



Molotov Remembers, Inside Kremlin Politics, Conversations with Felix Chuev, Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Albert Resis, © 1991 Terra Publishing Center as *Sto Sotok Beded s Molotvym*, Ivan R. Dee, Inc., Chicago 1993.

pp. 14-5

In Berlin

Hitler was an extreme nationalist. A blinded and stupid anticommunist.

Did Stalin meet him?

No, I was the only one to have such pleasure. There are people of that kind now too. That's why we must pursue a vigilant and firm policy. Hitler [...] There was nothing remarkable in his appearance. But he was a very smug, and, if I may say so, vain person. He wasn't at all the same as he is portrayed in movies and books. They focus attention on his appearance, depict him as a madman, a maniac, but that's not true. He was very smart, though narrow-minded and obtuse at the same time because of his egotism and the absurdity of his primordial idea. But he didn't behave like a madman with me. During our first conversation he spoke a monologue most of the time while I kept pushing him to go into greater detail. Our meetings were most accurately recorded by Berezhkov. Fiction based on this subject contains a good deal of make-up psychology.

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Stalin was the greatest tactician. Hitler, after all, signed the nonaggression pact with us without the acquiescence of Japan! Stalin made him do that. Japan was deeply resentful toward Germany and gained no benefit from their alliance. Our talks with the Japanese minister of foreign affairs, Matsuoka, had great significance. At the end of Matsuoka's visit Stalin made a gesture that caught the whole world's attention. He per-

sonally went to the station to see off the Japanese minister. No one had ever expected this; Stalin never met or saw off anyone. The Japanese and the Germans were stunned. The train was delayed for an hour. Stalin and I made Matsuoka drink a lot, and we almost carried him onto the train. Seeing him off was worth it because Japan refused to wage war on us. Matsuoka himself paid for his visit to us [...]

And in 1945 I declared war on Japan. I called the Japanese ambassador to the Kremlin and handed him the note.

What was their reaction?

Their reaction? They were delighted.

On TV they showed how you and Stalin hosted Matsuoka in 1941. Stalin drank champagne and watched him. And you were holding a glass and smiling. Matsuoka took Stalin's arm [...]

He had already drunk quite a bit. The journalists made him do it. It was in my office. There were a lot of people. Events were moving toward war [...]

[4-29-82]

They say you and Matsuoka sang, "The cane was rustling [...]" when you went to see him off in 1941.

That happened [...] Why, he could barely stand up in the station [...]

[1-1-79, 3-9-79]

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We Wanted to Delay the War

All the history books say that Stalin miscalculated the beginning of the war.

To some extent, but it was impossible not to miscalculate. How could you know when the enemy would attack? We knew we would have to deal with him, but on what day or even what month [...]

It is known there were fourteen dates.

We are blamed because we ignored our intelligence. Yes, they warned us. But if we had heeded them, had given Hitler the slightest excuse, he would have attacked us earlier.

We knew the war was coming soon, that we were weaker than Germany, that we would have to retreat. The question was, retreat to where – to Smolensk or to Moscow, that's what we discussed before the war.

We knew we would have to retreat, and we needed as much territory as possible. We did everything to postpone the war. And we succeeded – for a year and ten months. We wished it could have been longer, of course. Stalin reckoned before the war that only in 1943 would we be able to meet the Germans as equals.

But there were the intelligence reports [...]

What is written about this is contradictory. From my point of view, there couldn't have been another beginning for the war. We delayed it and, in the end, we were caught asleep; It turned out to be unexpected. I think we could not have relied on our intelligence. You have to listen to them, but you also have to verify their information. Intelligence agents could push you into such a dangerous position that you would never get out of it. Provocateurs everywhere are innumerable. That's why you cannot trust intelligence without constant and scrupulous checking and rechecking.

Some naïve people, philistines, have written in their reminiscences: the intelligence agents spoke out, deserters from the enemy crossed the border [...]

You couldn't trust such reports. But if you were too distrustful you could easily go to the other extreme.

When I was the Predsovnarkom I spent half a day reading intelligence reports. The only thing missing was the date of the invasion! And if we had trusted these reports [and gone on a war footing] the war could have started much earlier. The task of intelligence was to report in a timely manner.

On the whole everyone expected the war would come and it would be difficult, impossible for us to avoid it. We delayed it for a year, for a year and a half. If Hitler had attacked us half a year earlier, you know, bearing in mind our situation then, it would have been very dangerous. So it was impossible to begin obvious preparations without revealing to German intelligence that we were planning serious measures. We took many serious steps, but still not enough. We didn't have time to finish very much. Some think Stalin should have to answer for all this. But there was the people's commissar for defense, the chief of the general staff [...] On the other hand [...]

Some people, Marshal Golovanov in particular, argue that the war caught the general staff asleep.

They were not asleep. But they had a directive ordering that the first reports not to be trusted, that they must be verified. Time was lost.

But that's a failing of Stalin's.

You may think so, of course. He was in a difficult situation because he didn't want the war.

And maybe Stalin overestimated Hitler? Maybe he thought Hitler was smart enough not to attack us until he finished the war with England?

That's right, that's right. Not only Stalin had this feeling but I and others did, too. On the other hand, there was nothing left for Hitler to do but attack us. He would never have finished his war with England – you just try to finish a war with England!

A writer described the beginning of the war this way: "Stalin cursed the ambassador to Germany Dekanozov and Molotov as well, who had boasted that now we would be friends with Germany."

He is spitting on and smearing me, knowing that now I can't publicly defend myself [...]

They write now that Stalin trusted Hitler, that Hitler deceived him with the pact of 1939, lulled his vigilance. Stalin trusted him [...]

Such a naïve Stalin. No. Stalin saw through it all. Stalin trusted Hitler? He didn't trust all his own people! And there were reasons for that. Hitler fooled Stalin? As a result of such deception Hitler had to poison himself, and Stalin became the head of half the world!

We had to delay Germany's aggression, that's why we tried to deal with them on an economic level – export-import.

No one trusted Hitler, but Stalin was so credulous! [...] He wanted to delay the war for at least another half a year, or longer. Everyone wanted this delay, everyone who was close to the concerns of the time. No one as close to the situation as Stalin could have avoided miscalculation. But in fact there was such a man who managed to find the way out, and not only to find the way out but to win!

A mistake was made, but of minor importance, I would say, because we were afraid to get ourselves drawn into the war, to give the Germans a

pretext for attack. That's how everything got started. I assure you [...]

To me, these were not our mistakes but our weaknesses. Weaknesses because I think psychologically it was almost impossible for us to be completely ready for war. We felt we were not yet ready, so it was quite natural for us to overdo it. But there is also no way to justify that. I personally don't see any mistakes in that. In order to delay the war everything was done to avoid giving the Germans a pretext to start it.

But Hitler had already made up his mind. It would have been hard to make him change it [...]

We weren't inside his mind, anyway. He was out to unleash the war in 1939. But when? We wanted a delay for a year or several months. Of course we knew we had to be ready for war at any moment, but how do you do that in practice? It was very difficult.

So many times we talked about this subject, and each time I tried to clear it up. After five, ten, fifteen years Viacheslav Mikhailovich made the same statements. And it was not an attempt to justify himself but an unshakable conviction. We were at the dacha in Zhukovka; Ivan Stadniuk, a writer, was visiting. Molotov had followed the publication of his novel The War. He liked it, gave some advice. After reading the third book of the novel he reproached the author for writing that Stalin had assumed the Germans would not attack us until 1942. Stadniuk had relied on memoirs of Marshal K. Meretskov.

But I consider that wrong. To slander a dead man, Stalin, as if he had said this. In the first place, Meretskov is inaccurate, you can't trust him on this. Stalin called him "Yaroslavets." Why "Yaroslavets"? People in Yaroslavl were so shiftily, he said, that there were almost no Jews. Russians themselves played such roles and one of them was Meretskov. I doubt Meretskov's accuracy when he wrote this! I was close to Stalin and I don't remember anything like that. I admit I could have forgotten something. Maybe he did say something of that sort, but with the word "probably." [...] You [Stadniuk] have written this to justify Timoshenko who in your book reflects upon the beginning of the war. Timoshenko wasn't a low-ranking officer – he was

people's commissar for defense! But did he measure up? So why slander Stalin?

I take a very critical view of your work. As you would have it, there appeared a man Timoshenko – who spoke more truthfully, and suddenly he is against Stalin! The point is not that we didn't divine the exact date of the attack; the point is that we didn't let Hitler into Moscow, Leningrad, or Stalingrad – that's the point! The crux, after all, is our final brilliant victory! And you cast doubt on Stalin now, when he is no longer alive [...]

"I proceeded from the assumption that thus would justify Stalin," Stadniuk said. "Why weren't we prepared? Because we supposed [...]"

But we were prepared! How is that – weren't prepared? That is wrong, that we weren't prepared. Unprepared for what?

For the day of the attack, for the hour of the attack – that's what we weren't prepared for.

Oh, but no one could have been ready for the hour of the attack, even God himself! We'd been expecting the attack and we had a main goal – not to give Hitler a pretext for it. He would have said, "Soviet troops are assembling at the border. They are forcing me to take action!"

Of course that was a slip-up, a shortcoming. And of course there were other slip-ups. You just try to find a way to avoid mistakes on such a question. But if you focus on them, it casts a shadow on the main point, on what decided the matter. Stalin was still irreplaceable. I am a critic of Stalin; on certain questions I did not agree with him, and I think he made some major fundamental mistakes. But no one talks about these mistakes; instead they keep criticizing things on which Stalin was right, and they talk endlessly as if they were negative.

In essence we were largely prepared for war. The five-year plans, the industrial capacity we had created – that's what helped us to endure, otherwise we wouldn't have won out. The growth of our military industry in the years before the war could not have been greater!

The people went through a colossal strain before the war. "Hurry, hurry!" And if they didn't they were expelled from the party, arrested. Is it possible to keep the people or the party or the army

or even your near and dear ones under such strain for a year or two years?

No. And still there were things that cannot be justified.

There were mistakes, but the point is how to understand them. First, whose mistakes were they? Second, how could they have been avoided? There are at least two questions there.

The tension was palpable in 1939 and 1940. Tension ran very high; that's why there was so little good cheer about and why everyone longed for a respite. Recently someone asked me reproachfully, "And where was [Politburo member] Zhdanov?" He was vacationing in Sochi when the war broke out. Well, it was certainly possible not to go to Sochi in 1939 or 1940 or even in 1941, but after all you had to give a sick man a rest. They taunt us: "What were they thinking about? About the war? No, they were in Sochi!" The members of the Politburo, it is said, were optimists.

To keep every member of the Politburo, healthy or sick, under pressure every day [...] And think of all the people, all the personnel. We even abolished the seven-hour working day two years before the war! We abolished the right of workers to move from one enterprise to another in search of better conditions, even though many of them lived poorly and were looking for better places to live – but we abolished this. We built no apartment houses, but there was a great construction of factories, the creation of new army units armed with tanks, aircraft [...] We drove all the designers – "Faster, faster!" – they couldn't finish in time, they were all young designers!

I knew Pavlov rather well – the commander-in-chief of the Belorussian district. He was a tank man, a brawny fellow and, of course, utterly loyal to the party. He was executed because he had panicked. He was ready to sacrifice his life on a battlefield or anywhere else for our country. Well, let's admit, he was a bit of a blockhead – that's more the man's misfortune than his fault. Although he couldn't have been that stupid if he managed to become a commander-in-chief! Not smart enough, a bit stupid, but he became the commander in honest fashion, as a communist. And it turned out, he went to the theatre in the 21st of June. He was informed that not everything was quiet on the border, but he said,

“never mind, we’ll sort it out after the performance.” Could we have told him not to attend the theatre in 1939, 1940, and 1941? – that’s also wrong. It’s not that the man didn’t understand; he was tired and wanted a respite.

[...] I told Molotov that Marshal Golovanov had recounted to me that he had personally witnessed a telephone conversation between Pavlov and Stalin in Pavlov’s study only a few weeks before the war. Stalin had warned him about a possible attack, but judging by the talk it seemed that Pavlov, who was almost on the border, did not take the warning seriously.

“The thing is,” I told Molotov, “now some think you appointed such untrained people as Pavlov, but if it had been Tukhachevsky [...].”

Take someone like Tukhachevsky. If trouble started, which side would he have been on? He was a rather dangerous man. I doubted he would have been fully on our side when things got tough, because he was a right-winger. The right-wing danger was the main danger at the time. And many right-wingers didn’t realize they were right-wingers, and were right-wingers in spite of themselves. Trotskyites, those loudmouths, shouted, “We won’t be able to hold out! We’ll be defeated!” They damned themselves out of their own mouths, so to speak. And these defenders of kulaks were deep-rooted. They were more cautious; they had lots of supporters around – peasants and the lower middle classes. There was only a thin layer of party leadership in the 1920s, and there were always fissures in this thin layer – now right-wingers, then nationalists, then workers’ opposition [...]. How Lenin managed to bear this is amazing. Lenin died, but they all lived on, and Stalin had to pass through very tough times. Khrushchev is proof of that. He turned out to be a right-winger, though he was pretending to be for Stalin, for Lenin. “Father Stalin! We are ready to give our lives for you, we’ll wipe out everyone!” Only when Stalin’s power weakened did the conspirator in him surface [...].

We demanded a great sacrifices from the workers and peasants before the war. We paid little to peasants for bread or cotton or their labor – we simply had nothing to pay with! What to pay? We are reproached – we didn’t think of the material interests of the peasants. Well, if we had,

we would have wound up in a dead end. We didn't have enough money for cannons!

We delayed the war. This calmed the people a little. If we managed to delay it for a year and ten months, we could probably have delayed it for a month or so more. Anyway, I have been thinking about it ever since. We should have kept in mind that the best time for an attack on Russia was June. It wasn't fully taken into consideration in any quarter, to my mind. Napoleon attacked Russia in June, too. Summer months are very dangerous. But the Soviet Union heroically found the way out of that situation.

That was a mistake.

Yes, a mistake. But one June had already passed. June of 1940 had passed, and that suggested that June 1941 would pass too. This was a miscalculation, I suppose. We were under great pressure to prepare better, which I thought was impossible. Well, perhaps we could have been 5 percent better prepared. But no more than 5 percent. We were going all out to get our country ready for defence. We inspired the people – if war comes tomorrow, if tomorrow they take to the field, we shall be ready to march today! We didn't let the people oversleep, but we encouraged them and cheered them up all the time. If everyone was under such a strain, some kind of respite was needed [...]

But the time for a respite was poorly chosen.

No. The need for a respite was continuous – in January, in February, in March, and so on. But when would they attack? We could be blamed for not taking June into more consideration than may. But you would have to be a pedant to blame us for this, knowing all the measures that were being taken. If you blame us for this you are, if not a bureaucrat, a pedant. Of course we should have been somewhat more alert in June than in May. But already in May we had been under colossal pressure with no chance to let off steam. Even if a higher alert had been ordered in June, there would still have been need for a respite. Why was Zhdanov in Sochi, why were officers on leave, why was Pavlov at the theatre? My God! Of course, we might have done without these niceties; just the same, they were not decisive!

Why did you destroy the old line of fortifications [The Stalin Line] before you managed to build a new line?

That's simple – we didn't have to opportunity. We didn't have the time not only to destroy what we needed to destroy but also to replace it with something new – that's a fact. Maybe there was haste; I don't exclude that possibility.

[12-6-69, 6-16-83]

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Comments on the foreign edition of Khrushchev's memoirs state: "unfortunately, in the entire book (except for a few passages) there is no profound analysis of Stalin's qualities that enabled him to stand firmly on his own and to negotiate knowledgeably and persuasively with Churchill and Roosevelt. Probably only Molotov could speak authoritatively about that."

It's a difficult story, but the mere fact that Stalin forced the capitalists Roosevelt and Churchill to war against Hitler says much.

[5-9-85]

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Eisenhower used to say that peaceful coexistence meant existence in a concentration camp. I met with Eisenhower. And with Dulles, too. Eisenhower was so good-natured. Dulles was such a pettifogger that one had to keep this in mind all the time. His brother was in intelligence, too. These were brothers who would pick your pocket and cut your head off at the same time.

[1-14-75]

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It was a very good intelligence operation by our Chekists. They really stole just what we needed. And just at the right moment, when we were beginning this work.

The Rosenberg couple [...] I refrained from asking about that, but I think they were connected with our intelligence effort [...] Someone helped us mightily with the A-bomb. Intelligence played a great role. In America the Rosenbergs were punished. There is a chance they were helping us. But we shouldn't talk about that. We may have use for it in the future.

[11-1-77]

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Churchill was one of the leaders of victory. And to this day I cannot understand how he lost the

elections in 1945! I need to know English life better. The talks in Potsdam had begun with him and then [...] He had been very active. And he never forgot to write things down. Keep in mind that he stated the facts in his own way. You need to check them against other sources. He stated them very artfully. He was an imperialist to the core.

[7-31-72]

The cold war – I don't like the expression. It sounds like Khrushchev's. It was used in the Western press in Stalin's time, and then it passed to us. Goebbels was the first one to use the 'iron curtain.' It was often used by Churchill, that's for sure. But what does the "cold war" mean? Strained relations. It was entirely their doing or because we were on the offensive. They certainly hardened their line against us, but we had to consolidate our conquests. We made our own socialist Germany out of our part of Germany, and restored order in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, and Yugoslavia, where the situations were fluid. To squeeze out the capitalist order. This was the cold war. Of course, you had to know when and where to stop. I believe in this respect Stalin kept well within limits.

[11-28-74]

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Stalin led the cause for the downfall of imperialism and the advent of communism. We needed peace. But according to American plans, two hundred of our cities would be subject to simultaneous atomic bombing.

Stalin looked at it this way: World War I had wrested one country from capitalist slavery; World War II has created a socialist system; and the third will finish off imperialism.

[7-30-70, 12-2-71]

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The USA is the most suitable country for socialism. Communism will come there sooner than in other countries.

[6-3-81]

p. 72

Did you drink with Hitler? He was a teetotaler, wasn't he?

I drank instead of him! And what do you think? We didn't let him visit us, though he wanted to come. Why did he encircle Moscow?

[11-7-79]

p. 77

Didn't you translate for Stalin Hitler's speech after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor? Stalin had asked you to listen to it and report to him. Wasn't that so?

Yes, that's the way it was.

[7-17-75]

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Willi Brandt headed the Socialist International. I consider this a most decent political distinction. It seems he is doing well. His son is a communist. Anyway, he made an important agreement – with the Soviet Union on the borders of the two Germanies. That's a great accomplishment, not a small one.

[12-7-76]

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Who was more severe, Lenin or Stalin?

Lenin, of course. He was severe. In some cases he was harsher than Stalin. Read his messages to Dzerzhinsky. He often resorted to extreme measures when necessary. He ordered the suppression of the Tambov uprising, that everything be buried to the ground. I was present at the discussion. He would not have tolerated any opposition, even had it appeared. I recall how he reproached Stalin for his softness and liberalism. "What kind of dictatorship do we have? We have milk-and-honey power, and not a dictatorship!"

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"Children were shot to death in Georgia in 1956," said Shota Ivanovich. "They removed Mikoyan's portrait and hung it in an outhouse, where his home was supposed to be. They hitched Khrushchev's portrait to a streetcar, but they carried your portrait at the head of a marching column of protesters that demanded, 'We want the Central Committee headed by Viacheslav Mikhailovich Molotov!'"

Children died then, and you know which children? Those whose parents were in jail in 1937. The children that were shot to death were not allowed a decent burial. People wailed, they couldn't understand. "Your parents perished at the hands of Stalin, but you are for him?"

[1-16-73]

p. 182

The kulak class, it goes without saying, was included among capitalist elements. The kulak class was referred to in particular and the elimination of classes in general.

You went too far.

It was adopted, no one objected.

[7-15-75]

p. 191-2

In 1918 Lenin wrote that the Russian is a poor worker. He called the country a small-holding, peasant country. To advance from an abysmally low level to a higher one we would need many more years than the more developed countries.

For us, ten or twenty years appeared an eternity. And how to rise from such a low base? The typical Russian – at first he is at the heights of enthusiasm, the next thing you know he is lying satisfied on the oven.

In 1918 we were in dire straits, but Lenin drew the right conclusions. We would have had sufficient manpower if it had been well organized. But good organization is precisely what we lacked.

The Japanese were well trained, but **in our country insufficiently developed capitalism adversely affected socialism.**

[9-30-81]

pp. 232-3

A friend of mine, an author, brought from Paris A. Avtorkhanov's Enigma of Stalin's Death and gave it to me to read. I gave the book to Molotov, and after a few days I visited him to ask what he thought of it.

It is so filthy. He depicts all of us as a gang of brigands! Nevertheless, the book contains a grain of truth. Beria was a man who, so to speak, was not so much a man of the past as a man of the future – in just one sense: he strained might and main to grab leading positions. Among the reactionary elements he was an activist. That's why he strove to clear the way for a return of private property. Anything else lay outside his field of vision. He did not avow socialism. He thought he was leading us forward, but in fact he was pulling us back, back to the worst.

On the book jacket are pictures of Beria, Khrushchev, Malenkov and Bulganin. Molotov looked at them and went on to say:

Khrushchev was absolutely a reactionary sort of person. He merely hitched himself to the Com-

munist party. He certainly didn't believe in any kind of communism. Bulganin didn't really represent anything. He never took a firm stand for or against anything. He drifted along with the wind, wherever it blew. Beria, to my mind, was not one of us. He crept into the party with ulterior motives. Malenkov was a capable functionary.

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A person who never sympathized with either Stalin or Molotov persistently asked me to arrange a meeting with Molotov. I made a strenuous effort to arrange it and finally succeeded. The conversation lasted about four hours, during which the most burning questions were raised and not a single one left unanswered. As we walked to the railroad station after the meeting, Molotov's interlocutor remarked, "Visiting with Molotov is like traveling abroad for the first time. If one were anti-Soviet he would grow more anti-Soviet after meeting with him; if one were pro-Soviet he would grow firmer in his convictions. I haven't started liking him, but I've definitely been struck by his reasoning powers and responsiveness. Those men are not to be trifled with! I wonder what kind of person Stalin was if he had a man like Molotov working for him?"

[2-3-72]