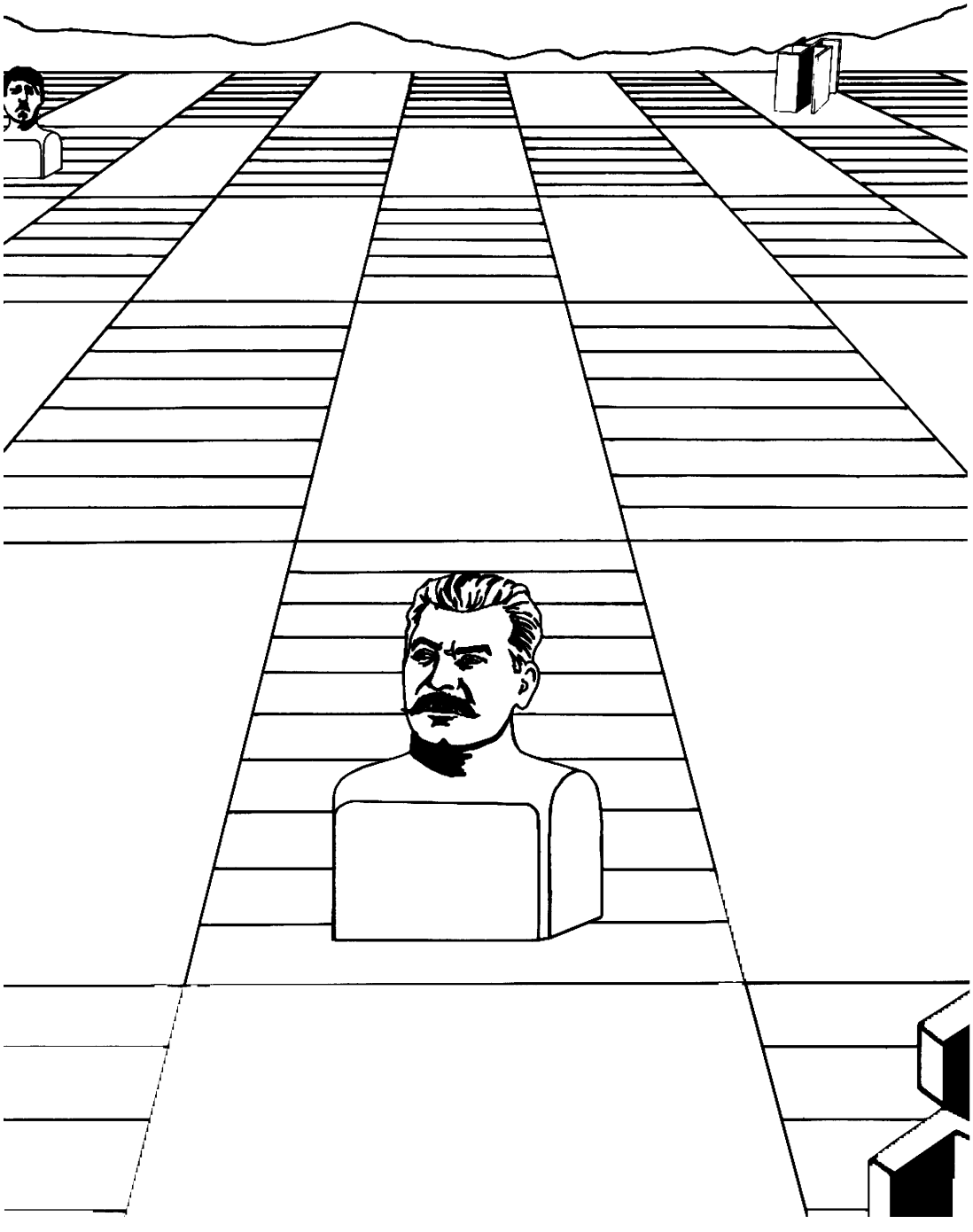
1 Introduction:
The BARBAROSSA Puzzle



Modern historiography has tended to overlook the role of police and intelligence services in the great social movements of history. Yet, since the days of Fouché, this has been a factor that historians ignore at the peril of gross error.

–R. G. Colodny, The Struggle for Madrid *(1958)*

The researcher is a detective, and his research task is to unravel a mystery; but he must first find and recognize that mystery—his "research problem." [1]

The research problem grew out of my wrong solution to quite another problem. In December 1966 I had completed a draft history of Soviet intelligence networks.[2] It was a structural analysis, limited to the channels through which foreign information flowed into and within the Soviet intelligence and decision-making system. I then realized the need for a short section on function as a caveat to any unwary reader not to assume that the vast size and far-flung operations of the Soviet strategic information system necessarily indicated that it was either efficient or effective. Once stated, the point may seem obvious, but mistaking omnipresence for omnipotence did fairly represent the logical pitfall of nearly all recent writings on Soviet intelligence and espionage. The apocalyptic cold war visions of *The Net That Covers the World, The Great Spy Ring,* and *Pattern for World Revolution*—to cite some typical titles of the period—seem almost hysterical compared with the bumbling reality.

Faced with a pressing deadline, I had the happy thought of demonstrating my point about the shoddy reality of Soviet intelligence with a short chapter limited to a single case study, one I could quickly write up. The best example to crib from the literature was obvious: Operation BARBAROSSA, that monumental instance of strategic surprise inflicted by Hitler on Stalin when at first light on Sunday, 22 June 1941, the Wehrmacht struck across the Russian frontier. Strategic surprise was complete and, except for the Soviet Navy and some scattered Red Army units, tactical surprise as well. The *Feldgrau* horde slashed its way forward through unprepared and disintegrating resistance, sweeping up 400 miles along the entire front in only four weeks. More than 1400 Russian aircraft were caught on the ground and destroyed in the first day alone. The Red

Army barely survived this initial stunning blow. Yet Stalin had received repeated warnings: from Churchill, from the U.S. State Department, from his own agents. Seemingly, only the monstrous fatuity of a Byzantine dictator and his authoritarian system could explain such blindness.

Moreover, *all* the authorities were agreed that this explanation—Stalin's unwillingness to face simple facts—did full justice to the scenario. Senior participants like Winston Churchill, Anthony Eden, Eduard Beneš, Cordell Hull, and Sumner Welles publicly complained after the war that their warnings had gone unheeded. The postwar revelations of documents and defectors had added that similar warnings had come through such top Soviet agents as Richard Sorge in Tokyo and Alexander Rado in Switzerland. The same version was accepted in their postwar studies by professional intelligence officials such as William Langer (OSS), Lyman Kirkpatrick (CIA), F. W. Deakin (S.O.E.), J. R. M. Butler (M.I.), Kenneth Strong (M.I.), L. A. Nicholson (M.I.6), and Peter Fleming (London Controlling Section).* Even Khrushchev added his concurrence in his "secret" denunciation of Stalin in 1956. Soviet historians (such as M. A. Nekrich), memoirists (I. M. Maisky, Valentin Berezhkov, Admiral N. G. Kuznetsov, and Marshal N. N. Voronov), and even the KGB itself quickly agreed and eagerly supplied new supporting evidence. (At least that was the Russian trend until 1967, when Stalin ceased to be fair game for either self-serving calumny or cautious scholarship.) All Western Sovietologists—Max Beloff, John Erickson, Raymond L. Garthoff, David Dallin, Bertram D. Wolfe, Colonel Albert Seaton—agreed, as did such sober scholars as Arnold Toynbee, Trumbull Higgins, Chalmers Johnson, and Gerhard L. Weinberg and such popular journalistic historians and memoirists as Paul Carell, Alan Clark, Ernest K. Lindley, Sefton Delmer, Ladislas Farago, Ronald Seth, William L. Shirer, Alexander Werth, Harrison Salisbury, and Louis Fischer, to name only the better known. Even Stalin admitted his surprise, after recovering from the nervous breakdown brought on by the

* Abbreviations are explained in the "Glossary of Abbreviations, Acronyms, Codewords, and Definitions," which precedes the Index.

unexpected invasion. Only the ever-foolish Anna Louise Strong had the nerve to rush into print in 1941 with a book titled *The Soviets Expected It.*

I could think of no historical event of comparable magnitude that had found such overwhelming consensus of informed authority. Overconfident, I winked away Shaw's admonition that "forty million Frenchmen *must* be wrong," and set about summarizing BARBAROSSA. Knowing from earlier readings that this consensus existed, I decided to limit my research to surveying the dozen or so standard accounts most readily at hand.[3] That task was allotted a mere fortnight.

I then made a fortunate blunder in "methodology." I should have adopted that hoary method appropriate to such secondary analysis as précis of a textbook or comparative case study in which the writer does not impeach his selected authorities. However, in my haste, I unthinkingly employed my usual research method, namely, an inductive one that treats all empirical generalizations as tentative hypotheses to be tested against all available instances. This method is of course both pointless and wasteful when faced with proven conclusions of the type BARBAROSSA seemingly fitted. However, it is a most efficiently productive method for tackling doubtful or controversial questions.

Accordingly, I began systematically collating the intelligence warnings contained in the sources. After about a week a curious point emerged: although all authorities presented the same conclusion, they varied rather wildly in the evidence presented. That is, while most authorities tended to merely repeat the same narrow set of four specific warnings, a few included one or two others that had turned up in their research. Taken together, these sources supplied twelve separate warnings. Moreover, by arraying the contributions of each authority in chronological order of publication, it became obvious that most later writers had failed to make full use of even the more readily available published sources. With few exceptions,[4] these authorities had impeached one another. Such contempt for evidence is a red flag for any bullheaded empiricist. In stubborn annoyance, I abandoned my arbitrary schedule and

chose a more open-ended one. But my intention was still to do only enough research to provide the first comprehensive and critical survey of *all* known warnings of BARBAROSSA. It had not yet occurred to me that my authorities' *conclusions* could also be fundamentally wrong.

By late January 1967 I had spent about three weeks rummaging my original sources, discovering some of the main memoirs, and beginning to browse in such basic published documentary collections as the transcripts of the Nürnberg war crimes trials, *The Foreign Relations of the United States,* and *Documents on German Foreign Policy.* A startling fact had emerged: the standard authorities had all misrepresented their data. Two widely cited warnings had never been uttered (warnings 27 and 56);* another was a simple forgery.[5] But far more serious than occasional scholarly lapses was that *all* the warnings had been universally assigned an unwarranted degree of specificity and credibility. That is, even the authentic warnings were mutually inconsistent, individually ambiguous, and often transmitted by less than credible sources. With unexpected insight, I suddenly recognized that the data fitted the Wohlstetter model of the role of intelligence in surprise attack.[6]

During the 1950s Roberta Wohlstetter wrote her brilliant analysis of the antecedents of the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. She did this at the RAND Corporation. When her study finally emerged in 1962 from "the clutches of an interminable, capricious clearance process," [7] it made a deserved stir among historians, political scientists, and intelligencers. It was the first explicit statement of a systematic hypothesis about the nature and cause of strategic surprise. She showed quite conclusively how strategic surprise *could* result from ambiguous information, information that only the wisdom of hindsight makes seem explicit. Moreover, her theory of surprise also requires a specific research method, which she has summarized as follows: "To understand the fact of surprise it is necessary to examine the characteristics of the noise as well as the signals that after the event are clearly seen to herald the attack." [8]

Wohlstetter also entered a tentative claim that her Pearl Harbor

* Eighty-four warnings are given in Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

analysis explained "many [other] examples of effective surprise attack," including specifically BARBAROSSA.[9] (Unfortunately, her own tentative and unsubstantiated generalization was uncritically accepted by most of us as a model for *all* cases of strategic surprise.)

Having long urged colleagues and students of the need and ease of replicating Wohlstetter's study,[10] I realized I now had a superb opportunity to do so myself. I immediately increased the fineness of my net to catch the BARBAROSSA "noise" as well as the "signals" to which I and all previous investigators had hitherto limited ourselves. The next two months were occupied with a more careful and critical screening of the literature to establish the magnitude, quality, and relative balance of both the signals and the noise.

In late March the second plateau in the research was reached. I had completed first rough drafts of the following basic chapters:

1. An outline of the German development of the BARBAROSSA plan (the present Chapter 2), which was intended only as a chronological summary of the actual decisions and actions taken by the Germans vis-à-vis Russia.
2. A chronologically organized description of the BARBAROSSA security leaks known to have reached foreign ears (Chapters 3 to 5). (Nearly half the final eighty-four instances and types of warnings had by then been identified.)
3. An account of the channels, both national and international, through which intelligence was diffused in the first half of 1941 (Chapter 6). The research covered the strategic information and intelligence systems of fourteen countries. This study yielded the unexpected finding that, perhaps uniquely in history, nearly every first- and second-class power was intercepting and reading most of the secret communications of nearly identical information about German actions.
4. A compilation of the rumors, inconsistencies, and ambiguities comprising the noise that confused the various non-German intelligence services (Chapter 7), which showed for the first time that, as with Pearl Harbor, much noise was associated with BARBAROSSA.
5. A discussion of Soviet perceptions, expectations, and decisions regarding the various indications of German intentions (Chapter

8). The main findings here were that while (1) the Soviet leadership did indeed generally fail to sense the imminence of war, individual perceptions and responses varied somewhat, and (2) Stalin did finally come to believe on D-minus-1 that attack was imminent, the abysmal lack of contingent preparations and the cumbrous inefficiency of his bureaucracy meant that even with a few hours' advance warning at the top, the system as a whole remained unwarned.

6. I also compared (in Chapter 9) the estimates of all other major national intelligence services and foreign-policy makers with those of Stalin. An important, original, and quite unexpected finding emerged. Previously, all commentators had ascribed Stalin's blind disregard of the warnings either to his authoritarian rule in general or to his personal paranoid tendencies. That is, they had presumed that Stalin stood alone in stubborn ignorance while the rest of the world's informed leaders clearly perceived the shape of the coming invasion. My research showed that, in fact, the great majority of world leaders and intelligence services had miscalculated Hitler's intention quite as badly as Stalin. Nor could their failure be written off any more than Stalin's on the grounds of insufficient information: as Chapters 3 to 5 and, particularly, 6 prove, their conclusions were all based on virtually the same data. Consequently, we have in BARBAROSSA a general and not an idiosyncratic case of failure in intelligence estimating. Authoritarianism or paranoia were not necessary conditions for this particular surprise attack.[11]

Proportionately few individuals and intelligence organizations had early and consistently read Hitler's intention to attack Russia: British Prime Minister Churchill, U.S. President Roosevelt, U.S. Secretary of State Hull, and Undersecretary Welles. These four were the only examples known to the standard authorities and were the sole basis, other than hindsight, for the hard historical judgment against Stalin. In addition, my own research was able to extend this list of more or less prescient leaders to include Czechoslovak President-in-exile Beneš, Pope Pius XII, and the following disbelieved persons: Japanese Ambassador to Berlin Ōshima; Italian chief of military intelligence (SIM), Cesare Amè; chairman of

the British Joint Intelligence Committee (J.I.C.), Victor Cavendish-Bentinck; and members of the Advanced Planning Enemy Section of the J.I.C. But those were about all, and they represent a very small proportion of the foreign policy leaders and intelligence experts in 1941. And, as the test of fact neared, some such as Hull grew *less* certain, and others such as Cripps wavered.

The research had succeeded only in disclosing a mystery. The warnings were available in profusion, yet nearly everyone had failed to understand them. Almost no one realized that Hitler had decided to smash Russia, no matter what. And the few such as Churchill and Beneš who had correctly fathomed Hitler's intent did not know why they had guessed right. Consequently, they could not present their warnings to Stalin in a convincing way. Why? I was now, for the first time, able to pose a key research question: *How* was Stalin surprised? As the reader will discover in following through the story, this initial question proved just off the mark—but close enough to lead easily to the right one. The question that ultimately gave the solution to the puzzle is: How did *Hitler* inflict surprise—on Stalin as well as on almost all the world's national leaders and intelligence analysts?

Up through Chapter 6 all the clues and all the "red herrings" available to world leaders and intelligencers on the eve of the invasion are presented. Thus at this point it should be *possible* for the reader to guess the solution, or at least to identify a set of alternative solutions, including the correct one. The person who succeeds will have done better than anyone did at the time. Chapters 7 and 8 give the additional evidence needed to *choose* the correct solution. Anyone who succeeds in doing this will also have outguessed all the military historians.

The reader can approach this book as, what Graham Greene would call, "an entertainment." It is, after all, a tale of strategic intelligence and, particularly, of counterespionage. But BARBAROSSA was not fiction. It was the most important international mystery of 1940/41. Its human costs and political consequences literally changed the world. Moreover, an understanding of *how* Hitler

surprised Stalin in 1941 gives us a far deeper understanding of how most of the puzzling cases of strategic surprise have been brought about—from Pearl Harbor six months after BARBAROSSA to the Arab-Israeli Six Day War in 1967. It may even help us understand and perhaps avoid future strategic surprises.