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**THE WESTWARD EXPANSION OF THE USSR**

By John A. Armstrong



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### I. Significance of the topic for understanding the Soviet system.

Between 1939 and 1946 the USSR acquired access to a broad band of territories along all of its western frontier except parts of the far north, increasing the Soviet population by 21 million or approximately one-eighth. The advances of the World War II period came after nearly two decades of virtually complete territorial stability both for the Soviet system and its sphere of influence. Furthermore, these advances have had no formal sequel; contrary to many expectations, no other territories have been directly incorporated into the USSR.

From the standpoint of international law the Soviet annexations constituted clear violations of numerous treaties of non-aggression,\* as well as the multilateral obligations of the USSR as a member of the League of Nations. From the standpoint of power politics, however, the annexations seemed essentially defensive, designed to acquire a glacis against attacks and to eliminate the threat of Ukrainian "Piedmonts." I should doubt that that there is

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\*With the exception of Transcarpathia, nominally voluntarily relinquished by Czechoslovakia. The memoir by Frantisek Nemecek and Vladimir Moudry, The Soviet Seizure of Subcarpathian Ruthenia (Toronto, 1955) was a revealing source, but publications in Czechoslovakia during 1967-68 and by émigrés after 1968 might add more evidence. It is also clear that Stalin intended Transcarpathia to be a gateway assuring direct access to Hungary as well as the removal of the last significant Ukrainian Piedmont.

much to be gained by reexamining in great detail the purely international aspects of these annexations. My impression is that neither the Western powers' diplomatic publications nor Soviet histories have added much to the evidence of German documents and memoirs published in the decade after World War II. A close reexamination of Soviet activities within the annexed territories, however, might well throw new light on Soviet intentions toward its allies (successively Nazi Germany and the Western powers). For example, the indoctrination manual for Soviet troops moving into Eastern Poland went far, in my opinion, to refute contentions that Stalin looked to a long period of friendship with Germany.\* I know of nothing in Soviet publications which really provides convincing evidence on this point, but recent émigrés who held apparatus posts in the occupied territories ought to be questioned on their instructions. In a somewhat similar but less direct fashion some Soviet memoirs of the last months of World War II suggest that the writers had been instructed to disregard formal frontiers of the USSR by preparing as rapidly as possible for installing puppet regimes in the adjoining

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\*Partiino-Politicheskaja Rabota v Boevoj Obstanovke: Sbornik Dokumentov, Izdannykh vo Vremia Osvoboditel'nogo Pokhoda v Zapadnuju Ukrainu i Zapadnuju Belorussiju (Moscow: Gosvoennizdat, 1940). Issued for official use of the Red Army Political Administration, the book was lent to me briefly by the late Geroid T. Robinson.

countries\*

Much more can be learned about Soviet intentions and capacities in the international field by considering the internal aspects of Soviet annexation policy and local reactions to Soviet control. Studies should, wherever feasible, compare aspects of the western annexations to parallel developments in the East European satellites. During the 1950s, when most studies of the annexations were made, it was still uncertain that the Communist regimes could maintain control over the satellites for a prolonged period; conversely, many observers thought that if control could be maintained as long as in the older Soviet regions a similar penetration of control would result. We are now in a position to see that in thirty years East European Communist regimes have not been able to achieve the degree of control attained in the USSR by the late 1940s.

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\*I deal with both of these points in The Politics of Totalitarianism (New York, 1961), and have not examined much of the flood of Soviet memoirs since that date. This outline has no pretensions as a bibliographical review. It is, nevertheless, surprising how few solid research studies dealing with the 1939-53 period in the western territories have appeared. The early postwar series on Soviet affairs concentrated on the old USSR. Thus the Research Program on the USSR and the Munich Institute for Study of the USSR published little dealing primarily with the western territories. Apart from the books I mentioned the best resources for the beginner are the articles in émigré journals such as the Baltic Review, the Ukrainian Review, and especially the Ukrainian Quarterly. All vary widely in thoroughness and objectivity. The monthly Digest of the Soviet Ukrainian Press (Karlplatz 8/III, 8 Munich 2), while highly selective, is very reliable.

Intellectual life in East Europe is freer and more in accord with national traditions; the spirit of national independence is much higher than it was in most Soviet nationalities; and the intangible elements of customary ways of life persist more strongly. Various explanations for the difference can be advanced: traditions of independence reinforced by the vestigial formal sovereignty of the East European states; the lack of large-scale immigration of Russians or uprooting of natives; above all, the brief duration of Stalin's intense totalitarian rule. In all of these respects the western annexations are intermediate; hence it would be very rewarding to examine in detail the degree of persistence of the elements just noted, and the extent to which each is correlated with the varying explanations for East European resistance to Communist Gleichschaltung.

Apart from the intrinsic interest of the subject, a detailed comparative examination of the success of Communism in East Europe and the western annexations would illuminate the sources of dissidence in the "old" USSR. There is considerable evidence to suggest that the East European satellites constitute the immediate source for Soviet intellectuals, and perhaps for the ordinary Soviet citizen, of most of their unorthodox ideas, even if such ideas are ultimately derived from the West. Far too little attention has been directed to the possibility that, from 1939 on, the newly annexed western territories

performed a similar role. There were internal police barriers between the new territories and the old USSR for some years, but it is probable that these barriers were never as impermeable as were (at least until the late 1950s) the formal frontiers of the USSR. Today Soviet sources admit that the superior level of consumer services in the Baltic republics is widely appreciated in other parts of the Union. There is also evidence that clandestine nationalists from Galicia deliberately sought jobs in the Donbass in order to escape arrest and continue their anti-Soviet propaganda. In between these extremes there is a wide range of ways (which few Western works on the USSR even hint at) in which the western territories may have acted as windows on the West for the older portions of the Soviet Union.

## II. Scope of the western annexations.

Fortunately, the number of distinct areas annexed to the USSR between 1939 and 1946 is large enough to permit meaningful comparative analysis. By careful selection of areas one may control specific factors (such as those suggested above); such an analytic comparison is far more promising than the easier approach of examining territories lumped together by legal or cultural criteria. A brief survey of the annexations will, I hope, make this point clearer. From the chronological standpoint it is most important to stress the need for extending any study

(except one confined to Transcarpathia) back to the initial period of Soviet occupation in 1939-40. While the impact of the Soviet regime during this period was transitory, it was important both for its direct effect on the occupied populations (particularly through elimination of substantial leadership elements) and as an indication of the range of options which the regime has considered. Since there appear to have been two distinct phases of Soviet policy--a mild one down to June 1940 and a harsh phase from then until the German conquest--it is even possible to make some longitudinal comparisons.

Probably not much useful work can be done on the areas acquired from Finland, since nearly all of the native population was evacuated. The same is true of the Kaliningrad region of northern East Prussia. The southern portion of Bessarabia was directly incorporated into the Ukrainian SSR in 1940 as the Akkerman oblast (later renamed the Izmail oblast, possibly because the Soviet authorities were under the misapprehension that "Akkerman" was a German rather than a Turkish name), but in 1954 was absorbed in Odessa oblast. I have never seen any indication that this small area, with a population of very mixed ethnic origin, presents any special features of interest to the investigator even if (as appears unlikely) he can find sufficient available information to warrant detailed investigation.



The two Lutheran Baltic republics, Latvia and Estonia, obviously constitute a unit, although the presence of Riga with its polyglot population makes the former more complex. Roman Catholic Lithuania, with its very different history, usually requires separate consideration in many respects. In fact, there are three distinct "Lithuanias" available for most comparative purposes: the Republic as it existed between 1919 and 1938; the Memel area, seized by Germany at the latter date, which therefore did not experience Soviet rule until 1945; and the Vilnius area of Poland attached to Lithuania by Soviet fiat in 1939.

In contrast to these areas, which enjoyed greater or lesser experiences of national independence, the extension of the Belorussian SSR into areas of northeastern Poland involved both an old and a new Soviet population with relatively slight traditions of ethnic distinctiveness, especially after the retrocession (1945) to Poland of Bialystok and the "repatriation" of most of the large Polish population of the remaining areas. Western Belorussia comes as close as one can expect to the "pure" case of imposition of Soviet rule on a peasant population lacking distinctive consciousness. The central portions of Bessarabia were re-named the Moldavian SSR (which, in a curious sleight-of-hand, was deprived of almost all the areas--mixed Ukrainian and Moldavian--east of the Dneestr which had been in the old Moldavian ASSR). The overwhelmingly

peasant population of the Moldavian SSR, with its low levels of education and income, somewhat resembles Belorussia. Moldavians are, however, wholly distinct in language (though not in religious background) from the dominant Slavic populations of the USSR. In recent years discreet signs of irredentism have appeared in Romania proper, but during the Stalin period the Soviet leadership appears to have toyed with the notion of making Moldavia the Piedmont through which Romania as a whole might be absorbed into the USSR.\*

Finally, there is the West Ukraine, or rather the four Ukraines acquired by the USSR during 1939-46. Galicia (it is hardly worth considering separately the small strip retroceded to Poland in 1945) is by far the most important. The presence of a major center, Lvov, with an ethnically variegated population, and the virtual absence of previous experience with Russian rule are major distinctive features of Galicia. Its intense nationalist organization is (as noted below) by far the most significant characteristic of Galicia, making it almost unique among Soviet territories old or new. In contrast, the northern Polish Ukrainian holdings (Volhynia), Orthodox and Russian until 1920, have occupied a position intermediate between

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\*Arnold Kleess, "Rumanisch und Moldauisch," Osteuropa, V (1955), 281-84.

Galicia and the East Ukraine. Transcarpathia also has had an intermediate position, not because of previous experience with Russian rule, but because of the mixed religious affiliations of the Ukrainian population and the low pre-war cultural attainments. Finally, Bukovina (acquired from Romania) appears to have resembled Galicia, although information is scanty on this small area.\*

### III. Major topics for investigation.

The range of topics which might be profitably treated is limited only by the very elastic scope of activities undertaken by the Soviet regime, the availability of data, and the researcher's imagination. Consequently the few topics I shall consider below represent only those which I have encountered in my own work and can confidently assert could be investigated profitably.

#### A. Soviet guerrillas and underground operations.

The intensive case studies of the War Documentation Project, based largely on the immense German occupation records, deliberately omitted consideration of the

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\*I treated Soviet incorporation of all these areas some twenty years ago in Ukrainian Nationalism (New York, 1955; 2nd ed., 1963), and The Soviet Bureaucratic Elite: A Case Study of the Ukrainian Apparatus (New York, 1959; 2nd ed., 1966). The latter book contains a bibliography of the considerable number of important books which has appeared on the Transcarpathian question up to 1959. Although there have been some article-length treatments and numerous references in memoirs and general treatments of the war period, I do not know of any really intensive consideration of Soviet annexation policies since the 1950s.

newly annexed Soviet territories.\* At the time these studies were made (1951-54) the need for information on the old Soviet Union was so evident and the future prospects of the western territories so obscure that the limitation was clearly justified as a measure of economy. Those of us involved with the Project know that there is an immense amount of German documentation (since declassified) on Soviet partisans in the west; now there are scores if not hundreds of Soviet memoirs and histories dealing with the topic. Since the partisan episode throws a harsh illumination on many aspects of Soviet policy, it would be rewarding to extend the WDP investigations. Cooperation by the U.S. Government agencies which became the repositories of a large amount of preliminary cataloging and photocopying when the WDP was terminated could greatly facilitate a new investigation.

**B. Importation and local recruitment of Soviet apparatusists**

It is becoming increasingly apparent that the "normal" Soviet procedure is to recruit lower and middle levels of most elements of the party and state apparatus from

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\*The War Documentation Project was sponsored by Department of the Air Force, Human Resources Research Institute of the Psychological Warfare Division, under contract with Columbia University, Bureau of Applied Social Research. The standing committee was headed by Philip E. Mosely, with successive Directors Fritz T. Epstein and Hans J. Epstein, and Alexander Dallin as Director of Research. When (1962) the completed studies were declassified, I undertook to condense and edit them for publication as Soviet Partisans in World War II (Madison, 1964). The serious researcher will want to proceed to the fuller versions available through the Air Force.

local people, even at the oblast level.\* Clearly this practice should not be applied to areas just acquired. In the most important western territories the position of the local Communists, after formal dissolution of the Polish Communist Party in 1938, was obscure. We know something about the major officials imported to the West Ukraine from the East Ukraine, but little elsewhere. Did (as Soviet sources allege) independent sections of the "Communist Party of the West Ukraine" and "Communist Party of West Belorussia" persist with Comintern authorization during 1938-39? Were they a major source of recruits, and how long were these local recruits trusted? What was their ethnic composition (there are hints that Jews and Poles were preferred in more delicate posts, Ukrainians and Belorussians in public positions)? There is also the question of partisan leaders transferring to party and state positions after demobilization, and their relation to the police agencies. The latter question had crucial reverberations just after the close of the Stalin period when Beria's intrigues focussed on the frontier police apparatus and the general discrimination against non-Russified elements.

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\*See especially Joel C. Moses, Regional Party Leadership and Policy-Making in the U.S.S.R. (New York, 1974).

C. Industrialization and urbanization.

As elsewhere, the Soviet regime in the western territories has emphasized an urban way of life based on industrialization. These territories varied considerably in their levels of urbanization and industrialization when acquired by the USSR; even Latvia and Estonia were dominantly peasant, however, and the other acquisitions overwhelmingly so. Much could be learned from the precise patterns of economic mobilization sponsored by the regime. The kinds of industrialization appear to have differed from the extreme concentration of heavy industry common elsewhere; thus textiles and food processing, but also automotive construction, appear to have been relatively more important. The housing situation in older cities is constructed on West European models. Despite great population growth, some "slack" may have resulted from the disappearance of middle class elements and whole ethnic groups (Jews, Poles). These considerations deserve close attention. It would be especially useful to trace the settlement patterns of immigrants (particularly Russians) from the old USSR.

D. Collectivization of agriculture.

The rigid, sweeping collectivization of farms in the western annexed territories during 1949-50 came almost two decades later than collectivization in the old USSR,

and the success of the new Soviet collectivization contrasted sharply with the faltering, abortive contemporary efforts in neighboring Poland. Unfortunately, Soviet central and republic newspapers gave little space to the campaign. The Soviet dissertations I relied on have been off limits for 16 years. Access to oblast level newspapers would be very desirable; possibly some emigrant could provide anecdotal knowledge. On the other hand, there are now available the retrospective, raion by raion accounts in the monumental publication Istoriia Mist i Sil Ukrainy/koi SSR.\* An immense amount of detail suitable for comparative analysis is available in the volumes for the West Ukraine; unfortunately I know of no comparable data for Belorussia. There appear to be a considerable number of monographic studies for the Baltic republics, in their languages.

**B. Nationalist guerrillas and resistance to collectivization.**

The Istoriia Mist i Sil provides astonishingly detailed accounts of forceful resistance to collectivization in many raions. For details of this resistance and the brutal Soviet repression (involving mass deportation of peasants from many Carpathian districts) the abundant émigré press (available at the Ukrainian Free Academy, 206 West 100th St., New York) is indispensable.

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\*26 volumes (one for each oblast), Kiev, 1967-74. See my serial review in American Historical Review, LXXVI (December 1971), 1570-73; LXXVII (June 1972), 546-47; LXXVIII (June 1973), 716; LXXIX (February 1974), 193-94; LXXXI (February 1976), 189-90.

Since the appearance of the Istorija, moreover, it is possible to check émigré accounts (notably in Do Zbroj) of their guerrilla activity (Ukrains'ka Povstans'ka Armia-UPA) during 1944-49 against Soviet versions of resistance. An English doctoral candidate (David R. Marples of the University of Sheffield) proposes to do this. Unfortunately, such detailed Soviet versions of the lesser but significant Lithuanian armed resistance have not appeared. By using local materials and the good summary account by Stanley Vardys,\* a basis for comparing Lithuanian nationalist guerrillas with the UPA (there was some clandestine collaboration between the two groups) could be constructed.

B. Organized religion under Soviet rule.

Standard recent works on religion in the USSR have devoted slight attention to the western territories, and almost none to the periods immediately following annexation.\*\* Yet Soviet sources, generally not circulated widely in the West, show a keen awareness of the churches as one of the three major forces impeding imposition of full Soviet control (the others being spontaneous peasant resistance and the nationalist organizations). Indeed, Soviet authorities have made strenuous efforts to equate the religion to nationalist

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\*Slavic Review, XX (1963), 499-522.

\*\*E.g., Richard H. Marshall, Jr. (ed.), Aspects of Religion in the Soviet Union, 1917-1967 (Chicago, 1971). Cf. my review in American Political Science Review, LXVIII (December 1974), 1327-28.



violence, e.g., in the assassination of the West Ukrainian writer Iaroslav Halan' who collaborated with the Soviet regime in both anti-religious and anti-nationalist propaganda.\* Much the most virulent Soviet campaign has been directed against the Ukrainian Catholic (Uniate) Church. The eventual "happy ending" to Cardinal Josif Slipyf's long incarceration is well known, but no one has done a scholarly study of the fate of lesser clerics. The role of the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate, particularly the Exarch Nicholas, deserves candid exploration from many points of view. The role of the quasi-official Orthodox Church in suppressing the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church in Volhynia and similar organizations in Belorussia is also worth investigating.\*\* Less prominent activities of the Orthodox body in Transcarpathia, Bukovina, Moldavia, and the Baltic republics are well worth scrutiny. Nuances in treatment of the Roman-rite Roman Catholic Church in Lithuania (and vestigial Polish elements in Belorussia) as compared to the Uniate church need careful attention. Finally, the complex position of the Lutherans in Estonia and Latvia needs more study.

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\*See especially Vladimir Dobrychev, V Steni Sviatogo Iura (Moscow, 1971) and V. Cherednychenko, Natsionalizm proty Natsii (Kiev, 1970).

\*\*See the concluding section in Friedrich Heyer, Die Orthodoxe Kirche in der Ukraine von 1917 bis 1945 (Cologne, 1953); and the more general remarks in Ivan S. Lubachko, Belorussia under Soviet Rule, 1917-1957 (Lexington, 1972).

F. Intellectuals and cultural institutions.

Intellectuals have spearheaded most resistance movements in the Western territories, and nearly all Soviet policies have involved culture. It would be misleading, however, to treat the highly significant cultural factors as residual. As elsewhere in the USSR, especially in the East Ukraine, Soviet regime policies toward the national cultures have awakened opposition among intellectuals who began with purely professional attitudes toward the society, or even as strong supporters of Marxism-Leninism.\* Any comprehensive analysis should therefore take into account the following factors: (1) reactions toward Russification or Sovietization (e.g., introduction of "Soviet customs," use of "all-Union" calques on Russian words in the place of native expressions);\*\* (2) relations with Russian immigrants, especially officials and intellectuals; (3) attachment to latent or symbolic manifestations of local patriotism such as folklore, dialectology, antiquarian local history; (4) use of language in the educational system; (5) intermarriage. For some of these factors generalization can of course be extended beyond the intellectual stratum, but it would probably

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\*See especially John Kolarsky, Education in the Soviet Ukraine (Toronto, 1968), p. 136.

\*\*On "Soviet customs" and holidays, see A. I. Kholmogorov, Internatsional'nye Cherty Sovetskikh Natsii: Iz Materialakh Konkretno-Sotsiologicheskikh Issledovaniy v Pribaltike (Moscow, 1970), p. 73.

be wise to devote initial study to them both because of their roles in the communication process and because evidence is more apt to be available.

- G. Finally--but not exhaustively--I should like to call attention again to the importance of links between the peoples of the western annexations and the populations of the rest of the USSR. Clearly the significance of these links derives largely from the stronger attachment to national traditions mentioned earlier, but the means of communication should be examined carefully. At least until recently the western territories were more sealed off from the outside world (including the East European satellites) than many older metropolitan areas of the USSR, but infiltration of ideas and messages from East Europe and beyond should be examined where possible.