, 1996.

[9] Figes, *Peasant Russia*, p. 349; Documents No. 192, 207 in Shishkin, *Za sovety bez kommunistov*, pp. 207, 219.

bandits materially, but themselves take up arms only very rarely," and many of them resented guerrillas who disrupted their business and requisitioned their horses.[10] Yet the top Bolsheviks qualified any peasant rebellion as *kulak* and persuaded themselves that the elimination of *kulaks* would automatically end the insurgency. Leon Trotsky, People's Commissar of Defence, called the insurgency in eastern Ukraine *"anarchic-kulak Makhnovite counterrevolution,"*[11] which was far off the mark. Nestor Makhno, the leader of the rebels, was an anarchist revolutionary who hated *kulaks,* although his definition of *kulak* differed from that of the Bolsheviks. The relentless repression of wealthy farmers in eastern Ukraine made those who would not otherwise resist the Reds join their enemies but hardly affected the Makhnovite resistance, whose social basis consisted of those whom local peasants would qualify as *seredniaks* and *bedniaks*. However, the theoretical dogma made the Communists target the wealthy peasants in every rebellious region. Lenin sent these instructions to the Communist leaders of Penza:

> The revolt by the five *kulak volosts* [districts] must be suppressed with no mercy. … We need to set an example.
>
> 1. You need to hang (hang without fail, so that the *public sees*) *at least* 100 notorious *kulaks,* the rich and the bloodsuckers. …
> 4. Execute the hostages. … This needs to be accomplished in such a way that people for hundreds of miles around will see, tremble, know, and scream out: *let's choke* and strangle those blood-sucking *kulaks*.[12]

These repressions were supposed to target *kulaks,* yet, because their number was small, Lenin declared the entire regions *kulak*. Such orders in fact encouraged the collective punishment barely different from that practiced by the Imperial government. In suppressing the rebellion of the Don Cossacks, Trotsky called on Soviet soldiers "to raze Cossack villages to the ground" regardless of the economic status of their residents and discussed whether to use gas against them.. Mikhail Tukhachevsky, a former tsarist officer unsophisticated in class theory but favored by the Bolsheviks for his loyalty, ruthlessness, and military talent, believed that "in regions where rebellion has firmly taken root, … the struggle must be essentially conducted not against the bands, but against the entire civil population." He did attempt to gas peasants hiding in the forests when he was ordered to suppress an insurgency in Tambov Province.[13]

[10] Figes, *Peasant Russia,* pp. 349, 350.

[11] V. Krasnov and V. Daines, *Neizvestnyi Trotskii: krasnyi Bonapart* (Moscow: OLMA Press, 2000), p. 171; Nestor Makno, *Vospominaniia* (Moscow: Respublika, 1992), pp. 258–269.

[12] Document No. 4 in Diane Koenker and Ronald Bachman, eds., *Revelations from the Russian Archives: Documents in English Translation* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1997), p. 12. Emphases in the original.

[13] Documents Nos. 195 and 204 in V. Danilov and T. Shanin, eds., *"Antonovshchina": krest'ianskoe vosstanie v Tambovskoi gubernii v 1919–1921* (Tambov: Redaktsionno-izdatel'skii otdel, 1994), pp. 177, 185. Moscow suggested that Tukhachevsky use gas with "the utmost

"If war is hell," writes Arno Mayer, "then civil war belongs to hell's deepest and most infernal regions."[14] Revolutionary civil wars provoke the greatest violence, and as Stathis Kalyvas observes, "Rather than the magnitude of fatalities, it is the victimization of non-combatants that best approximates the perception of excessive violence and atrocity in civil wars."[15] By the summer of 1919, Russian society had been brutalized by World War I, two revolutions, the Red and White terrors, and violence committed by various armed groups that belonged neither to the Reds nor to the Whites. The stakes of the opponents were high, ideologies extreme, and the price of human life low. All major participants of the civil war committed crimes against civilians. White terror matched the Red one if the violence perpetrated by anti-Soviet Cossacks is taken into account, and the peasants resisting the Reds and the Whites committed equally gruesome atrocities against their enemies. The top Bolshevik leaders encouraged "merciless reprisals" and sweeping preventive repressions to intimidate civilians. Soviet security forces routinely burned entire villages in rebellious regions, machine-gunned rioting crowds, and executed 10 peasants for every Communist killed in riots.[16] If the Reds had to retreat, they often killed all persons they had arrested, sometimes to the hundreds.[17] Soviet officials in the Tambov Region complained that the Reds unleashed terror that was "beyond human imagination and resembles medieval times."[18]

The principle of collective responsibility adopted by the Bolsheviks dictated them to take hostages from the families of insurgents or, alternatively, "class enemies" to facilitate the surrender of guerrillas and to prevent attacks on Soviet administrators and the destruction of railway tracks, bridges, and telegraph lines. This became a standard Bolshevik practice. A typical order written by Tukhachevsky and Antonov-Ovseenko, the two most important Soviet commanders in the Tambov region, warned civilians:

> 2. In villages that hide weapons, the Political Commission of the district … will execute hostages if the weapons are not surrendered.

caution." Because of shortage of gas shells, only a few dozen were fired and apparently did no harm to the rebels. Krasnov and Daines, *Neizvestnyi Trotskii*, p. 161.

14 Arno Mayer, *The Furies: Violence and Terror in the French and Russian Revolutions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 323.

15 Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 54.

16 P. A. Aptekar', "Krest'ianskaia voina," *VIZ* 1:50–55, 1993; P. A. Aptekar', "Krest'ianskaia voina," *VIZ* 2:66, 1993; Document Nos. 347 and 503 in Alexandr N. Iakovlev, ed., *Sibirskaia Vandeia,* Vol. 1 (Moscow: International Fund *"Demokratiia,"* 2000), pp. 236, 324; P. A. Novikov, "Povstancheskoe dvizhenie v Irkutskoi gubernii (1920–1921)," *Belaia gvardiia* 6:67, 2002; Brovkin, *Behind the Front Lines of the Civil War*, pp. 346, 347; Figes, *Peasant Russia,* p. 351; Document No.125 in Shishkin, *Za sovety bez kommunistov*, p. 158; Document No. 213 in Danilov and Shanin, *"Antonovshchina,"* p. 189.

17 Brovkin, *Behind the Front Lines of the Civil War*, p. 344.

18 Samoshkin, *Antonovskoe vosstanie*, p. 18.

3. If hidden weapons are found, the oldest working family member present will be summarily executed.
4. The family in whose house a bandit is hiding is to be arrested and exiled from the province, and the oldest in the family will be summarily executed.
5. Families which provide sanctuary to bandit family members or who hide the property of the latter will themselves be regarded as bandit families, and the oldest working member of such a family will be summarily executed.[19]

Another order issued by these commanders specified the details of the intimidating procedure:

Upon arrival, [a Red unit] surrounds the district and takes between 60 and 100 of the most prominent [peasants] as hostages. ... The residents have two hours to surrender any bandits, weapons and bandit families. ... If the residents do not surrender the bandits and weapons within two hours, ... the hostages are publicly executed, after which new hostages are taken and a second request to surrender the bandits and weapons is made. ... In case of defiance, new executions are carried out, etc.[20]

Within three weeks of the issuing of these orders, the Bolsheviks took 3,430 hostages. In his "Instructions on the Eradication of Banditry," Tukhachevsky wrote: "The morale of the bandits can be broken only if they know suppression will be conducted consistently and with cruel persistency. ... Once a threat has been made, it should be fulfilled even if it means cruelty."[21] His subordinates followed the instructions. One of them reported: "Women were taken hostages along with men and also were executed. This method yielded good results."[22] In some villages, the Bolsheviks arrested all males, and in Parevka Village they shot 80 hostages, perhaps most of its adult population.[23] Hostage taking was a far harsher measure than the attempt to gas those hiding in the forests. After all, most of the latter were guerrillas, whereas most hostages were civilians. The Soviet officials reported that public executions of hostages "made an astounding impression on the population,"[24] and thousands of deserters and guerrillas subsequently surrendered.[25] Judging from the increasing use of this draconian measure, Bolsheviks found it effective when the superiority of their forces in the rebellious regions was overwhelming, and it was such after they had defeated the Whites in November 1920. If the Bolsheviks knew that members of certain families were among the guerrillas, they took hostages from these families, regardless of their economic status. However, if the authorities had no information as to which households supported the guerrillas, they repressed predominantly "class enemies," whatever

[19] Document No.198 in Danilov and Shanin, *"Antonovshchina,"* p. 179.
[20] Document No. 210 in Danilov and Shanin, *"Antonovshchina,"* p. 188.
[21] M. Tukhachevsky, "Bor'ba s kontrrevoliutsionnymi vosstaniiami," in Samoshkin, *Antonovskoe vosstanie,* pp. 127, 241.
[22] Document Nos.176 and 212 in Danilov and Shanin, *"Antonovshchina,"* pp. 163, 188.
[23] Documents Nos.182 and 206 in Danilov and Shanin, *"Antonovshchina,"* pp. 168, 186.
[24] Samoshkin, *Antonovskoe vosstanie,* p. 127.
[25] Brovkin, *Behind the Front Lines of the Civil War*, p. 387.

their attitude toward the guerrillas, and they continued to refer to peasant insurgencies as *kulak,* regardless of their actual social composition. Thus, although in practice the Bolsheviks tacitly admitted that their class theory did not reflect reality, they nonetheless used it to explain peasant resistance and to justify sweeping repressions in rebellious regions.

Another form of hostage taking was the mass deportation from rebellious regions. The Reds first resorted to deportations in 1918, when they uprooted three Cossack villages in the North Caucasus and distributed the lands of the deported Cossacks among ethnic minorities and outsider loyalists.[26] These deportations resembled Imperial colonial practices: The government removed a hostile population and replaced it with people expected to strengthen its authority, undermining the resistance of the unfriendly majority surrounding the loyal enclaves. During the suppression of the Tambov uprising, the Reds used deportations more systematically. They took a quasi-census of the population in rebellious villages and then incarcerated in concentration camps families whose members were absent, along with the relatives of "notorious thieves, horse-lifters, incorrigible bandits and all vicious elements."[27] These families stayed in the camps for two weeks. If the fugitives failed to report during this period, their relatives were deported out of the province and sentenced to forced labor, and their property was confiscated and passed to loyalists in order to fuel the conflict among peasants. However, those fugitives who did report were granted immunity from the death penalty, and their families were released.[28] The Reds viewed deportations as a relatively mild punishment intended to destroy the civilian infrastructure of the insurgents while sparing "ignorant class allies," giving them a chance to integrate into proletarian society after their class consciousness has been awakened. By August 1921, the Bolsheviks had incarcerated or exiled 100,000 people, half of them guerrilla relatives taken hostage.[29] Deportations were a primary means of suppressing the Tambov rebellion, and Tukhachevsky listed them among the leading strategies of counterinsurgency.

All these repressions were sanctioned by top Bolshevik leaders, including Lenin.[30] However, after they gave their punitive units carte blanche in conducting mass repressions, the Red terror became too general to have a class orientation and often went out of control. Intoxicated with power, security troops and grain-collecting teams – consisting of poor peasants, factory workers, adventurers, shady characters of all sorts, and ethnic minorities who suddenly found themselves in favor with the authorities – routinely killed prisoners, raped women, and robbed peasants regardless of their economic status; they

[26] N. Bugai and A. Kotsonis, eds., *"Obiazat' NKVD vyselit' grekov"* (Moscow: INSAN, 1999), p. 23; Holquist, "To Count, to Extract and to Exterminate," pp. 127, 131.
[27] Aptekar', "Krest'ianskaia voina," *VIZ* 1:53–54, 1993.
[28] Document No. 177 in Danilov and Shanin, *"Antonovshchina,"* p. 165.
[29] Holquist, "To Count, to Extract and to Exterminate," p. 131.
[30] Brovkin, *Behind the Front Lines of the Civil War*, p. 386.

also engaged in drunken brawls and extracted bribes.[31] The Irkutsk revolutionaries observed that some Soviet units behaved "like gangs of rowdy cutthroats." Rural Bolsheviks often had "extremely low moral standards and sometimes criminal records. … They are a bunch of privileged individuals pursuing selfish interests." Officials in Turkestan wrote that "crimes committed by Red Guard units provoked the growth of *basmachi* resistance."[32] In Tambov Province, *Cheka* reported "systematic plunder by our troops,"[33] while a Red staff officer painted a gloomy picture of Soviet practice and its consequences:

> Instead of cleansing villages of bandits, our units … cleansed them of all property. … Nobody investigates who is right and who is wrong. … During procurements of forage (i.e., looting), some peasants who had been loyal to us lost all their property and homes because they were burned down. They found themselves in a hopeless situation. They want to avenge the loss of their property and see no alternative to joining the bandits. … [As] a result [guerrilla] bands mushroom. … [Red] commanders act like lunatics who, on seeing that their house has caught fire, attempt to extinguish it with kerosene.[34]

All these actions violated government policies and elevated the level of violence far above what the top counterinsurgents believed to be rational. These crimes undermined the moral standards of Soviet soldiers, ruined the prestige of the authorities, and drove peasants to support the insurgents even if they did not share their ideals. The Bolshevik leaders, being briefed regularly by *Cheka,* knew about the abuses but regarded them as an inevitable by-product of the revolution caused by the petty bourgeois mentality of the masses and the incompetence of local authorities. They attempted to reduce random violence mainly by appealing to "the revolutionary consciousness" of the Soviet forces. Some commissars made more serious efforts, ordering the summary execution of marauders and rapists.[35] However, the government realized the scope of the damage random violence inflicted on its policy only belatedly, and even then, its efforts to curb it were minimal and ineffective. The Communist leaders learned remarkably little from this experience and developed no procedures to prevent similar crimes in the future.

[31] Samoshkin, *Antonovskoe vosstanie*, pp. 19, 24, 25; Brovkin, *Behind the Front Lines of the Civil War*, pp. 305–309, 371; Document Nos. 66 and 87 in Shishkin, *Za sovety bez kommunistov*, pp. 94, 113.

[32] Novikov, "Povstancheskoe dvizhenie," p. 66; N. E. Eliseeva, "S. S. Kamenev o bor'be s basmachestvom," *VIZ* 5:41, 1995. *Basmachi* were Islamic anti-Bolshevik insurgents in Central Asia.

[33] Brovkin, *Behind the Front Lines of the Civil War,* p. 371. *Cheka* was the abbreviation for the Extraordinary Commission for the Fight against Counterrevolution and Sabotage, the Bolshevik secret police in 1918–1922.

[34] Samoshkin, *Antonovskoe vosstanie*, p. 42.

[35] Document Nos. 273 and 296 in Iakovlev, *Sibirskaia Vandeia*, Vol. 1, pp. 185, 204; Document Nos. 209 and 278 in Danilov and Shanin, *"Antonovshchina,"* pp. 187, 236.