Stalin's insistent endeavors at conquering Finland

By Carl O. Nordling

Within the period 1938 to 1948, Stalin managed to expand his "personal Empire", the Soviet Union with its fringe of satellites, by annexing a number of formerly independent nations. Among these were several that had not belonged to the Empire of the Czars. But although he made many attempts, Stalin failed to annex Finland to his own Empire. He began with preparations in the 1930's, waged war in 1939-40, tried with subversive, "fifth column" methods in the summer of 1940, made sure that Finland became involved in the Soviet-German war 1941-45 and launched a formidable offensive in the shade of Operation Overlord. All in vain. Finally, in 1948, he reverted to his fifth columnists and urged them to seize power and make Finland a "People's Democracy". Although this scheme worked perfectly in Prague, it was a flop in Helsinki.

Preliminaries

Long before Stalin was ready to make an attempt at annexing Finland he tried to destabilize the Finnish society in various ways. One means was devastating strikes maneuvered by the Comintern. He got his chance in 1927 when a big labor conflict broke out within Finland's metal industry. On Moscow orders Arvo Tuominen, the Finnish Communist leader, worked for a prolonged conflict. Months passed and in the end even Tuominen realized that "albeit being the agents of the Comintern and the Profintern, we had to consider other things [than the aims of the Comintern]. We had to take into consideration that the whole branch of metal industry in Finland would die down if the conflict was to continue indefinitely." Tuominen's argument did not move the Kremlin, however. "The day after came the great crash. And it came with such a force that it was about to knock us down altogether. […] As the motive for continuing the struggle the Kremlin said that it was important to fight the armaments. […] [T]hey said that Finland was increasing her armaments on behalf of the Western Powers in order to prepare for a war against the Soviet Union. […] Thus our worst fears were confirmed: Moscow's final aim was to extinguish Finland's metal industry or at least decimate it far below its former capacity" resulting, of course, in large-scale unemployment.[1]

Another method implied influencing public opinion. During the 1930's the Finnish Communists (on Moscow orders) organized two clubs as meeting places for writers and artists. One was called "Group Kiila", the other "Club 33". No one knew that the inner circle of Group Kiila consisted of dependable Communists or that its magazine was financed by Moscow. The contents of both this "Kiila's Album" and another magazine called "Soihtu" were controlled by Moscow.[2]

At the same time more conventional preparations for a war of conquest were used in the form of espionage. In 1929-30 Soviet spies were caught after having collected information about the Finnish fortifications on the Karelian Isthmus,[3] and in 1936 a spy was sent to map out roads and bridges in the "waist" of Finland in the north.[4]

Apparently Stalin took a serious interest in Finland in these years, because in December

1935, Otto Kuusinen, Stalin's private secretary, confidentially told his wife Aino (both Finns): "It is likely that there will soon be a war. Finland is secretly preparing an attack and is about to annex Karelia and other areas as far as Murmansk."[5] This conversation took place about three years after the Finnish Government had put down a Fascist insurrection at Mäntsälä, 50 km from Helsinki and just a few months after all the political parties had issued a joint statement about Finland's adherence to common Scandinavian neutrality. Kuusinen went on to say that the coming war was likely to be a general war and that the Germans were only waiting for the Finnish attack, so that they could find a pretext for rushing to the aid of the Finns. Kuusinen even expected Great Britain and Norway to take part in the attack in order to get strongholds on the Soviet coast about Murmansk. "Finland is so small, yet so important!" It became clear to Aino Kuusinen that the Soviet Union was preparing a war against Finland and that Stalin had designated her to be the new Soviet Envoy to Stockholm. At that time Mrs. Alexandra Kollontay, a former Menshevik, held the post, but Kuusinen said that she had frequently betrayed the Soviet Government politically and even sided with Leon Trotsky when serving in Mexico.[6] (Mrs. Kuusinen managed to avoid the appointment and was sent to Japan instead.)

Stalin shelved his plans against Finland until later. And already in 1939 he decided that it was about time to make use of two of the leading Finnish Communists whom he had saved for the purpose. These were Otto Kuusinen (then 58) and Arvo Tuominen (then 45). Almost all the other Finnish Communists in Russia had been executed or sent to the *Gulag* (where even Mrs. Kuusinen eventually had to spend 17 years). Kuusinen, who had fled o Russia in 1918, was employed by Stalin as a trusted secretary and never fell in disgrace, an almost unique lot.

Tuominen had been politically active in Finland in the 1920's and 1930's but he was living in Moscow when the Great Purge started. The year 1937 represented the culmination when anyone could be arrested any day. Tuominen proposed to Kuusinen that he should carry out his Comintern work from Stockholm instead. Amazingly, his request was granted. Tuominen, and soon also his wife, left for Stockholm in the spring of 1938. The Swedish police considered that Tuominen had little chance to get a residence permit in Sweden. Since he was, however, befriended with Sigfrid Hansson, Head of the National Board of Welfare (which handled the permit applications) it was not a problem. Mr. Hansson, brother of the Prime Minister, simply had his friend promise not to interfere with Swedish politics.[7] As time went by, Tuominen became more and more skeptic about Stalin's policy, but he was reluctant to defect openly as long as he could avoid it.

At the same time as Tuominen went to Sweden, a young Soviet diplomat, Boris Yartsev, contacted the Finnish Foreign Minister clandestinely. Yartsev told Minister Holsti that the Soviet Government expected Hitler to attack the Soviet Union, thereby making use of Finland as one of the bases of the offensive. When this happened, the Red Army would advance and meet the enemy as far away as possible from the Soviet territory. Even if Finland resisted the Germans, Yaartsev insisted, it could not stop them without Soviet aid. Moscow claimed to know already that if the Finnish Government refused to let in the German troops, it would be overthrown by Finnish fascists. Therefore, it was essential

that Finland accepted Soviet aid in order to avoid these calamities. At least the Soviet Union needed "guarantees" that Finland would not side with Germany in case of war. Later also Prime Minister Cajander talked with Yartsev and made clear that Finland was firmly resolved to stay neutral and not let in *any* foreign troops.[8] Stalin obviously indulged in expectations of a possibility to station Soviet troops in Finland without having to put down armed resistance. The placing of Tuominen in Stockholm may have been part of this scheme.

Finally, in August 1939, Stalin managed to conclude his pact with Hitler, the famous Molotov-Ribbentrop-Pact, which granted him a certain "sphere of influence" including Finland and the Baltic States.[9] As soon as this was brought to a successful close, he hurried to extort bases and through traffic permits from the Baltic States. When this was done, he turned to Finland.

Attempt at Persuasion

On 5 October 1939 Molotov sent an invitation to Finland's foreign minister, Mr. Eljas Erkko, to come to Moscow for the discussion of "certain political questions". Molotov required an answer within 48 hours. Erkko was late answering and did not go to Moscow. Instead he sent the 69-year-old diplomat, Mr. Juho Kusti Paasikivi to carry out the discussions with Mr. Molotov. Soon it became clear that Stalin wanted Finland to give up part of her territory on the Karelian Isthmus and to cede the Hangö Peninsula as a naval base to the Soviet Union. He was cautious enough to offer Finland territorial compensation (in eastern Karelia) for these claims. With these precautions Stalin must have hoped to get at least much of the proposed concessions from Finland.

The ostensible reasons given by Stalin for the demands on Finland were:

(a) Securing the safety of Leningrad;

(b) Becoming satisfied that Finland will have firm, friendly relations with the USSR.[10]

These reasons are legitimate enough. Every government should, of course, try to secure the safety of the biggest cities in the country. Also, the government of any state, big or small, should pursue friendly relations with all neighboring nations.

Therefore, let us consider what should a considerate leader have done in order to achieve the two ends stated by Stalin.

Leningrad's northern defense line (on the Karelian Isthmus) was short and strong--, as subsequent events were to prove--and Stalin certainly knew that. The safety of Leningrad was, however, to a certain degree dependent on the safety of the Red Banner Fleet (the Baltic section of the Navy). If an enemy should at some time dominate the main part of the Gulf of Finland, the Fleet would be more or less confined to its base at Kronshtadt off Leningrad. (This actually happened within two months of the German attack in 1941.) There the warships would become attractive targets for air attacks and, if it came to the worst, also for field artillery. Therefore, the military safety of the Fleet and of Leningrad would have been enhanced if the Soviet Union were able to shut out enemy warships from a large part of the Gulf of Finland. In order to accomplish this, it would be

necessary to block the passage through the Gulf by means of mine fields and anti-submarine nets. To be effective, such nets and mine fields would have to be defended by land-based batteries that could sink any number of minesweepers. The batteries in turn would have to be able to defend themselves against attack from the sea, from the air and from the ground.

There exists just one spot in the Gulf of Finland where such mine fields and defending batteries could be located in order to block the main part of the Gulf from outside penetration. This is the area between the island of Naissaar off Estonia and the group of small islands off the Porkkala Promontory on the Finnish side. (Map 1.) The open space is just 37 kilometers (km) wide at that spot, and thus a minefield could have been defended by forts on each side armed with 6-inch guns (a very common type of the period), which had a firing range of 18 km. A single battery of 10-inch guns on Naissaar would have covered the middle part of the water space and another of 16-inch guns with a range of about 50 km placed on the same island could have defended both forts against battleships. Since the fort islands would have been separated by more than 1,000 meters (m) of water from the mainland and from other islands, the defense against overland attacks would not have been much of a problem. The conditions for building harbors and airfields for maintenance transports are favorable in both places.

A certain advantage of the Porkkala-Naissaar defense line is the possibility of using fire control towers not exceeding 28 m in height in order to cover the space of water between the forts. Even though a sleight haze is common in these waters, the visibility seldom falls below 18 km. Since the Soviet Union did not have access to any kind of radar at the time, these circumstances were important when selecting the place for a barrier across the Gulf.

As a matter of fact, the German and Finnish naval forces succeeded in locking up the Red Banner Fleet during a large part of World War II by means of a barrier in the Porkkala-Naissaar position. Incidentally, 22 years before, two czarist forts placed precisely in this position had guarded the Gulf of Finland (as parts of the so-called Peter the Great Sea Fortress). There had been a 10-inch battery on either side.[11]

Stalin, however, had acquired a base at Paldiski on the Estonian coast and followed suite by demanding that Finland lease the Hangö Peninsula (with adjacent islands) 76 km opposite Paldiski. Without radar there were no practical possibilities to keep this stretch of water under surveillance from the bases at each end, not even under optimum weather conditions. In order to keep mine fields safe from enemy sweepers, warships or airplanes would have been needed to patrol the waters day and night. Thus the barrier would have been almost as effective whether or not it contained batteries at Hangö. We may note in this connection that the British did not succeed in stopping or sinking the two German battleships *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* and the cruiser *Prinz Eugen* when they passed through the Channel on 12 February 1942. The width of the Channel is 34 km at its narrowest point, i.e., at Dover, where the British then controlled the passage with radar and long range artillery.

Any competent naval officer could have informed Stalin of the worthlessness of the Hangö-Paldiski barrier. Stalin probably realized this himself, since it is known that he

amazed government officials and generals with his knowledge about things like tanks, airplanes and cannons.[12] And at the end of July 1939, Zhdanov, the architect of the German Pact, had invited Admiral Kuznetsov for a brief cruise in the Baltic. During this cruise the two senior commanders, L.M. Galler and N.N. Nesvitsky (who had served in the Imperial Navy in World War I), pointed out to Zhdanov "the area in which mine fields had been laid down in 1914, from the island of Naissaar off Estonia to the Porkkala Peninsula in Finland".[13] These mine fields had actually, as intended, barred German access to the Russian base at Kronshtadt during the entire World War I. In the summers of 1943 and 1944 the Germans were able to keep even Soviet submarines from passing the Porkkala-Naissaar barrier (by means of deep and double wire netting).[14]

If Stalin and Zhdanov had intended the claims on Estonia and Finland as a means of improving the defense of Leningrad and Kronshtadt, they could not have afforded to miss such an opportunity as the Porkkala-Naissaar line. They would rather have given up all other claims in order to convince the respective governments of the utmost importance of these bases for the Soviet Union.

It seems, however, that during the protracted and difficult negotiations between the Soviet Union and Finland, Naissaar and Porkkala were mentioned just once, on 14 October 1939. Stalin then said that Czarist Russia had possessed 12-inch guns at these spots. He went on to say: "we don't ask for Porkkala, nor for Naissaar, since these places are too close to the capitals of Finland and Estonia, respectively. […] It is a law of naval strategy that passage into the Gulf of Finland can be blocked by the cross fire of batteries on both shores as far out as the mouth of the Gulf".[15]

The truth is that a flotilla of small minesweepers could easily operate in the middle of a minefield between Hangö and Paldiski--or anywhere else at the mouth of the Gulf. Battleships and heavy cruisers could then have made a successful dash into the Gulf, just as demonstrated by *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* on 12 February 1942. As it happened, the Paldiski base, as situated on the mainland, had to be abandoned when German ground forces approached it less than a month after the beginning of Operation Barbarossa. The fact that the Hangö base held on for another four months made no difference for the defense of Leningrad.

It is obvious that Stalin did not speak the truth when he explained the reasons for his claims to the Finnish delegation on 14 October 1939. Most certainly he knew that the Gulf of Finland could not be effectively blocked by means of the bases he claimed. He also deliberately forwent the existing possibility to create an effective barrier across the Gulf.

Instead Stalin insisted on Hangö, the port and the peninsula, and certainly he had some good reason for wanting these objects. Let us consider the military value of Hangö. Its harbor was excellent for ships of all drafts, free from ice in practically all winters, and equipped with 1,500 m of quays, with warehouses, cranes, railroads etc. The town had 7,000 inhabitants (all of whom were expected to move from their homes in case of cession) and could thus easily accommodate 25,000 troops or more. In April 1918 a German division landed at Hangö and advanced along the railroad and the highway taking Helsinki on the tenth day. If Stalin planned to invade Finland, Hangö would have

proved an ideal bridgehead for a couple of armored divisions attacking the Finnish army in the rear. And when Stalin finally got the coveted peninsula after the Winter War, he equipped it with much more mobile than stationary artillery. The former included three 12-inch guns (with a range of 50 km), four 7-inch guns and three 4-inch guns, all mounted on flatcars.[16] The latter (coast artillery proper) consisted of thirteen 5-inch guns. This means that one volley from the mobile batteries weighed about five times as much as one volley from the stationary batteries. Apparently about 80 percent of the total firepower was thus intended for use along some stretch of railroad! In comparison with Hangö, the Porkkala skerries were totally unusable as a takeoff for an invasion. Even the Porkkala Peninsula lacked a harbor and railroads, and could therefore not have served as a springboard for a swift advance toward Helsinki. Instead, the 12-inch mobile guns at Hangö could have begun bombarding Helsinki after having advanced just half way along the Hangö-Helsinki railroad.

Stalin's claims concerning the areas adjacent to the Soviet border on the Karelian Isthmus were of the same nature as those concerning Hangö. Besides removing the border 30 to 40 km from the Gulf of Kronshtadt along its entire length, they included Berezoviy Island with its fort and part of the peninsula of Primorsk, both areas about 100 km from Leningrad and 65 km from Kronshtadt. (Map 2.) Part of Finland's main defense line, the so-called Mannerheim Line, run through the claimed area, and would have been chopped off if the claims had been accepted. Even more important was the fact that the claimed areas included the artillery forts of Saarenpää (six 10-inch guns with a range of 23 km) and Humaljoki (six 6-inch guns, range 18 km). These forts could not interfere with the traffic on the Gulf of Kronshtadt fairway, but they could give badly needed artillery support to the troops defending the right flank of the Mannerheim Line. (Deficient artillery power proved to be the weakest point of the Finnish defense system in the 1939-40 war.) Giving up these forts and part of the Mannerheim line would have been tantamount to giving up most of the Karelian Isthmus right from the beginning of a defensive war. On the other hand it is obvious that both forts would have been completely useless for any enemy attempting to invade the Soviet Union by way of the Isthmus. From a military point of view it would have been reasonable to ask for a strip of land along the northern coast of the Gulf of Kronshtadt. By insisting on Berezoviy Island and on part of the Mannerheim line to the very end of the negotiations, Stalin revealed that he wanted to break up the Finnish defense and place the Government of Finland in a position of Soviet dependency.

The idea of dependency based on fear of reprisals seems to have been Stalin's notion of the state of "friendly relations" that he wanted to exist between Finland and the Soviet Union. And as much as Stalin was willing to bargain about territorial details, as much he was determined to get the idea of dependency through. Therefore, in addition to all the claims ostensibly motivated by some kind of "military necessity" (that might have been mistaken for something that he really thought was necessary), Stalin included just one little claim *not* motivated in this way. He asked that Finland cede her part of the "Fisherman's Peninsula" (*Rybachiy*) on the Arctic coast. This peninsula has four bays, two on either side, and the frontier was drawn in such a way that the Soviet Union had got two bays and Finland two--all very good fishing grounds. This part of the Finno-Soviet border had been agreed upon less than 20 years before, i.e., it derived its origin

from the peace negotiations with Lenin's Government in 1920. Stalin had been People's Commissar for Nationalities in this Government and the Finnish delegates discussing Stalin's claims had also taken part in the 1920 negotiations. Therefore both Stalin and the Finns knew perfectly well the real reason of the exact position of this stump of the frontier--which was, of course, to grant fair fishing possibilities to both countries. Now Stalin wrote in the Soviet Memorandum of 14 October 1939: "A separate question arises with regard to the Fisherman's Peninsula in Petsamo, where the frontier is unskillfully [!] drawn and has to be adjusted in accordance with the annexed map".[17] If Finland had accepted this obviously false motivation and ceded her part of the Peninsula, it would have been tantamount to saying: "We don't dare oppose you; if you do wrong, we will call it right and pretend that we believe it to be right." Such was the conduct Stalin wanted from a government he would call having "firm, friendly relations with the Soviet Union".

A sensible leader of a great power would certainly have been able, in the circumstances, to acquire friendly relations with Finland in the normal meaning of the word. First he would have refrained from territorial claims other than those required for establishing an island-based barrage across the Gulf of Finland and a protected fairway through the Gulf of Kronshtadt. Then he could have encouraged Finland to sign a defense treaty with Sweden and given his blessing to a joint Finno-Swedish fortification of Åland (which would have barred foreign warships from entering the Gulf of Bothnia). And the ruthless Stalin could have done even more to make the Finnish Government feel safe and friendly toward him. Just as he had dismissed Maksim Litvinov to placate Hitler and had liquidated thousands of officers for the same or other reasons, he could have liquidated the Finnish Communist leaders Otto Kuusinen and Tuure Lehén or turned them over to the Finnish authorities for prosecution.

By insisting on claims that were utterly harmful to the defense of Finland Stalin did not obtain firm and friendly relations with Finland. Instead the Finnish Government became even more wary and offered only very limited cessions in exchange for territorial compensation. Stalin then decided to create "friendly relations" in his own way and attacked Finland along the entire frontier with his Army, Navy and Air Force, on 30 November 1939.

The Finnish Government never analyzed Stalin's behavior to the extent that has been done above. They did not quite realize the absurdity of Hangö as a barrage base. But they happened to draw the right conclusions, anyhow. They thought it would be dangerous to give Stalin the little finger (e.g., Hangö or any adjacent island) lest he should take the hand. The Baltic States, Churchill and Roosevelt were later to learn this truth the hard way.

A couple of weeks before the attack, on 13 November 1939, the very day when the Finnish delegation went back home, Otto Kuusinen and Comintern Secretary-General Georgi Dimitrov sent a letter to Arvo Tuominen in Stockholm ordering him to return immediately to Moscow. A commission involving great responsibility was awaiting him there, so they said. In another letter Tuominen was told that the commission would be connected with a new arrangement of the relationship between Finland and the Soviet Union. Tuominen did not go. He defected publicly from Stalin and from Bolshevism.[18]

This was another disappointment to Stalin. If Tuominen had been in Moscow in November 1939, he would not have been able to refuse the commission as Prime Minister in a Soviet Government of Finland, the government that Stalin would set up after having conquered the first square kilometer of Finnish territory.[19] In the actual situation, it was obviously a disadvantage to have Tuominen in Stockholm instead of Moscow. Therefore, we can rest assured that Stalin had originally planned the whole advance on Finland otherwise than it turned out. President Paasikivi later testified that "judging from the discussion at the last conference it looks like Stalin was disposed to reach an amicable settlement".[20]

The Soviet treatment of Lithuania gives an idea of what kind of amicable settlement Stalin had in mind for Finland. Lithuania was given large areas in exchange for a treaty that granted the stationing of 20,000 Soviet troops at certain bases on Lithuanian territory. The local authorities had no means to check the number of troops actually entering the bases. On 7 June 1940 Molotov demanded the dismissal of Lithuania's Minister of the Interior and on 14 June he presented Lithuania with an ultimatum, demanding a new government, one that would "possess the confidence of the Soviet Union". Molotov rejected President Smetona's proposal to nominate the new Prime Minister and made sure that some Lithuanian Communist like Tuominen got the office.[21] Had an "amicable settlement" of this type been arranged with Finland, Arvo Tuominen could have arrived from Stockholm and taken over the office of Prime Minister, looking as if he had nothing to do with Moscow at all.

Winter War

On 13 November 1939 Stalin apparently realized that the Finnish Government would not comply even with his somewhat reduced claims. Had Stalin's aims been limited to the areas that were considered absolutely essential for the defense of the Soviet Union, the Red Army could now have attempted to take them by force. What actually happened was something different. The Red Army invaded Finland along the whole length of the frontier. And on the second day of the war, a Communist Government for the "Democratic Republic of Finland" was set up in the first population center conquered in the campaign. Since Tuominen was not available as Prime Minister, Kuusinen was used for this post. The next day "Comrade" Molotov and "Mister" Kuusinen signed a treaty between the USSR and the "Democratic Republic". This spectacle could hardly have anything to do with the improvement of Leningrad's defense. Instead it was an obvious attempt--however unsuccessful--to transform Finland into a Soviet Republic.

That the Winter War was intended as a war of conquest is especially evident from the proclamation issued to the Finnish people. This lengthy proclamation was announced over the Soviet Radio on 1 December 1939 (the second day of the war), pretending to emanate from some secret Finnish radio station, and the essential parts of it read:

"In conformity with the will of the people […] a new government for our country has been formed in eastern Finland. […] In order to take part in the common struggle, hand in hand with the heroic Red Army, the People's Government has already set up an initial Finnish Army Corps. During the coming battles this Corps is going to be supplemented

with revolutionary workers and peasants volunteering for membership. The Corps is going to be the strong 'picked troops' of the future Finnish People's Army. This initial Finnish Army Corps will be given the honor to carry the banner of the Democratic Republic of Finland to the capital [Helsinki] and to hoist it on the President's Palace to the pleasure of the toilers, and so as to strike the enemies of the people with terror. […] As soon as Helsinki […] has been reached the Government will be renewed and supplemented with representatives for those parties and groups that have lined up with the People's Front of the Toilers. […]".[22]

Clearly, if Stalin had started the Winter War just in order to capture Hangö, Vyborg and the border zone, he could have pointed out in his proclamation how impudent it was to take part in the defense of such a "dispensable part" of the country. Instead he spoke about a Communist march into Helsinki. That meant that the prestige of the great Soviet Union was put at stake. The failure to occupy Helsinki would certainly mean a loss of prestige for the Soviet Union--and so it did, when eventually Stalin chose to finish the war without having accomplished the conquest of Finland.

As for Stalin's preparations for the Finnish campaign, it is worth noting that he had ordered plans for an offensive against Finland already about the end of June 1939. The proposed war was then called "a counter-offensive blow against Finland", and the task of planning for it was given to K.A. Meretskov, then the Commander of the Leningrad Military District. According to Stalin's orders, Meretskov had to plan for a three-week campaign ending with the conquest of Finland. Meanwhile other groups were working independently on the same problem, each taking their separate solutions to Stalin. Shaposnikov, the Chief of the General Staff, seems to have presented a rather realistic plan requiring several months to overcome the Finnish resistance. Meretskov, however, consulted directly with Stalin in making up his three-week plan, and the latter was eventually accepted in preference to Shaposnikov's.[23] At the beginning of the Winter War, 20 Red Army divisions were deployed against 15 of the Finnish Army.[24] Toward the end of the War there were 46 Soviet divisions and seven armored brigades--totaling about a million men, according to calcualations.[25] Apparently, the war had not progressed according to plan. But still on 10 December 1939 the Soviet Radio announced that the divisions operating on the northern part of the front would soon reach the Swedish border. When a little later, the division at the head in the direction was surrounded and annihilated, a written order was found forbidding the troops to cross the Swedish frontier.[26]

The above mentioned radio announcement also said that the Soviet war operations were expected to be finished off within eight more days. The slowness so far was ascribed to bad weather conditions. All Soviet prisoners taken at the early stage of the war testified that their commanding officers had told them that the whole war was a formality. The advance would be more like a triumphal procession, because the oppressed people of Finland would receive the liberators with open arms.[27]

All the evidence points to the conclusion that the military command of the Red Army had received direct orders to take Finland in so and so many days. Although Stalin certainly knew a lot about guns and tanks, he lacked the higher military education that would have made him understand the impossibility of carrying out such an order.

After two months with very little progress, Stalin decided to swallow his annoyance and offer to negotiate with the Ryti Government. This offer was cabled to Stockholm on 29 January and triggered a process that led to the peace treaty of 13 March 1940. At that date the Red Army had finally accomplished a real breakthrough by establishing a beachhead behind the Finnish defense line.[28] But at the same time, Finland was on the verge of calling for British and French assistance. If Stalin had not agreed to make peace, an allied invasion of Scandinavia could have followed and probably a German intervention as well. There seems to have been an agreement that Germany would be entitled to take Åland in case the USSR penetrated further than Vyborg.[29] And, of course, the Western Powers might have declared war on the Soviet Union. In short, the whole situation would have run out of Stalin's control.

Springboard Achieved

Tactical breaks such as this played an important role in Stalin's strategy. The idea seems to have been to resume the conquest at some opportune moment. As Stalin once explained to Tito about restoring the King of Yugoslavia: "You need not restore him forever, take him back temporarily. Then you can slip a knife in his back at a suitable moment".[30] So, true to his principles, Stalin postponed the final subjection of Finland and satisfied himself with creating a very good starting position for the next step. Besides securing the Hangö Peninsula, he inflicted on Finland a frontier about 150 km longer than the former one that had run across the narrowest part of the Karelian Isthmus. This meant that the Finnish Army would have great difficulty in manning the considerably extended defense line, while the uncountable divisions of the Red Army would get much more elbowroom for an attack than they had possessed on the narrow Isthmus. Incidentally, a boundary line drawn from the Gulf of Vyborg to Lake Ladoga would have been the ideal for the defense of Leningrad--if defense had been Stalin's purpose.

In case of an attack against Finland, Lake Ladoga would provide the Red Army with transportation capacity supplementing the few roads and railroads on the Karelian Isthmus, so naturally Stalin got hold of the whole lake. He also rejected the natural topographical boundary along a swamp strip running parallel to the shore of Lake Ladoga about 25 km inland. Instead he secured a frontier, running through farmland and settlements, about 10 km on the Finnish side of the swamp strip. With both Hangö and these extended deployment areas in Karelia in Soviet hands, Finland's defensive position was considerably impaired.

After the Moscow Peace Treaty, Stalin soon made his intentions regarding Finland very clear. A strong opinion emerged in Norway, Sweden and Finland in favor of an alliance of defense that might keep these countries out of the war that had begun in September 1939. This proposed alliance was effectively stopped, however, by Molotov on 29 March 1940. The Soviet Prime Minister simply declared that such an alliance would be nothing else than an attempt to break the Peace Treaty and would be directed against the Soviet Union, which could not avoid drawing certain conclusions… .[31]

The strategic railroad building program that the Soviets had started in the summer of 1939 was resumed after the Winter War. It included six branch lines from the Murman Line toward the Finnish border. Moreover, 15 strategic highways were built in the same

area. Within this 200-km wide border zone no less than 90 air fields were found when the Finnish Army advanced into the area in the summer of 1941.[32]

Attempt at Subversion

On 22 May 1940, some Finnish citizens with known Communist sympathies founded the "Society for Peace and Friendship with the Soviet Union" (SPFSU). The Society soon made a savage lunge against the leaders of the Finnish Social Democratic Party saying that these leaders "still opposed the building up of friendly relations between Finland and the USSR".[33]

The gradual sovietization of the Baltic States during the summer of 1940 were called "gratifying facts" by one of the leaders of the SPFSU and it was pointed out that the same might occur in Finland. On a public meeting held by the SPFSU in June 1940, it was decided to send a sharp message to the Speaker of Parliament and to the political parties, accusing the Government of not acting in the interest of creating confiding relations with the USSR. Its final point read: "On these grounds the Peace Society holds that the present Government is unfit and lacking in ability to arrange the relations between Finland and the Soviet Union in a way that coincides with the interest of the people. Consequently, the Society expects that a new Government be formed." The SPFSU described the 1939 attack as understandable and fully justified and argued that the sensible thing would be that Finland subordinate herself to the USSR just as the Baltic States had done. The alternative would be the same subordination by force.[34]

The tone of the various meetings was both jubilant and threatening. There were shouts of "Long live Soviet-Finland" and "another two weeks and we shall see where we are going" and "the police will not dare lay hands on us because the Soviet Union is behind us". The last slogan expressed the naked truth. The SPFSU was in fact being backed by the whole strength of the Soviet propaganda machine, which had started on a new phase.[35]

In connection with the conclusion of the Peace Treaty and during the following months, the Kremlin repeatedly assured that the Treaty had settled all political questions. Notwithstanding, in July 1940, Molotov presented three new demands on Finland within ten days. The most threatening was the insistence on a right for Soviet military transit traffic on Finnish railroads to and from the Soviet base at Hangö, where there were already armored units and heavy railroad artillery.[36] This happened the day after Sweden had granted such transit rights to belligerent Germany, and the Finnish Government saw no possibility to deny the USSR the demanded right. The agreement was signed on 22 July 1940.

In conversations with Finland's Envoy to Moscow, J. K. Paasikivi, Molotov required that Finland should leave the Soviet-Finnish frontier unfortified--including the strip across the Hangö Peninsula. This was a conspicuous change since the peace negotiations, when Molotov had said: "Build as many fortifications as you want, in this respect we make no claims".[37]

In the beginning of August 1940, the SPFSU distributed a message that the Soviet Union

would probably occupy the key points of Finland within two weeks. The USSR would justify this occupation with the need to secure the transit traffic over the railroad network.[38]

During 1940 and the beginning of 1941 Soviet spies were sent to Finland, mostly on very short terms.[39] Some of these spies had been told that the annexation of Finland was just a question of time.[40] The military preparedness for an annexation was present all the time in the shape of a strong and well-equipped army corps deployed in Soviet Karelia in addition to the regular border garrisons.[41]

Amazingly, after the forced resignation of the Finnish Minister of Provisions, Väinö Tanner, Ambassador Zotov soon complained that the two prudent Ministers, Ernst von Born and K. A. Fagerholm, were obstacles to good relations with the USSR. Both men were the most likely ones to promote a cautious foreign policy.[42] In October 1940 the Soviet Union once more vetoed a plan for a Union between Finland and Sweden (one that was explicitly based on the provision that Finland refrain from any plan of a revenge war).[43]

In the fall of 1940 the pressure on Finland was considerably eased, but the idea of annexation seems to have subsisted. During a party at the Soviet Embassy in April 1941, Military Attaché Smirnov--somewhat drunk--explained to the kitchen personnel that the Soviet Union was going to liberate Finland once and for all in August that same year[44].

Lightning Attack

Actually, the Soviet Air Force began attacking Finnish warships at 6:05 A.M. on 22 June 1941, hours before the Red Army had got orders to resist the German assault along the entire demarcation line in Poland. Two hours later also the Hangö batteries opened fire without the Finnish troops having made any move.[45] Thus began the so-called "Continuation War" with the USSR playing the defensive part until 9 June 1944, when the Red Army launched a formidable offensive against Finland. This offensive was a complete surprise to the Western Allies, as Laurence Steinhardt, the American Ambassador, told his Finnish counterpart in Ankara at the time. Steinhardt expected that the Red Army, by virtue of its superiority, would reach Helsinki in the middle of July at the latest--perhaps at a cost of up to 200,000 casualties.[46] The enormous concentration of troops, aircraft and armor indicates that the attack was intended as an attempt to conquer Finland at a time when the world's interest was focused on the Normandy Invasion.[47]

For all that, the Finnish Army managed to check the offensive round about Vyborg, and to bleed the Soviet forces to such an extent, that following out the plan would have required thorough reorganization. In this situation Stalin decided to suspend the conquest and offer Finland the same unwieldy border as after the Winter War. Instead of Hangö he now claimed the Porkkala Peninsula with an adjacent area on the mainland, 380 square kilometers of land area in all, and reaching to within 19 km of the center of Helsinki. (Map 1.) The area of this enclave is 25 times larger than that of Kotlin Island, where the Kronshtadt Naval Base is situated.

Subversion Anew

Again Finland was placed in a position of dependence just as in 1940. By contrast with, e.g. Hungary and Bulgaria, Finland was left unoccupied by the Red Army. The local Communists, however, managed to get the post as Minister of the Interior for Yrjö Leino, the son-in-law of Otto Kuusinen. Andrey Zhdanov, Stalin's right-hand man headed the Control Commission for Finland and gave orders to Leino as to a subordinate. Leino's first task was to fill up the State Security Police with reliable Communists, but more was to follow.

Said Zhdanov: "Dismiss the old police commissioners and appoint new ones." Leino: "That would be against the Constitution." Zhdanov: "What the hell are you talking about? Those are the laws of the bourgeois regime, but don't you know that you are supposed to serve the proletariat on your post as Minister of the Interior?" Leino: "I still have to follow the law that remains in force in Finland." Zhdanov: "In that case you must institute laws that conform better with our aims".[48]

There is no mistaking about Zhdanov's intentions, but progress was very slow during 1946 and 1947, owing to a certain resistance by Leino. In the middle of 1947, the Finnish Communist Tuure Lehén, an expert on coup tactics and strategy, was sent from Moscow to Finland. He too had once been married to the same daughter of Kuusinen, as was Leino. It would become his task to start wildcat strikes in the big industrial centers of Finland.[49]

At the same time, Stalin seems to have despaired of getting results from the work of Leino. In January 1948, Mr. and Mrs. Leino went to Moscow on a secret visit, where they met Zhdanov and Malenkov. Zhdanov accused Leino of being responsible for the decrease in the Communist votes in the recent elections and for not having secured any Communist influence in the Confederation of Trade Unions. He then told Leino: "The Soviet Government have dealt with your case and decided that you must resign from your post as Minister of the Interior.[50]

A few days after this incident, Zhdanov complained to Milovan Djilas: "We made a mistake in not occupying Finland. Everything would have been set up if we had." Molotov consoled him: "Akh, Finland--that is a peanut".[51] What Zhdanow called "our mistake" was, of course, Stalin's decision about how to conquer Finland, i.e., by infiltrating Finland's political system--a task given to Zhdanov. It was he, Andrey Zhdanov, who had failed (Stalin would never admit to a mistake), and consequently Zhdanov died all of a sudden half a year later--at the age of 52.

In February 1948, Stalin "suggested" to the Finnish Government that the two countries should conclude a Mutual Aid Pact. This was at the same time that the Czechoslovak Communists staged the so-called Prague Coup and transformed Czechoslovakia into a "people's democracy"--after having infiltrated the Police Force. The same fate seemed to be predestined for Finland. If the proposed Pact had split Finnish opinion in two camps, for and against, demonstrations and riots could have been triggered. The Communists were prepared, especially since they were in possession of the Mobile Police Force that would be able to tip the scale in case of disturbances.

Yrjö Leino, still holding the post as Minister of the Interior, was scared when he learned on 9 March 1948 that he was to go to Moscow with the Finnish delegation to negotiate the Pact. The State Security Police had recently brought him a document of unknown origin bearing the title "Organization Plan for the Resistance Movement in Finland 1947". He had not been able to determine whether the document was authentic or a Communist fabrication. Anyway, the very same night, to be on the safe side, he invited the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, General Aarne Sihvo, to dinner. He told Sihvo that he was alarmed about the possibility of disturbances in the country during his coming absence. Sihvo declared that he would take the responsibility for the public security, and that nothing surprising would be allowed to occur during the next few weeks.[52] Sihvo called off his own participation in the Moscow talks and remained at his post. He also assembled an "experimental force" with armor and artillery not far from the capital.[53] Nothing at all happened during the seven weeks when the negotiations were carried through. Two days before the ratification of the Pact, on 26-27 April 1948, the Head of the Helsinki Police Force disarmed the whole Mobile Police Force in spite of wild protests from the Communist Chief.[54] With this action the danger of a Communist coup was definitely over. Stalin's fourth attempt had miscarried. He never got another opportunity and Finland stayed independent throughout the Soviet Era.

Why did Stalin Fail on Finland?

Stalin conquered no lesser territories than did William the Conqueror; he was no less terrifying than Ivan the Terrible and no less powerful than Peter the Great. He succeeded in enlarging his Empire with about a hundred million subjects in Eastern Europe. Yet he failed to include little Finland among his acquisitions. What were the reasons for this failure?

Obviously he did not reckon with meeting an adversary that was different from the rest of them. The "amicable settlement" tactics failed in the fall of 1939 because the Finnish Government did not realize that when Stalin invited them to "negotiations", he used this word just for the sake of appearances. They were naive enough to regard negotiations as negotiations, and they expected the bargaining to continue with mutual concessions until the parties would meet somewhere between the initial bids. They even accepted with equanimity a breakdown in the negotiations because they did not expect Stalin to start a war at the beginning of the least suitable season.[55]

Then many other factors combined to make the Winter War an abortive conquest. Stalin trusted his spies who had told him that the "masses" in Finland were dissatisfied and would welcome a Communist regime. He also trusted Comrade Arvo Tuominen to rally the Finnish workers against their "oppressors" who had defeated them in 1918. In reality, Tuominen was thoroughly disappointed in Stalin after the Great Purge and the Pact with Hitler. He urged the Finnish Communists to volunteer against the intruder, and the workers in general appeared as patriots.[56] Therefore the Red Army forces found themselves unprepared to face a united nation with a determined army instead of the welcoming masses they had expected. Thus, the war was drawn out long enough to produce unforeseen reactions in other countries.

Stalin had better luck with the subversive movement in the summer of 1940, and he

probably was on the verge of launching a coup like those in the Baltic States. But before having time to settle the deal, Finland had granted Germany troop transit rights between Vaasa and the northernmost part of occupied Norway. This was done on 19 August 1940, within a month after the USSR had extorted such rights from Finland.[57] A coup in this situation could have led to a premature confrontation with the Germans, something that Stalin probably shunned like the plague.

In 1944, Stalin had to pay attention to the opinions among his allies and to the Tehran agreements. His only chance to conquer all of Finland was to produce a *fait accompli* within a week or so while the whole world focused its interest on Operation Overlord. However, after an initial stage of confusion, the Finnish officers and men composed themselves and put up a furious resistance to the Soviet assault. Thereby the Soviet advance became delayed to such an extent that Stalin once more had to consider the detrimental side effects that the pursuing of the original plan would have caused. Again the cautious Stalin found it advisable to suspend the conquest.

When he considered the situation ripe for a conquest in 1948, he was once again betrayed by one of his own, the patriotic Communist Yrjö Leino. Even the seemingly unscrupulous Zhdanov proved to be too lax for inciting a coup. Both were probably "harmed" by their environment: the confident, law-abiding and inoffensive people who encompassed them in Helsinki of 1948.

To sum it up: From Stalin's point of view there were two renegades who tipped the scale to the benefit of Finland: Arvo Tuominen and Yrjö Leino--at that time Communists but nonetheless Finnish patriots. These two brave men have been improperly underrated from the Finnish point of view.

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Back to World War II